

## Psicologia: Teoria e Pesquisa



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## Approach to competences, human development and higher education

Claisy Maria Marinho-Araujo<sup>1</sup>  
*Universidade de Brasília*  
Leandro S. Almeida  
*Universidade do Minho*

**ABSTRACT** - Grounded on human development psychology, this paper presents a conceptual expansion of the understanding about competence. This is a polysemic construct, with a wide range of epistemological, ethical and ideological concepts that reinforce the complexity of training processes, especially in relation to personal and professional training in the context of higher education. This paper defends the notion of competence rooted in intentional mobilization of various resources inherent to human development: psychological processes, behaviors, knowledge, emotions, beliefs, aptitudes, ethical and aesthetic choices that the subject must mobilize. From this conceptual expansion, a categorization of transversal competences and possibilities of assessment are presented. Analyses can support critical actions of psychologists and educators to mediate the development of competences of higher education actors.

**Keywords:** competences, professional profile, human development, higher education

## Abordagem de competências, desenvolvimento humano e educação superior

**RESUMO** - Tendo como fundamento a psicologia do desenvolvimento humano, apresenta-se, neste artigo, uma ampliação conceitual à compreensão de competência. Esse é um termo polissêmico, com multiplicidade de concepções epistemológicas, éticas e ideológicas que imprimem complexidade aos processos formativos, especialmente em relação à formação pessoal e profissional na educação superior. Defende-se a noção de competência ancorada na mobilização intencional de diversos recursos próprios ao desenvolvimento humano: processos psicológicos, comportamentos, conhecimentos, afetos, crenças, habilidades, escolhas éticas e estéticas, que devem ser mobilizados pelo sujeito. Apresenta-se, a partir dessa ampliação, uma categorização de competências transversais e possibilidades para sua avaliação. A reflexão pode fundamentar uma atuação crítica de psicólogos e educadores para a mediação do desenvolvimento de competências dos atores do ensino superior.

**Palavras-chave:** competências, perfil profissional, desenvolvimento humano, educação superior

### Introduction

The search for social inclusion and greater opportunities of access by citizens to more advanced levels of education impacts public policies and influences the current higher education expansion. In a context where higher education massification is a reality, we should observe to which extent the expansion of offers results from and is translated into an effective democratization of access and success (and quality permanence). This is particularly true for students from more disadvantaged sociocultural groups and from families where higher education is not a tradition. New curricula, methodological approaches, evaluation processes and academic practices emerge from an effort to gather democratization, equal access, fair processes and results of the effective inclusive education, while the profiles of students reaching higher education are sharply reconfigured.

This article focuses on the competences and their development, defending higher education as an important opportunity for youth-adults to develop and be differentiated in their profiles of skills (cross-sectoral and technical-scientific). It is increasingly assumed that, beyond professional training, playing its sociopolitical role, higher education should develop and consolidate citizenship by building profiles

committed with the required social changes, deepening and strengthening personal autonomy and emancipation based on their relationship with knowledge, criticism, reflection and the political exercise of social participation (Almeida, Marinho-Araujo, Amaral & Dias, 2012; Marinho-Araujo, Oliveira & Almeida, 2011; Marinho-Araujo, Tavares, Almeida & Amaral, 2011). In this line of new configurations in higher education, emerges the need for designing theoretical-methodological alternatives of research to evidence the best way of matching theory and practice at this education level. It should also find a way to develop competences, mainly the soft ones, linked to students' experiences in their academic contexts.

### Higher Education: the relevance of soft competences

In many countries, formal education became a complex experience, where social groups and classes, on one hand, share and interact building their own identities as authors of history and culture but, on the other hand, fight with each other and are organized in social practices where they defend their interests and express their wills, preserving their own values. In this context, the role of educational institutions in the dialectic promotion of the maintenance and transfor-

<sup>1</sup> Contact: [claisy@umb.br](mailto:claisy@umb.br)

mation of culture should be acknowledged. If on one hand divergent interests and different objects cause tensions, on the other hand they favor evolution and changes as counterpoint to stability and conservatism. The educational systems, with their spaces of contradicting and coping with the prevailing ideology, both sustain and replicate ideas of the prevailing social culture, while providing opportunities to build other ways to exercise citizenship (Araujo, 2003; Guzzo, Martinez & Campos, 2007; Marinho-Araujo, 2005, 2009; Marinho-Araujo & Almeida, 2005).

This tension is particularly evidenced, and more easily legitimated, in higher education that, by matching the demands of society and educational policies, is sometimes characterized as a knowledge-builder context that nurtures citizens for the practices of social and economic lives, and other times is an institution that benefits and favors private and the labor market interests. However, in any light higher education must be understood as a social and historical phenomenon that contributes to trigger more comprehensive training processes. As such, it is subject to changes and plays different roles in response to the demands it has to meet in different historical circumstances (Dias Sobrinho, 2010; Dourado, 2011; Rothen & Barreyro, 2014).

There is a wide range of epistemological, ethical, ideological, political, cultural, technical and scientific issues that make higher education so complex. Generally speaking, education offered by the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is guided by specific objectives rooted in scientific knowledge. This strong direction entails some difficulties. The major one is that by attaching priority - many times in an exclusive way - to the scientific production process, the academic proposals end up segmenting science and detaching it from actual phenomena. This crumbles and decontextualizes reality in summaries compacted in the curriculum units, modules and courses that, at the same time, are configured in tight syllabuses and handbooks of unchallengeable knowledge. On the other hand, information circulated in the HEI is not enough to express the whole knowledge produced either by scientific means or by the sociocultural relationships.

Underlying the “scientific discourse” there are many other social discourses, jointly with the intersubjective contexts and relations that gave rise to it. These are not always materialized in the options of education offered or most appraised, mainly in the existing courses. Even so, the relevance of higher education is expanded, acknowledging its strong impact on education paths and the professional activity of the subjects. In addition, the dynamic and structural features of these institutions can lead to the development of countless actions and concepts that can either limit or enable autonomy; transforming or adjusting, depending on the visions and ideologies inherent to each HEI and to the higher education system of the country as a whole (Dias Sobrinho, 2010).

In this sense, the HEI educational process should be understood not only in the light of teaching and learning knowledge, but also from the sociopolitical, economic, ethical and cultural dimensions. In a broader way, these dynamics will represent the social function of the institutions in charge of higher education. Despite their countless contradictions, these institutions also integrate several powers capable of overcoming such contradictions. These impasses

and dynamism particularly affect the training processes and subjectivity of the parties. Thus, the emphasis of the effort to be made at higher education level should be on the citizenship-centered training of players, beyond the focus on technical-professional skills. It should prioritize the nurturing of a profile with deep ethical and political commitment, and the development of subjects capable of critically thinking over relevant matters of the social, economic and cultural life (Dias Sobrinho, 2010; Marinho-Araujo, 2004; Vieira & Marques, 2014).

### Professional profile and development of skills

The development of a competent professional profile committed with social demands is a time consuming process that involves building professional history in line with the personal traits and specificities of the professional practice. It demands the development of skills that help considering and gathering theories, methods and experiences in the mapping and resolution of problems in the social and labor life. When an individual comes across a problem, he/she not always have beforehand the solution or all data for a more confident decision-making. A broad set of procedures that consider different types of knowledge (academic, specialized, practical, based on experience), some norms, rules and techniques characteristic to production should be built. Moreover, it is necessary to nurture critical and thoughtful sense that leads individuals to make professional decisions and judgments in an ethical, safe and clear way.

Historically, the conventional limits of technical rationality, the classification of knowledge and the academic status detach the initial training in higher education from the reality and its demands. Moreover, it generates overload of theoretical information compressed in the early stages of the course; creates the “sprinkling effect” on knowledge due to the lack of integration in different subjects - usually supported by a normative curriculum that is far from understanding the multiple contexts of work. In a different sense, however, the contemporary sociopolitical demands urge for an education model anchored in technical fundamentals for a given professional profile, and in components related to actual, shared, vivified practice, refocused on the countless senses of the experience and relational processes.

Therefore, in the existing higher education setting, surveys and public policy suggest alternative education processes with curricular responses organized around skills; educational guidelines that demand continuous improvement, dedication and creative supervision of the teaching staff, as well as active and participatory learning postures - by students - to favor the acquisition and development of agility, creativity, autonomy, inquisitive positioning and decision-making (Almeida, Marinho-Araujo, Amaral & Dias, 2012; Brazil, 2003; Dourado, 2011; Mesquita, Lima, Flores, Marinho-Araujo & Rabelo, 2015).

To build such an active and participatory professional profile, the training paths have used skill-based approaches as a privileged and useful strategy for personal development and preparation for the roles and functions to be performed in the contexts of professional practices. In Brazil, the *Diretrizes*

*Curriculares Nacionais*<sup>1</sup> for all undergraduate courses use this approach as benchmark to the organization and development of the courses syllabuses (Brazil, 2003).

However, for some authors, education grounded in this approach could suggest a technicist bias and the prevalence of focus on the labor market. As counterpoint, linking early professional training to the building of skills does not mean to hold hostage of the market economic demands. In fact, it could consider the labor world contradictions, economic and political-ideological contexts, technical and organizational changes, socio-environmental impacts, collective and solidarity ties, the principles and fights of citizens. In principle, this article assumes the feasibility and relevance of these elements to integrate the higher education process.

### Concept of competences

The definition of “competences” is a complex one, with several dimensions anchored in different theoretical-conceptual frames that guide its description and further unfolds. Since the middle Ages the concept of competence has been linked to an acknowledged capacity of action or of individual expression about given matters (Depresbiteris, 2001; Kuenzeer, 2004b). However, competence cannot be defined exclusively in terms of “readiness to perform an action”. Rather, it is built in the sociocultural life and the everyday relational situations when these demand, from players, the identification of pertinent knowledge and the mobilization of resources, configured in an active posture in face of challenges or problems. As such, the notion of competence is polysemic, evokes a wide range of knowledge, wisdom, skills and many other personal resources that are put in practice or not in activities, situations or relationships.

The countless changes on social, economic, historical and cultural conditions in the last four decades influenced the labor relations and situations, redefining professional profiles and setting new ways of organizing the work. The complexity of the issue of competences largely increased in this context, marked by sharp changes and unpredictability. That was when emerged the classification of competences as categories of “knowledge” and a broad set of concepts associated with competences such as performance, know-how, empowerment, qualification, acquired through formal or informal learning in a framework of specific moments of learning or lifelong learning (Deluiz., 2001; Depresbiteris, 2001; Esteves, 2009; Kuenzer, 2002, 2004b).

The concept of competences changed as the socio-historical and economic context changed. This brought more complexity to the working processes, demanding in-depth scientific-technological knowledge and the use of complex cognitive capacities. These capacities are developed through systematized relationships with formal theoretical knowledge. The demands for improving products quality and relaxation of production and working processes have escalated competitiveness, and end up using education and higher academic training as means to increase or fit the individual acquirements to those demands (Araujo, 2003;

Marinho-Araujo, 2014, 2015; Marinho-Araujo & Rabelo, 2015, 2016).

The term “competence” was then universalized, supporting the structured work, demanding mastering scientific and technological knowledge jointly with psychomotor, cognitive, affective and social development (do, know, be and be with the others). This new setting focused the issue of competences on operational and observable definitions that, for Depresbiteris (2002), would not be enough to guide the comprehension and development of competences.

The term “competence” was gradually associated with a wide range of attributes such as “capacities”, “skills” or “expertise” required to carry out given professional activities. This diverse use of the term contributed to dissociate the concept of competence from the idea of a high-level specialty, becoming more flexible and frequently used, mainly in the educational system. We find references to “competences” in the contemporary discourse in the field of education, regardless if referring to teachers’ or students’ profiles. This notion was expanded as the demand for mastering scientific and technological knowledge was allied to other aspects of human development, mainly to the socio-affective dimensions.

Competence was then understood as resource and tools that qualify the subject to work purposely and with confidence in technical and complex contexts, where subjects can make ethical, conscious and transforming options (Carneiro, 2014). At this point, the concept of competence is expanded to include the complex process of coping with a cultural, changing and historical reality which demands selections and decisions.

In brief, the expansion of the notion of competence moves it away from the limited explanation of “know to do”, expressed only in “problem solving” or “fulfilling tasks”, anchored in operational schemes and cognitive competences required to mobilize specific knowledge, skills or attitudes. The development of competences focusing exclusively on skills or cognitive structures mobilized by subjects to fulfill their objectives and potentials reduces the conception of competences to an individual, trainable characteristic. This reduced conception disregards the collective nature of the combination of competences required by a specific professional context or a given professional category. So, building competences through a training process assumes purposely considering the set of historical, social and cultural influences, jointly with the impact of social practices on the personal and professional lives.

Some authors (Le Boterf, 1998, 2000, 2003; Wittorski, 1998, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2009; Zarifian, 2001, 2003) consider the social influence on mechanisms that assign sense for individual or collective actions and, mainly, the impact of social practices on the identification of competences. By binding the notion of competence to social contexts produced in historical-cultural spaces and times, they try to gather it to collective activities parameters with shared objectives (Araujo, 2003; Esteves, 2009; Kuenzer, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2009; Le Boterf, 1998, 2000, 2003; Marinho-Araujo, 2009, 2014, 2015).

Competence is not defined exclusively as a set of skills or capacities used for a given end. A competent being is characterized by the mobilization, in a coordinated and in-

1 National Curricular Guidelines

terdependent way, of a wide range of resources available in the being and in the context to cope with a problem situation. These resources should be gathered with the critical points identified in the situation, helping the proper decision-making and referrals to assist the coping in social and labor contexts (Araujo, 2003; Kuenzer, 2002, 2009; Le Boterf, 2000, 2003; Marinho-Araujo, 2009, 2014, 2015; Marinho-Araujo & Rabelo, 2015; Vieira & Marques, 2014). Learn to identify, mobilize and use resources (knowledge, wisdoms, skills, mental schemes, affections, beliefs, principles, psychological functions, attitudes, postures and behaviors) in relationships and in action is what leads to the building of the materiality of a competence, understood as a dimension of the human development process. The many resources to be mobilized are differentiated symbolic contents that will be transformed, in a thoughtful and intentional way, into more complex and diversified activities (Le Boterf, 1998, 2000, 2003; Wittorski, 1998, 2003, 2007, 2009; Zarifian, 2001, 2003). This perspective converses the competence-based approach into a profitable tool of permanent and recursive mediation between the knowledge-building and the everyday social action.

This reviewed concept of competence is closer to a broader perspective, as it seeks to build and mobilize not only knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, in a specialized technical dimension, but also affections, praxis and attributes of communication and interrelations in the historical-cultural dimension. When building competences, this concept demands the mobilization of a set of historical, social and cultural opportunities in far-reaching educational and social process. In this process, social and intersubjective contradictions, as well as the dynamic negotiations found in the relational networks, become more relevant. Considering human competences in a context historically defined, individually and collectively built followed by the mobilization of knowledge generated in work activities and relationships helps broadening the notion of competence.

As suggested by Le Boterf (1998, 2000), Wittorski (1998, 2003, 2005) and Zarifian (2001, 2003), the work-related situations would be privileged locus to develop competences based on contexts that involve purposed practices and operations, giving rise to activities consistent with and favorable to the construction of a professional identity responsive to the demands from individual and collective concrete situations. In the same line, one should consider the important role assigned to labor experiences and professional internships, organized in the higher education framework (Vieira & Marques, 2014). A major requirement of the competence-building process is to gather it with knowledge, whether deepen, systematized, resulting from personal experience, elementary or complex. So, it is said that the more human actions demand deepening or organizing this knowledge, more time is required to acquire and develop the associated competences.

To Tardif (2002) the construction of competences assumes considering the historical dimension of personal and professional dimension. It is in the temporal process of competence-building that professionals gradually master the knowledge required to perform their labor activities; that they give new meanings to beliefs, representations and certainties about their practices; integrate skills, wisdoms and knowledge in

the contradiction, dilemmas and tensions brought about by several sources that have historically diversified competences (Araujo, 2003; Marinho-Araujo, 2009, 2014).

Therefore, competence adds a trait of *temporality* to its development, because it demands gradual appropriation and integration of resources, wisdoms and knowledge, in addition to likely changes of beliefs, representations and values. The consolidation of competences in the professional path assumes a historical dimension that is refocused during the subject's development and in the inter-game of shared social relationships. Working on competences means predicting continuity and rupture processes that change according to the countless situations lived. Temporality is a strong feature in the construction of competences. During the historical process of development it gradually enables the appropriation and integration of resources, knowledge and wisdoms, in addition to likely changes on beliefs, representations and values (Araujo, 2003; Le Boterf, 2000, 2005; Zarifian, 2001, 2003).

Allied to this characteristic of temporality, competences should be understood as expression of the convergence of several and diversified resources mobilized around contextualized and relational requirements. This way, competence is the possibility of selection, organization, expansion, integration and complementation of these elements from their value of use in a given action. The mobilization and mainstreaming of these resources should favor the production of different ways of acting, updating their uses rather than crystallizing the *a priori* conducts. What minds here is to provide different paths to the *change of knowledge* to build new capacities to respond to challenges, intentions, contexts and relationships (Araujo, 2003; Le Boterf, 2000, 2005; Zarifian, 2001, 2003).

Competence extrapolates knowledge and wisdoms, but is not built without them. Therefore, knowledge and competences are gathered but do not identify one another, are not mixed. As such, one should not waive acquiring knowledge when the objective is to develop competences, because human actions are impregnated with some sort of knowledge. When knowledge is mobilized towards competent practice, the subject does not use it indiscriminately or in the same way; he/she privileges some and considers others as peripheral or secondary. As that, the competence-building process demands clear options, their reasons and unfolding (Araujo, 2003; Kuenzer, 2002, 2004b; Vieira & Marques, 2014).

To Kuenzer (2002, 2004a, 2004b), there is a *praxis* dimension in the concept of competence gathered with the specificities of theory and practice: neither the isolate theoretical knowledge nor the simple act is enough to develop competences. The author appeals to the *praxis* as the ground of the knowledge process, advocating that a reality cannot be known or changed exclusively upon an action of the thought; it also demands critical-practical activity. At the end, this relationship found in the *praxis* provides the processes of human nurturing with the possibility of incorporating the dimension of reflection and practices into processes, outcomes or outputs of acts or set of acts. Although the intellectual work is associated with the *praxis*, this is not enough to develop competences. The theoretical production and tacit knowledge gain new meanings when mediated by social and productive processes. The *praxis* is crucial to the

development of competences, changing a dichotomist logic of prevalence of artifacts, sometimes theoretical other times practical, understood as universal referential to solve the open and complex situations faced by professionals (Kuenzer, 2002, 2004a, 2004b).

Therefore, understand the notion of competence in its historical and cultural dimensions places it in a perspective beyond the social construction of its meanings. It emerges as a multidimensional strategy present at work, promoting the development of individuals. On the same grounds, the socio-affective repertoire should be part of the resources mobilized by competences, because these are basic and fundamental for individuals to be engaged with and cope the many working and non-working situations.

Broadening the understanding on competences, as presented up to here, is very useful for educating processes existing in higher education, mainly if backed by the contributions of developmental psychology. The characterizations that assume the notion of competences discussed herein conform to the historical-cultural perspective of human development. This perspective is supported on a concept of human being constituted through the appropriation, updating and transformation of cultural practices in the social relations shared in historical process. The assumptions that endorse it advocate for a dialectic understanding of the symbolic mediation between social history and individual and concrete experiences, through experiences in specific sociocultural situations (Leontiev, 1983, 2004; Luria, 1990; Vygotsky, 1999, 2000, 2003).

To understand the subject based on historical-cultural psychology supposes to understand him/her subjectively constituted by the cultural impregnation in neurobiological mechanisms through semiotic processes that influence his/her organization and practices, giving rise to the gradual, dynamic and historical constitution of the psychic functions. According to Vygotsky (1999, 2000, 2003), these functions and complex psychological processes emerged in human being from their productive activity shared in the work, which endowed a constitutive relationship between phylogenesis and ontogenesis. Historically, human work has a vital social function in the development of superior psychological processes. Through work the human being, throughout the history of this species, has ruled reality and created culture pursuing the well-being and satisfaction of desires, affections, emotions, in strong opposition to the animal evolution exclusively based on survival (Leontiev, 1983, 2004; Luria, 1990; Vygotsky, 1999, 2000, 2003).

The collective activities throughout the human process of evolution were dialectically forged and followed by the creation of tools and instruments useful not only for their concrete, but also for their symbolic characteristics. As human activities became more complex, the use of instruments brought about different intellectual and psychological processes that enable different exchanges and communication movements between subjects. Therefore, the organization of human psychological processes was being built in this system of tools, symbols, signs, historically refocused during the interaction with the others. This symbolic system acquired the preponderant function of mediation in psychical transformations (Leontiev, 1983, 2004; Luria, 1990; Vygotsky, 1999, 2000, 2003).

To the historical-cultural approach, the processes of development and learning are psychological mechanisms that constitute the subjectivity that, in an independent way, provide for the construction and transformation of meanings (intersubjective) and senses (intrasubjective) built in the communication processes. In this light, educational spaces become privileged *locus* for learning to influence the development of superior psychological functions.

The development of competences subsidized by the conceptual expansion advocated herein is strongly supported by the fundamentals of the historical-cultural perspective of the human psychological development. Understanding competences conformed to this psychological ground, for its principles and potentials, enables the nurturing of subjects, notably in higher education. The development of competences in this perspective brings about possibilities to use and incorporate the information received, generalizing, summarizing and giving new meanings to objectives, constituting important processes of subjective configurations and consequent qualitative unfolding to the psychological functions.

### Higher education and soft competences

To develop competences in the educating process associated to higher education, one needs a methodological referential supported on categorization of competences. In fact, several pedagogical and academic proposals privilege a specific set of competences, which Wittorski (1998, 2003, 2004, 2009) calls “domain or intellectual competences”. As proposed up to here, however, the socio-affective and historical-cultural resources should also be integrated and mobilized by competences.

One of the main challenges posed today to professional educating practices is the need for transposing or transferring what was learned to new or different situations. Higher education courses not always teach postures of reflection, criticism and autonomy in relation to situations presented and different practices to be developed. So, the issue is: how could we allow the expression of competences in the stages and processes of professional development, allow students to envisage, in practice, the experiences, postures and experiences allied to knowledge and skills developed in higher education. In fact, it is important to develop methodologies to assist students to purposely understand how professional paths could be built in the subjective interdependence of personal identities, mobilizing other resources than the technical-scientific ones. When once again the interdependence between personal and professional, the individual and social subjectivities, contingencies and contexts that maximize development are evidenced, it makes clear the need for professional training to support competence development crossed by “sense elements” of other social life contexts, contributing with the configuration of a broader professional profile. As that, thinking over the expansion of the categorization of competencies, notably the soft ones, is advisable and required.

These competences are understood as a diversified set of individual and sociocultural resources, purposely mobilized by the subjects in situation of training or professional exercise, aimed to solve a given problem situation. These competences

assume the integrality of cognitive, emotional and social dimensions, in coordination with formal theoretical knowledge in the construction of increasingly complex professional paths. Moreover, these competences comprise a diversified set of personal resources, ethical principles and aesthetic decisions that cut across the different professions and professional activities (Cabral-Cardoso, Estevão & Silva, 2006; Le Boterf, 2000, 2003; Marinho-Araujo, 2009, 2014, 2015; Zarifian, 2001, 2003).

These can be expressed by the critical thought, autonomy, creativity, entrepreneurship, team work, organization, persistence, perseverance, flexibility, respect to diversity and social responsibility, among others. Soft competences gather with many other technical competences, and this mobilization and combination of resources tend to cut across, in a flexible way, other complex and unpredictable professional situations. Soft competences are also common to different professions/professional activities, easing the employability of those who master them (Cardoso, Estevão & Silva, 2006; Vieira & Marques, 2014). These competences involve beliefs, values, practical knowledge, postures, principles, affections, selections, complex psychological functions (creativity, imagination, emotional management or self-regulation, etc.), mental schemes, *habitus*, citizenship traits and other possibilities of subjective, behavioral and affective development. In order to expand and refine the theoretical constructs, following is presented a proposal of soft competences categorization, pooling them in three dimensions (personal resources, socio-affective resources and ethical-political resources), delimiting each of these categories in terms of definition and scope of action.

## PERSONAL RESOURCES

### Definition:

- Characteristics and resources of the individual, singular and objective ones, made available as goals of personal and professional development.
- Previous knowledge resulting from the history of life and everyday experience, transformed by the coordination with formal knowledge.

### Actions:

- Evaluate and review the own practice, knowledge, beliefs and viewpoints based on new guidance or updating.
- Develop gestures, styles and postures that allow for perceiving, responding and overcoming challenges.
- Accept the unknown and the emergencies, using these to learn new lessons.
- Prepare individual study and continued professional improvement projects.
- Perform verbal communications in different contexts of the professional practice.
- Present works and discuss ideas in public.
- Draft technical and professional documents and scientific texts related to specific practices.
- Persist and persevere in planned actions, despite any circumstantial failure.
- Work with organization, objectivity, assertiveness.

- Retroactively evaluate the positive and negative effects of a given action, to guide future actions and decision-making.
- Work with autonomy and independence in problem situations.
- Cope with stressing contexts and conflicting relations, seeking creative solutions and conflict management.

## SOCIO-AFFECTIVE RESOURCES

### Definition:

- Traits that enable the social and interpersonal relationship and the construction of spaces of subjective and collective dialogues that maximize professional practice.

### Actions:

- Coordinate and manage group process, studies, collective tasks and works, considering individual and sociocultural differences of the members, their multiculturalism and diversity.
- Work inter- and multi-professionally in order to enable the development of interpersonal links required for the professional practice.
- Promote team development, sharing projects and common objectives.
- Enable the socialization of knowledge and circulation of information.
- Foster the collective participation in multiprofessional teams.
- Manage conflicts, pointing out discrepancies and mistakes in the group members' attitudes, expanding the understanding about situations.
- Seek alternative ways to solve problems using communicative and cooperative skills.
- Be available to listen to the other, respecting different viewpoints and being open to the new.

## ETHICAL-POLITICAL RESOURCES

### Definition:

- Characteristics favorable to the search for different possibilities in the intersubjectivity of relationships, refusing actions based on value judgment or discriminatory moralist rules that generate social exclusion.

### Actions:

- Take on the responsibility for decisions made and their consequences.
- Develop questioning and thoughtful, critical and consistent arguing about own decisions, actions and postures.
- Consider the macro context of the professional field and the contemporary challenges posed to it.
- Analyze the context of professional work in its institutional and collective dimensions, understanding the dynamic between social agents.
- Critically evaluate the trains of thought and concept related to their professional field.

- Exercise political commitment with the historical movement of personal and collective changes.
- Seek principles connected to tolerance, solidarity, respect, justice and equal opportunities.
- Carefully review criteria, guidelines and benchmarks against new data or arguments.
- Disseminate a culture of hope and trust in human actions and social transformations.
- Appraise diversity and do not disguise the unequal distances between cultures, forms, tastes and preferences.
- Curb the creation of prejudices caused by preferences or indifferences towards people, relations or situations.
- Get rid of the normative, coercive and restrictive ethics and aesthetic, on behalf of more flexible and less arbitrary benchmarks.
- Present work proposals in an organized, attractive, pleasant and interesting way, fostering dialogue between personal and collective aesthetics.
- Build presence and personal style that is coherent, consistent and responsive to each professional context and practice.
- Recognize and intervene on the surmounting of aesthetic rules and standards that hinder creativity, originality and authenticity.

### Evaluation of competences: procedures and instruments

Different instruments and procedures are described to evaluate competences: self-report and hetero-report scales, interviews, evidences of criterion, work samples, group tests, games, portfolios and memorials, among others. This wide range of instruments and participants in the evaluation exercise allow for qualitative and quantitative approaches, comprising the repertoire and individual performance, but also the contexts and relationships where competences are expressed, developed and transformed. By reference to the categorization presented herein, this diversity of instruments can sustain the specificities of a differentiated evaluation, according to the more behavioral or representational nature of personal and social resources (cognitive, socio-affective and ethical-political) being evaluated.

Wittorski (1998, 2003, 2005, 2009) believes that not only the content of competences should be characterized, but also the way how these are built with the means available to the subject: own resources and those of the social environment. The dynamic of the competence-development process, its temporality and influence by the context cannot be measured, as typically done by several competence evaluation processes, considering only the product as a task performed or behavior expressed. In this sense, Wittorski (1998, 2003) presents evaluation as process where competences are developed based on the model summarized below. This model has five moments to this development, in different and dynamic contexts.

- *Level 1:* The first way to develop and evaluate competences corresponds to the model of in-job training; professional situations demand individuals

to produce new competences in action through “trial and error”; it is a “logic of action”.

- *Level 2:* This definition of this level of competences is related to the schedule of alternate education - where the transmission of theoretical knowledge in learning situations interacts with the production of competences in internship contexts; it is the “logic of reflection and action”.
- *Level 3:* Competences are developed in situations of analysis of practices carried out in the educational-institutional spaces; it consists in formalizing the implicit competences produced in practice and, then, transform these in knowledge of practice - competences are translated into words and transformed in communicable knowledge that is validated by the group and, then, can be transmitted to the other; it is the “logic of thinking over action”.
- *Level 4:* This level corresponds to situations where subjects define advanced new practices, trying to improve the levels of quality and problem resolution; it is the “logic of thinking for action”.
- *Level 5:* The last level assumes that the theoretical knowledge acquired during training is integrated into knowledge by the subjects, and nurture resources that are further shaped into different competences according to the situations found - it is the “logic of integration/assimilation” and is also known as “logic of transformation” (Wittorski, 1998, p. 63).

Based on the typology of the processes of development and evaluation of competences, proposed by Wittorski (1998, 2003), it is sustained that these take place considering two broad dimensions: (i) the procedures that allow observing and mapping processes, stages, routines, strategies and relationships taking place in “new, learned or recurrent” situations; and, (ii) indicators of context and characteristics of the activities or situation, where reflection and action can be combined through the interaction between the transmission of knowledge and the production of competences in practical situations, assisted or oriented. In this sense, to analyze and investigate the *praxis* and its institutional dynamics is a fruitful indicator to subsidize the meta-cognitive processes of personal and professional development.

Another focus that has contributed to the topic of competence evaluation is that postulated by Depresbiteris (2001), which emphasizes the need for a more dynamic and educating evaluation. According with the author, to overcome a technicist perspective in the evaluation of competences, in addition to the required conceptual broadening, we should prioritize the concepts of the subjects in question, and the indicators of the context wherein these subjects are inserted. An evaluation of competences following the epistemological models, according to Deluiz (2001), assumes the use of matrixes to systematize and analyze them. To the author, the concepts of competence matrixes developed intertwined with theoretical-conceptual movements that prevail at given historical moments, giving rise to several approaches: behavioral, functionalist, constructivist and critical-emancipator. These different matrixes followed each other in the field of competences as paradigmatic perspectives, with different benchmarks and enabling different emphasis regarding the



definitions and evaluations of competences, according to the consistent changes in the historical-cultural context.

In line with the conceptual expansion presented herein and the developmental psychology principles used, the evaluation of soft competences should be sustained on a multidimensional operational schedule, where the competences matrix could stand for an innovative research tool about the resources of competences, involving different faces ranging from individual to socio-cultural, situational (contextual-organizational) and procedural. The evaluation of competences based on this matrix can produce indicators that join the educational, professional and sociopolitical dimensions. In a more global perspective, the evaluation of competences should consider, as guiding axes, sets of indicators such as knowledge, wisdoms, skills and other recourses, such as those presented in the categorization proposed herein. These indicators, found in the different educational opportunities - notably in higher education - can be expressed by the context and the characteristic of the activities, developed both individually and collectively.

## Conclusions

The conceptual expansion advocated in this article is based on the principles of the historical-cultural perspective of human development. In this light, the notion of competence is expanded to the intersubjective dimension, considering the influence of historical-cultural relationships and social patterns shared in collective activities. The emphasis on collective processes does not minimize the capacities, interests, expectations, projects and aspirations of the individuals. Rather, in a dialectic way it favors autonomy in the sense of emancipation from alienating relationships, strengthens solidarity options and joins education and professional education to the ethical and socio-political dimensions.

The characterization of competence in this expanded perspective means incorporating an individual and collective historicity to the consolidation of a competent and critically conscious process of personal and professional development. In this sense, considering human competences in a context, historically defined, individually and collectively constituted, followed by the mobilization of resources generated in the activities and social relationships, could be extremely useful to the wide range of professional interventions in the educational contexts. In fact, working competences as a strategy to build the expected educational or professional profile is a core tool for planning training in higher education. Simultaneously, the dynamic of development of competencies, socio-affective mediations, influence of the context and relations, should be considered both at the moment of interpreting the evaluative process and, above all, in the elaboration of instruments to point out indicators about further processes of development of competences.

Considering the wide range of challenges posed to the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) when it comes to provide quality to education, the adherence to the ideas presented herein could support the refreshment of undergraduate and graduate courses, learning-teaching processes, methodologies and systems of information and support in a purposed planning of the development of competence for teaching staff and students. At the

students' level, considering what they are seeking for in the transition towards this stage of education, the HEIs could adopt the conceptual expansion advocated herein to be fully developed and nurture responsible individuals that will become active citizens in the society.

Finally, the notion of competence in its historical and cultural dimension, considered as a multidimensional strategy present mainly in educational activities, fulfilling the role of re-composing personal identities and promoting qualitative changes in the history of the individuals' psychosocial development, and allow well-grounded construction of soft competences. In terms of educational praxis, notably for higher education, competence-centered development of the academic and psychosocial education of students, based on developmental psychology, considers the different resources to be mobilized (capacities, knowledge, experiences, affections, decisions, postures, attitudes and values, among others) as symbolic contents. These should be differentiated from activities that, through the purposed mobilizing mediation will be conversed in more complex and diversified contexts and processes. This favors the subject's autonomy in purposed decisions on his/her own process of personal and professional development.

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