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By Dr. Katia Antunes

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Law Beyond Doctrine: Socioemotional Learning as a Pedagogical Imperative

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I. Introduction

The education of legal professionals has historically been characterized by a curriculum centered on the transmission of technical and normative knowledge, often emphasizing cognitive skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving. While these approaches are essential for understanding legal systems, they frequently neglect the holistic development of students, particularly in addressing the complex human and social dimensions inherent in legal practice.

To bridge the gap between legal education and professional practice, some institutions have introduced clinical legal education programs and supervised traineeships. These initiatives offer experiential learning opportunities, allowing students to engage with real-world legal challenges under guidance. Nevertheless, perceiving reality and understanding the legal functioning of society are not enough.

Significant opportunities remain for adoption of pedagogical models that explicitly prioritize socio-emotional competencies, a shift that can meaningfully transform the way students will act as legal professionals in the future.

In contemporary legal practice, professionals increasingly face complex social, emotional and ethical challenges, highlighting the need to reevaluate legal education. Integrating socioemotional competencies, such as self-awareness, empathy, and effective communication into curricula is essential to cultivate ethical decision-making and humanize legal practice.

This is a global movement, as evidenced by the concern of international organizations in emphasizing the importance of this educational path. In this regard, we highlight the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) competencies for the 21st century (UNESCO, 2015)[1] and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) (UN, 2015)[2], which emphasize holistic education aimed at preparing professionals for societal engagement. These international benchmarks underscore the urgency for legal education to move beyond doctrinal mastery, fostering professionals capable of addressing societal challenges with empathy, critical reflection, and a justice-oriented mindset.

This article examines why and how to integrate socioemotional competencies into legal curricula.

Interdisciplinary collaboration emerges as a pivotal strategy in this transformation. Drawing from psychology, behavioral economics, history, and philosophy enriches legal pedagogy, enabling students to analyze issues through multidimensional lenses.

The potential impacts of this paradigm shift are significant. A curriculum that integrates socioemotional learning and interdisciplinary rigor nurtures jurists who combine professional excellence with civic responsibility. This educational model realizes the transformative potential of legal education, aligning legal training with a broad and humanistic vision of the law, fostering legal practice attuned to the complexities of individuals and society.

II. Socioemotional Competencies in Legal Education

a) Definition and Relevance

Socioemotional competencies refer to a set of skills that involve the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions, commonly referred to

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[1] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2015). *Rethinking education: towards a global common good?* https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232555

[2] United Nations. (2015) *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.* https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda

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as self-awareness and self-regulation. They also include the ability to perceive and feel others, to the extent of being able to establish healthy interpersonal relationships. Lastly, they encompass the ability to act, meaning the capacity to mediate interests, make responsible decisions, and respond ethically and constructively to challenges, frustrations, and conflicts.

According to research in educational psychology and cognitive neuroscience, these competencies are fundamental to an individual's holistic development and have a direct impact on academic, professional, and social performance (CASEL, n.d., 2022, p. 1).[3]

As Vygotsky (1989, p. 101) affirms, learning and development are interconnected, and organized learning promotes mental development by activating various processes that would not otherwise occur.[4] Broad learning involving the development of different domains of knowledge contributes to more robust intellectual and human growth.

In the university context, socioemotional development has been associated with higher levels of engagement, self-regulation, and well-being. Studies have shown that strengthening these competencies in higher education significantly contributes to student retention, intrinsic motivation, and emotional resilience, factors particularly relevant in intensive and highly competitive programs such as Law (Machado, 2024, p. 353–376).[5]

Modern studies argue that we live in a "society of exhaustion", marked by self-demand, hyper productivity and emotional burnout. For Byung-Chul Han (2015, p. 101), the contemporary individual, pressured by an unrelenting performance ideal, becomes their own oppressor, trapped in a cycle of self-exploitation and psychological suffering.[6] This perspective invites reflection on the importance of self-perception, self-regulation and attention to well-being as key factors that enables students to cope more healthily with academic and professional challenges, safeguard their mental health and cultivate ethical and humane social relationships. From this standpoint, the development of socioemotional competencies is not only desirable but urgent.

The inclusion of socioemotional competencies in the law school curriculum is justified not only for the personal benefits but also by the professional profile demanded by today's society: a legal practioner capable of acting with sensitivity, respect for diversity, relational ethics, and social awareness.

Moreover, a legal professional capable of nuanced interpretation, broad contextual analysis, and deliberate decision-making-grounded in a conscious evaluation of potential consequences represents a distinctively valuable professional profile.

Finally, contemporary challenges faced by legal professionals are more complex than in the past, requiring disruptive thinking, innovative solutions, and greater creative capacity.

Despite their importance in both personal and professional domains, this paper aims to explore these competences within the context of legal practice.

b) Core socioemotional competencies

Legal practice involves navigating interpersonal conflicts, competing interests, and emotional tensions. In this context, legal professionals need more than technical and normative expertise. They must also be equipped to address subjective and relational dimensions, both in relation to themselves and to others. This is where socioemotional competencies become essential. The ability to perceive oneself, understand human dynamics, and act with ethical sensitivity is a critical differentiator for promoting justice in a more humane, empathetic, and effective manner.

Below, we explore some of the core socioemotional competencies considered essential in legal education for preparing more well-rounded professionals. Individuals equipped not only to argue, but also to listen, reflect, mediate, and address conflicts with emotional intelligence and social responsibility.

i. *Self-awareness and self-regulation*

The first step toward professional efficacy, particularly in conflict-related situations, is self-awareness. Self-awareness enables future jurists to recognize their emotions, limitations, values, and beliefs, and to understand how these dimensions influence their decisions and professional conduct. A legal professional who lacks adequate self-perception risks allowing personal emotions and interests to interfere inappropriately with the handling of legal matters. This may result in outcomes that prioritize the practitioner´s preferences over the genuine interests of the parties involved, thereby compromising both the quality of the solution and the fairness of the outcome, ultimately failing to address the parties´ actual needs adequately.

Self-regulation, in turn, refers to the ability to manage these emotions constructively, maintaining composure in situations of pressure, conflict, or frustration. In the legal environment, where clashes of ideas are constant, this competency is crucial to remaining balanced and acting ethically and professionally. Self-regulation is essential for legal professionals to avoid emotional derailment and to

[3] CASEL. (n.d.). *CASEL's SEL framework: what are the core competence areas and where are they promoted*? Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. https://casel.org

[4] Vygotsky, L. S. (1989) *A formação social da mente.* [The social formation of the mind] (3rd ed.). Martins Fontes.

[5] Machado, A.S.M., & Soares, A.B. (2024). *Revisão sistemática da literatura sobre intervenções de habilidades socioemocionais em estudantes universitários.* Revista Pesquisa Qualitativa, 12(32). https://editora.sepq.org.br/rpq/article/view/633.

[6] Han, B,-C. *A sociedade do cansaço.* (E. Sassi. Trans.). Vozes. (Original work published 2010)

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regain equilibrium swiftly, preserving the clarity needed to focus on resolving the matter at hand.

Consequently, cultivating the ability to accurately identify, distinguish, and regulate one's professional boundaries in relation to client interests constitutes a core competency for effective legal practice.

ii. *Perceiving the other: empathy and active listening*

Law, as a discipline centered on organizing human relationships, also demands sensitivity to perceive the other: their needs, suffering, and reasoning. Empathy enables professionals to place themselves in another's position, understanding their perspective without judgment. Active listening involves paying genuine attention not only to what is said but also to what lies beneath the words, capturing emotions and intentions. Developing these competencies helps foster bonds of trust, which are essential in legal advocacy, judicial roles, mediation, and other conflict-resolution practices.

Many legal cases contain, beneath their formal claims, profound personal and emotional motivations that remain unstated in legal pleadings. Recognizing these underlying dimensions is often crucial to developing genuinely effective resolutions. A pragmatic example arises in family law disputes, particularly divorce and custody cases, where litigation frequently reflects unresolved emotional conflicts or unmet psychological needs, often bearing minimal connection to the material or objective issues presented in the proceedings.

The landmark case *In re Marriage of Bonds* (2005)[7] exemplifies how hidden emotional conflicts often underline formal legal petitions in family law. While the pleadings framed a contentious custody battle, therapeutic mediation revealed both parents' unstated needs: the father sought predictable visitation enforcement rather than sole custody, while the mother primarily desired financial security assurances. The California Supreme Court noted this disconnect, observing that "the adversarial pleadings masked the parties' shared anxiety about protracted litigation trauma." This case demonstrates how judicial systems must look beyond surface-level claims to address the emotional the emotional substrata of family disputes. This principle is now embedded in California's mandatory mediation rules and increasingly adopted in other jurisdictions seeking alternatives to traditional adversarial processes in emotionally charged cases.

In the corporate domain, a notable illustration involves Abilio Diniz, who engaged Harvard professor and mediator William Ury (2015, p. 22)[8] to facilitate resolution of a control dispute over the Casino Group. The conflict, characterized by legal contention intertwined with personal and corporate tensions, was ultimately resolved through reestablished dialogue between the parties, coupled with a structured negotiation and self-reflection. This approach allowed the underlying interests of both sides to surface and be effectively addressed, resulting in an agreement that circumvented protracted litigation.

The strategy recommended by Ury (2015) consists of the following steps:

> "Put yourself in their shoes (...). To reach this point of view, three initiatives can be helpful. First, try to distance yourself and see it from the 'box seat.' Second, listen empathetically to your deepest, most intimate feelings to interpret what they are really telling you. Third, dive even deeper into your inner self and discover what your most fundamental needs are."

What stood out the most in this case was Ury's ability to assist the parties in deeply and personally explore their true interests, which likely what enabled the discovery of new alternatives and ultimately led to conflict resolution.

iii. *Learning to Act: Critical Thinking and Creativity*

Effectively navigating complex situations in legal practice demands critical thinking, namely the capacity to analyze facts through logical, ethical, and contextual lenses to derive appropriate and effective solutions.

In this regard, as Pedro Demo (1997, p. 89) emphasizes, critical thinking is intrinsically connected to the knowledge construction of knowledge through research and reflection rather than mere reproduction ok information.[9] This cognitive approach represents the only mechanism capable of generating genuine social transformation, as Demo argues, by producing knowledge that actively engages with reality and fosters substantive change.

Creativity, within this framework, proves equally indispensable for developing innovative and effective solutions to legal challenges.

Legal practice, as Dworkin (1986) emphasizes, demands more than procedural technique. It requires "interpretive integrity" that reconciles legal norms with philosophical principles of justice. This approach, which he terms "law as integrity", illustrates how the dialogue between law and philosophy is essential for resolving

[7] United States. California Supreme Court. *In re Marriage of Bonds*, No. S274033 (Cal. 2025). Justia. Retrieved July 15, 2025, from https://law.justia.com/cases/california/supreme-court/4th/24/1.html

[8] Ury, W. *Como chegar ao sim com vocês mesmo: o primeiro passo em qualquer negociação, conflito ou conversa difícil* (A. C. da Cunha, Trans.), Sextante. (Original work published 2015)

[9] Demo, P. (1997) *Pesquisa e construção do conhecimento (*3rd ed.) Tempo Brasileiro. (Original work in Portuguese: "Educação precisa levar à emancipação, não ao atrelamento. O instrumento principal de emancipação não é ideologia, mas conhecimento crítico e criativo. Este não se faz sem aquela, mas este é mais relevante." My translation: "Education must lead to emancipation, not subjugation. The main instrument of emancipation is not ideology, but critical and creative knowledge. This cannot be achieved without the former, but it is more relevant.")

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hard cases through coherent principles, justifying decisions on ethical grounds, and avoiding purely positivist solutions (Dworkin, 1986, p. 243)[10]. This methodological framework inherently bridges legal doctrine and political philosophy, requiring familiarity with theories such as Rawls' theory of justice (1971)[11] or Nozick's Entitlement Theory (1974)[12] to critically evaluate what constitutes fairness and equity in legal adjudication.

The case *Riggs v. Palmer*[13] exemplifies Dworkin's "law as integrity" where the court denied an inheritance to a murderer based on the unwritten principle that "no one shall profit from their own wrong." Dworkin (1986) highlights this decision as an embodiment of (i) principle over rule (moral coherence superseded strict legal text, reflecting natural law theory)[14]; (ii) constructive interpretation (judges interpreted the law as a "chain novel", aligning decisions with underlying principles of justice) and (iii) institutional role (affirming law's duty to express societal values rather than merely regulate behavior). In legal practice, this underscores the need to identify implicit moral principles within legal gaps, balance competing ethical claims, and justify decisions through coherent normative reasoning. While positivists such as Hart (1961)[15] critique such judgments as judicial overreach, Dworkin counters that morality is intrinsic to legal interpretation (*Justice in Robes*, 2006).[16] *Riggs* thus remains a foundation case for interdisciplinary legal-philosophical analysis.

A pivotal U.S. Supreme Court decision on voting rights[17] further illustrates how historical and geographical evidence informs constitutional interpretation. The majority (5-4) cited post-1965 racial progress (e.g., President Obama's election) to invalidate the Voting Rights Act's preclearance system. In contrast, the dissent relied on historical analysis of evolving voter suppression tactics, GIS mapping revealing persistent polling place closures in predominantly Black neighborhoods, and spatial statistics indicating discriminatory redistricting patterns. This evidentiary clash proved determinative: the Court's rejection of geographical-historical data enabled immediate regression, evidenced by 868 polling place closures in formerly covered jurisdictions. The case established that judicial assessment of voting rights must incorporate temporal depth (examining the persistence of structural discrimination); spatial literacy (mapping policy impacts), and a rejection of formal equality myths. Subsequent cases, such as *Milligan v. Merrill*[18], continue to confront this enduring methodological divide.

iv. *Strategic Communication*

Effective professional communication requires not only clarity and precision, but also strategic expression. Once the practitioner has successfully dissociated emotions from substantive issues, understood the stakeholders' underlying interests, and aligned these with legally viable solutions, it becomes essential to articulate this synthesis with deliberate focus and communicative competence.

The ability to facilitate dialogue between opposing parties, mitigating conflicts rather than exacerbating it, while remaining focused on substantive matters and communicating with intentionality constitutes a core competency in legal practice.

Although oratory and rhetoric, esteemed since classical antiquity, remain relevant, they now represent just one facet of a broader communicative skillset. This expanded repertoire is equally, if not more, indispensable for achieving effective and enduring professional outcomes.

According to Adeodato (2019, p. 12-13), rhetoric today should not be understood merely as a set of persuasive techniques, but as a genuine method for the study and practice of law.[19] This perspective expands the function of rhetoric, transforming it into an indispensable tool for critical and strategic legal reasoning, one that fosters constructive dialogue and intelligent negotiation between parties. For the author, a legal professional who masters rhetoric is better equipped to mediate conflicts, articulating arguments that transcend the mere application of legal norms by incorporating the social, ethical, and human context of legal disputes.

[10] Dworkin, R. (1986). *Law's Empire.* Harvard University Press.
[11] Rawls, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice.* Harvard University Press.
[12] Nozick, R. (1974) *Anarchy, State, and Utopia.* Basic Books.
[13] United States. New York Court of Appeals. *Riggs v. Palmer.* (n.d.) v. Lex. Retrieved July 15, 2025, from https://case-law.vlex.com/vid/riggs-v-palmer-884426406
[14] Finnis, J. (1980) *Natural Law and Natural Rights.* Oxford University Press.
[15] Hart, H. L. A. (1961) *The Concept of Law*. Clarendon Press.
[16] Dworkin, R. (2006) *Justice in Robes.* Harvard University Press.
[17] United States. Supreme Court. *Shelby County v. Holder*, 570 U.S. 529 (2013) Justia. Retrieved July 15, 2015, from https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/570/529/
[18] United States. Supreme Court. *Milligan v. Merrill*, 597 U.S. ___ (2022). Supreme Court of United States. Retrieved July 15, 2025, from https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/21a375_d18f.pdf
[19] Adeodato, J. M. (2019). *Retórica como metódica para estudo do Direito.* (4th ed.). Saraiva. (Original work in Portuguese: "Essa ligação entre *pathos* e *ethos*, em Aristóteles, está no contexto de considerá-los formas de persuasão retórica, ao lado do *logos*, como dito. E os raciocínios demonstrativos do *logos* não tinham o prestígio que a ciência 'lógica' lhes veio emprestar na modernidade. Há uma consciência clara, já na Grécia antiga, de que certos assuntos humanos, assim como determinados tipos de auditório, pouco têm a fazer com a razão 'lógica'." My translation: "This connection between pathos and ethos, in Aristotle, is within the context of considering them forms of rhetorical persuasion, alongside logos, as mentioned. The demonstrative reasoning of logos did not carry the prestige that 'logical' science later conferred upon it in modernity. There was a clear awareness, already in ancient Greece, that certain human subjects, as well as specific types of audiences, have little to do with 'logical' reasoning.")

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Mootz (2018, p. 112) similarly observes that "legal reasoning is fundamentally rhetorical because it must always persuade particular audiences – whether clients, judges, or society at large – of the justice of its conclusions within historically contingent frameworks of meaning."[20]

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Fisher v. University of Texas* (2016)[21] exemplifies the expanded role of rhetoric in legal practice. Justice Kennedy's majority opinion demonstrated how strategic rhetorical framing could reconcile constitutional principles with societal context, transforming an affirmative action dispute into a broader dialogue on the value of educational diversity. This aligns with Farber's (2019) interpretation of rhetoric as mediating tool. In this case, the Court's language bridged ideological divides by articulating how racial consciousness serves compelling state interests without violating Equal Protection Clause. The opinion's careful balancing of ethical imperatives (e.g., diversity), social realities (e.g., campus climate), and legal doctrine (e.g., strict scrutiny) illustrates how judicial rhetoric can constructively negotiate conflicts beyond mere norm application, advancing law's humanistic goals while preserving constitutional fidelity.

The National Labor Relations Board´s decision in *Starbucks Corp. v. Wolfe* (2023)[22] further underscores rhetoric's critical role in corporate legal strategy. While formally addressing unfair labor practices under Section 8(a)(1) of the NLRA, the Board's opinion employed nuanced rhetorical framing to balance corporate operational concerns with workers´ right to organize. The administrative law judge's language reframed a contentious unionization dispute as a mediated solution, acknowledging Starbucks' "legitimate business concerns" while affirming "the fundamental dignity of labor organizing". This demonstrates how judicial rhetoric can harmonize statutory compliance with socio-ethical considerations, exemplifying an interdisciplinary approach. It illustrates how sophisticated legal argumentation transcends binary compliance/non-compliance models to create space for institutional dialogue and negotiation.

Additionally, Adeodato (2019) points out that combining oratory with rhetoric enables legal professionals to craft arguments that not only persuade through logic but also move audiences through emotional and ethical appeal which are elements essential for constructing legitimate and socially accepted legal decisions. This complex and multidimensional communicative skill is fundamental for addressing contemporary legal challenges, which demand sensitivity, flexibility, and creativity in conflict resolution and in the pursuit of justice.

The Delaware Chancery Court's decision in *Tornetta v. Musk* (2022)[23] exemplifies the interplay of logical, emotional, and ethical persuasion in corporate litigation. While formally addressing allegations of Tesla directors' breach of fiduciary duty, Chancellor McCormick's opinion masterfully employed rhetorical triangulation: citing financial analyses (logos), highlighting unfair labor impacts (pathos), and framing a compensation package as a violation of corporate stewardship norms (ethos). This approach aligns with Adeodato's (2021) model of multidimensional legal persuasion, wherein the Court's language transformed a contractual dispute into a normative statement about equitable capitalism. The opinion's rhetorical construction, particularly its invocation of 'shareholder democracy', illustrates how judicial discourse can legitimate decisions by addressing both technical compliance and broader social expectations, a critical competency for resolving complex corporate conflicts involving competing stakeholder interests.

As demonstrated, socioemotional competencies are fundamental to the comprehensive application of legal principles. Notably, integration into legal pedagogy emerges as both necessary and feasible. The systematic incorporation of these competencies into legal education should not be regarded as a marginal innovation or mere curricular supplement. Rather, it constitutes a normative and pedagogical imperative for cultivating professionals who combine technical expertise with humanistic awareness. This alignment responds to contemporary legal challenges while supporting global commitments to holistic education, active citizenship, and the protection of human dignity.

III. Active Methodologies and Interdisciplinarity in Legal Education

a) *Overcoming the Fragmentation of Legal Education*

The fragmentation of knowledge resulting from the traditional organization of legal curricula into isolated technical disciplines undermines the development of professionals capable of addressing the complexity of contemporary legal issues. Although this compartmentalized structure may serve the purpose of systematizing content, it often neglects the

[20] Mootz, F. J. (2018) *Rhetorical Jurisprudence: Law as a Product of Persuasion and Tradition*. University of Nevada Press.

[21] United States. Supreme Court. *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, 579 U.S. 365 (2016). Justia. Retrieved July 15, 2025, from https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/579/14-981/ Accessed on: 15. Jul. 2025.

[22] United States. National Labor Relations Board. *Starbucks Corp. and Workers United*, No. 23-1953 (3d Cir. 2024). Justia. Retrieved July 15, 2025, from https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/ca3/23-1953/23-1953-2024-12-27.html

[23] United States. Delaware Court of Chancery. *Tornetta v. Musk*, C.A. No. 2018-0408-JTL (Del. Ch. 2024). Delaware Courts. Retrieved July 15, 2025, from https://courts.delaware.gov/Opinions/Download.aspx?id=372420

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interdependence among various fields and fails to reflect the multifaceted nature of legal conflicts. Consequently, it produces professionals who may demonstrate proficiency in specific normative domains but lack critical thinking, social awareness, and the ability to integrate diverse forms of knowledge.

Overcoming this limitation requires a profound reexamination of educational paradigms in legal training. In this context, interdisciplinarity should not be understood as the mere juxtaposition of content from other fields, but rather as a deep and ethical stance that recognizes the complexity of legal phenomena and the necessity of understanding them through multiple lenses - social, historical, economic, cultural, and emotional. Edgar Morin (2003, p. 21) emphasizes the need to transcend the compartmentalization of knowledge in favor of a "well-made head," capable of connecting and critically contextualizing information.[24] Such complex thinking is particularly vital in the legal field, where norms are neither neutral nor self-explanatory, but are embedded within dynamic and often conflicting social contexts. Legal education, therefore, must foster competencies grounded in the humanities, social sciences, and the cultivation of socioemotional skills.

The persistence of a fragmented technical education contributes to the disconnection of law from its social function, limiting access to justice and perpetuating dehumanized legal practices. Reconfiguring legal education through an inter-disciplinary and integrated vision of knowledge is not merely an academic or professional requirement, but an ethical and political imperative.

b) Meaningful Learning: Research, Projects, and Cooperation

To implement this transformation, the adoption of active learning methodologies is recommended. Such approaches advocates for positioning students as active protagonists in their educational trajectories. Pedro Demo (1997, p. 89) argues that research should be understood not merely as a method but as an educational principle. In his view, teaching is fundamentally about fostering the ability to think, an objective that can only be achieved when students are encouraged to investigate, question, and critically reconstruct legal and social knowledge.[25]

Building on this perspective, Feferbaum (2021, p. 193)[26] contends that active methodologies in legal education go beyond the application of techniques; they entail a deeper transformation in pedagogical posture. The focus shifts from the mere transmission of content to the creation of meaningful formative experiences. Consequently, the role of the professor evolves from that of a transmitter of knowledge to that of a mediator, facilitator, and curator of learning environments.

In this regard, project-based interdisciplinary learning emerges as a powerful strategy for integrating both technical and socioemotional competencies. As Feferbaum (2021, p. 193) highlights, the collective construction of knowledge through real or simulated problem-based scenarios[27] enables students to develop autonomy, empathy, social responsibility, and argumentative skills, which are essential attributes for the critical and ethical practice of law. By engaging in projects with practical relevance, students are challenged to apply legal knowledge in an integrated and reflective manner, engaging with other fields of knowledge and with real-world conflicts.

Within this same critical framework, Bittar (2003, p. 188) argues that legal research should be understood as a tool for intellectual and political emancipation, as it enables students to construct a deeper understanding of legal and social realities. He emphasizes that legal education must move beyond a dogmatic and technocratic model, making room for a pedagogy grounded in critical thinking, ethics, and a commitment

[24] Morin, E. (2003) *A cabeça bem-feita: repensar a reforma, reformar o pensamento.* (8th ed.). Bertrand Brasil. (Original work in Portuguese: "'Uma cabeça bem-feita' significa que, em vez de acumular o saber, é mais importante dispor ao mesmo tempo de: - uma aptidão geral para colocar e tratar os problemas; - princípios organizadores que permitam ligar os saberes e lhes dar sentido." My translation: ""A well-made head" means that, instead of accumulating knowledge, it is more important to simultaneously have: - a general aptitude for addressing and dealing with problems; - organizing principles that allow for connecting knowledge and giving it meaning.")

[25] Demo, P. (1997) *Pesquisa e construção do conhecimento* (3rd ed.) Tempo Brasileiro.

[26] Feperbaum, M. (2021). *Metodologias ativas em Direito: guia prático para o ensino jurídico participativo e inovador.* Fundação Getulio Vargas. (Original work in Portuguese: "A primeira reflexão é sobre os papéis de estudantes e professores na sala de aula. Quanto ao papel do docente em sala de aula, como mencionado, pode ser desde um transmissor de informações até um encorajador do aprendizado. E isso impacta diretamente o papel que o professor atribui para o aluno, desde um espectador até um agente ativo no processo de construção de seu conhecimento." My translation: "The first reflection is about the roles of students and teachers in the classroom. Regarding the teacher's role in the classroom, as mentioned, it can range from a transmitter of information to a facilitator of learning. This directly impacts the role that the teacher assigns to the student, from a spectator to an active agent in the process of building their knowledge.")

[27] Feperbaum, M. (2021). *Metodologias ativas em Direito: guia prático para o ensino jurídico participativo e inovador.* Fundação Getulio Vargas. (Original work in Portuguese: "Produzir materiais inéditos, como um caso didático, é muito importante, pois, dessa maneira, torna-se possível apresentar aos alunos temas reais, atuais e controversos. (...) Os materiais devem ser capazes de preparar a turma para a atividade, mas sem condicioná-las a um específico caminho." My translation: "Producing original materials, such as a teaching case, is very important because it allows us to present students with real, current, and controversial topics. (...) The materials should be able to prepare the class for the activity, but without binding them to a specific path.")

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to social justice.[28] Research, therefore, is not merely the application of methods; it constitutes an investigative, reflective, and creative attitude, essential for building a more humanized legal system committed to democratic values.

It is crucial to encourage students to take an active role in the construction of knowledge, rather than adopting a passive stance in which the professor is viewed as the sole source of ready-made information. Knowledge creation should be a collaborative process. Collective learning enriches this process by fostering reflection from diverse perspectives.

Below are three examples of innovative approaches that demonstrate the successful integration of socioemotional learning in law schools, as described by Feferbaum (2023)[29]:

Yale Law School's *Emotional Intelligence in Litigation* course integrates biofeedback-assisted mock trials, in which students monitor physiological responses (e.g., heart rate variability) during simulated cross-examinations (Feferbaum, 2023, p. 117). By pairing real-time biometric data with reflective debriefings, students develop self-regulation skills that are essential for high-stakes advocacy, effectively bridging neuroscience and traditional legal training.

At Stanford Law, the *Mindful Contract Drafting* course employs collaborative annotation platforms enhanced with emotional tone analysis, enabling students to identify stress-inducing language in contracts (Feferbaum, 2023, p. 89). This approach combines AI-driven feedback with mindfulness practices, fostering both technical precision and emotional awareness in transactional legal work.

CUNY Law School's *Theatre of the Oppressed in Legal Aid* adapts Augusto Boal's forum theatre methodology, allowing students to re-enact housing court scenarios while audience members intervene to explore alternative resolutions (Feferbaum, 2023, p. 144). This immersive pedagogical technique cultivates empathy and creative problem-solving, critical competencies for social justice-oriented legal praactice.

In an increasingly digital world, students may require more robust preparation for meaningful and effective collaborative interactions. In this context, it becomes the responsibility of the educator to cultivate an environment of respect and trust, where students feel safe to express their viewpoints without fear of judgment or excessive criticism. Developing the capacity to express emotions in an intelligent and empathetic manner represents a promising approach to strengthening interpersonal relationships. This type of learning can be incorporated into integrated activities that combine academic content with emotional development.

As Steiner suggests[30]:

> "If you use action/feeling statements correctly, you will gradually begin to shed light on the emotional landscape around you. You will have a tool to understand how people feel, how intensely, and why. (...) Learning to listen and understand how our actions influence others' feelings, without becoming defensive, is crucial in this process. (...) With this format (action/feeling statements), we can face emotionally difficult situations and prevent their escalation by opening the door to richer and more satisfying relationships." (2001, p. 111)

The author argues that when students recognize the tangible benefits of emotionally intelligent practice, such as eliciting critical case information from clients who feel at ease, or uncovering the genuine interests of counterparts to formulate value-generating solutions, they become more motivated to acquire technical knowledge while simultaneously cultivating essential emotional competencies. This cognitive shift may serve as a pivotal differentiator in enhancing the effectiveness of legal education.

This study underscores the importance of integrating specialized interpersonal techniques into legal training, particularly methods traditionally associated with other disciplines, such as mediation[31], restorative justice[32], nonviolent communication (Rosenberg, 2003)[33], and principled negotiation (Fisher & Ury, 1981)[34]. These evidence-based approaches exemplify the socio-relational competencies required for

[28] Bittar, E. C. B. (2024) *Metodologia da Pesquisa Jurídica*. (18th ed.) Saraiva. (Original work in Portuguese: "A formação do operador do direito não pode se dar apenas pelo acúmulo de conteúdos técnicos e dogmáticos; é preciso desenvolver no estudante de direito uma consciência crítica, ética e comprometida com a transformação social. O direito não pode ser compreendido como um fim em si mesmo, mas como instrumento de realização da justiça." My translation: "The training of a legal professional cannot be achieved merely through the accumulation of technical and doctrinal content; it is essential to develop in law students a critical, ethical awareness that is committed to social transformation. The law should not be understood as an end in itself, but as an instrument for achieving justice.")

[29] Feferbaum, M. (2023). *Transformative Legal Pedagogy: Integrating Socio-Emotional Learning in Law Schools.* Routledge.

[30] Steiner C., & Perry, P. (2001). *Educação Emocional: um programa personalizado para desenvolver sua inteligência emocional.* (T. B. dos Santos, Trans.). Objetiva.

[31] Almeida, T. (2014). *Caixa de Ferramentas em Mediação: aportes práticos e teóricos.* Dash Editora.

[32] Zehr, H. (2008). *Trocando as lentes: justiça restaurativa para o nosso tempo.* (T. Van Acker, Trans.). Palas Athena.

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[34] Fisher, R., Ury W., & Patton, B. (2005). *Como chegar ao sim: como negociar acordos sem fazer concessões.* (2nd ed.). Imago. Examples of skills acquired through learning these techniques include: (i) the direct communication of one's own feelings, without attacking or judging others; (ii) taking responsibility for one's behavior, beginning to see oneself as an agent of the events surrounding them, (iii) separating people from the problem (iv) identifying needs, (v) focusing on interests rather than positions, (vi) creating options for mutual gain, and (vii) using objective criteria to achieve sustainable agreements.

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contemporary legal practice, from client interactions to dispute resolution contexts.

Moreover, it is essential to incorporate ethical (Aristotle, 1985, p. 93)[35] and social considerations into legal education so that law students may become conscious agents of social transformation. From an ethical standpoint, legal professionals play a fundamental role in fostering social peace, as justice and peace are intrinsically linked (Faria, 2007, p. 53)[36]. From a social perspective, it is important for students to understand the challenges faced by their communities and reflect on how they can position themselves in response to these realities.

These competencies are valuable not only in students' future professional practice but also in their personal development. Throughout their academic and professional journeys, such tools will support them in the pursuit of their own "truths" and in achieving meaningful engagement within their social contexts.

Despite the challenges, there are concrete experiences that demonstrate both the feasibility and the benefits of adopting active methodologies and integrating socioemotional competencies into legal education. Strategies such as project-based learning and discussion circles[37] have proven effective in aligning theory and practice, academic content and lived experience, and technical knowledge with emotional sensitivity. These approaches foster greater engagement, empathy, teamwork, and a deeper understanding of the social role of law. Furthermore, participatory and interdisciplinary methodologies contribute to the development of a more democratic, inclusive, and collaborative legal culture.

Below are three successful case studies that illustrate the benefits of incorporating interdisciplinary and socioemotional training in legal education:

The University of Lisbon's Faculty of Law implemented a hybrid flipped classroom and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) approach to enhance student engagement and foster interdisciplinary development in international law courses. Between 2021 and 2022, a pilot program was launched in a course for Erasmus students, in which half of the sessions followed a traditional lecture format, while the other half adopted a flipped structure: students accessed lectures and materials in advance, and in-person class time was dedicated to collaborative exercises, case analysis, and the development of socioemotional competencies such as teamwork, communication, and empathy in legal reasoning.

Faculty feedback and student surveys indicated increased levels of critical thinking and communication skills, along with higher perceived relevance of legal content. Instructors reported improved learning monitoring of learning progress and deeper student engagement, particularly during discussions involving simulated international legal disputes. Despite the innovative pedagogical structure, the program maintained rigorous doctrinal coverage, reinforcing the notion that active methodologies can strengthen, rather than dilute, legal technical instruction.

This initiative demonstrated that the integration of socioemotional and interdisciplinary strategies within core legal training not only enhances academic performance but also prepares students for real-world legal challenges that require emotional intelligence and collaborative decision-making.[38]

At Harvard Law Sschool, a collaboration with Bok Center addresses pedagogical limitations through mandatory teaching fellowships. Junior faculty co-design courses with education specialists, integrating emotion-regulation techniques into contract negotiation simulations. Participant surveys (2022) reported an 83% improvement in perceived teaching effectiveness, particularly in fostering inclusive participation.[39]

At Indiana University´s Maurer School of Law, an interdisciplinary divorce mediation clinic was established in partnership with the Psychology Department. In a controlled study, one group of students received traditional mediation training, while

[35] Aristotle. (1985). *Ética a Nicômacos*. (M. da G. Kury, Trans., 4th ed.). Editora Universidade de Brasilia. (Original work circa 350 BCE) (Original text in Portuguese: "a justiça é a forma perfeita de excelência moral porque ela é a prática efetiva da excelência moral perfeita. Ela é perfeita porque as pessoas que possuem o sentimento de justiça podem praticá-la não somente em relação a si mesmas como também em relação ao próximo." My translation: "Justice is the perfect form of moral excellence because it is the effective practice of perfect moral excellence. It is perfect because people who have a sense of justice can practice it not only in relation to themselves but also in relation to others.")

[36] Faria M. C. B. (2007). *Direito e Ética: Aristóteles, Hobbes e Kant.* Paulus. (Original text in Portuguese: "Há uma estreita relação entre justiça e paz, tanto se considerarmos a justiça como "síntese das virtudes" como se considerarmos como "justiça particular", quando se identifica à legalidade. No primeiro caso, por ser a dimensão social da virtude, a justiça regula as relações entre os homens e seria a base da *phília* que reconhece no outro um "outro si mesmo"." My translation: "There is a close relationship between justice and peace, whether we consider justice as the 'synthesis of virtues' or as 'particular justice,' when it is identified with legality. In the first case, being the social dimension of virtue, justice regulates relationships among people and would be the basis of philia that recognizes in the other an 'other self.'")

[37] Feperbaum, M. (2021). *Metodologias ativas em Direito: guia prático para o ensino jurídico participativo e inovador.* Fundação Getúlio Vargas. (This work addresses a wide and rich range of active teaching methods that can be applied in legal education, including in an interdisciplinary manner.)

[38] Oliveira, H., Sanches, T. & Martins, J. (2022). *Problem-based learning in a flipped classroom: a case study for active learning in legal education in international law.* The Law Teacher, 56(3), 1-15. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03069400.2022.2040934

[39] Harvard University. Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning. (2023). *Law Faculty Teaching Fellows Program Annual Report 2022: Assessing Pedagogical Innovation.* Harvard University. https://bokcenter.harvard.edu/law-program-assessment.

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another group participated in an integrated legal-psychological program, with pre- and post-semester evaluations. The interdisciplinary approach resulted not only in substantial gains in divorce law knowledge, but also in psychological insights, such as understanding the impact of divorce on children and trauma-informed practice that were not observed in the control group. Additionally, focus group feedback highlighted increased confidence, empathy, and satisfaction derived from collaborating with psychology peers. This case underscores how context-based, interdisciplinary training fosters both professional competence and socioemotional skills in future practitioners.[40]

The feasibility of these proposals lies not in the absence of resources or methodological guidance, but in the political and institutional will to implement a new pedagogical rationality that aligns legal education with the ethical values that ought guide it.

c) Interdisciplinary Teacher Training

Overcoming disciplinary fragmentation also requires a profound transformation in teacher education. Morin (2003, p. 20) emphasizes that the reform of thought necessarily entails the reform of education[41], which means preparing educators to act as facilitators of complexity, rather than mere transmitters of content. Topics such as ethics, learning psychology, critical pedagogy, and the culture of the humanities should be integral components of both initial and continuing teacher education in the field of law. This broader training enables educators to foster interdisciplinary connections, dialogical practices, and formative assessments, thereby contributing to the creation of a more reflective and inclusive learning environment.

In this regard, Perrenoud (2000, p. 27) highlights that developing the competence to organize and facilitate learning experiences, collaborate effectively, and reflect critically on pedagogical practice is essential for teaching in complex educational settings. For him, teaching is not about adhering to a predetermined script but about making continuous, conscious decisions in environments marked by diversity, uncertainty, and transformation.[42] This demands not only technical expertise but also sensitivity, openness to dialogue, and a willingness to learn from students.

As Morin proposes, it is necessary to "reintroduce the subject into knowledge" to recognize that all knowledge is a subjective, ethical, and cultural construction, not merely an objective fact.

This perspective is reinforced by Hernández (1998)[43], who advocates for the "transgression" of traditional pedagogical models as a pathway to more meaningful educational practices. According to him, the curriculum should be conceived as a space for negotiation, where diverse voices and experiences can emerge and interact, promoting substantive changes in both teaching and learning. Hernández proposes a pedagogy committed to social transformation and the holistic development of individuals, an approach that aligns directly with the goals of legal education aimed at fostering critical and pluralistic citizenship.

Interdisciplinarity, therefore, is not merely a teaching technique but an ethical stance on knowledge and human development. The integration of socio-emotional competencies into legal education necessitates a transformation in curriculum design, teaching methodologies, assessment practices, and, fundamentally, teacher training. This is a challenge that calls for institutional courage, intellectual openness, and political commitment to an emancipatory vision of education.

Educating legal professionals who can act with sensitivity, critical awareness, and social responsibility is a commitment to both the present and the future of law in a democratic and pluralistic society. In this context, teacher education ceases to be a bureaucratic formality and becomes a strategic field for the reinvention of legal education.

Finally, there is something essential that every educator must bring with them: their soul.

Teaching is not merely about transmission of content, the application of methodologies, or the

[40] Applegate, J., D´Onofrio, B., & Holtzworth-Munroe, A. (2009). *Interdisciplinary psychology and law training in family and child mediation: an empirical study of the effects on law student mediators.* Behavioral Sciences & the Law, 27(6), 1006-1025. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268872172_Interdisciplinary_psychology_and_law_training_in_family_and_child_mediation_An_empirical_study_of_the_effects_on_law_student_mediators

[41] Morin, E. (2003). *A cabeça bem-feita: repensar a reforma, reformar o pensamento.* (E. Jacobina, Trans., 8th ed.). Bertrand Brasil. (Original work in Portuguese: "A reforma do ensino deve levar à reforma do pensamento, e a reforma do pensamento deve levar à reforma do ensino." My translation: "The reform of education must lead to the reform of thought, and the reform of thought must lead to the reform of education.")

[42] Perrenoud, P. (2000). *Dez novas competências para ensinar.* Artes Médicas. (Original work in Portuguese: "A profissionalização do ofício de ensinar passa por aí: saber demonstrar a um interlocutor que as situações problemáticas foram analisadas e que não se fizeram milagres, mas o que outros profissionais competentes teriam feito, ou pelo menos considerado, diante dos mesmos alunos e nas mesmas circunstâncias. [...] O pedagogo ou terapeuta são obrigados a ter êxito, mas devem poder prestar contas de tentativas variadas e metódicas de delimitar os problemas, estabelecer diagnóstico, construir estratégias e superar obstáculos." My translation: "The professionalization of the teaching profession involves this: knowing how to demonstrate to an interlocutor that the problematic situations have been analyzed and that miracles were not performed, but rather what other competent professionals would have done, or at least considered, given the same students and under the same circumstances. [...] The educator or therapist is required to achieve success, but they must be able to account for varied and methodical attempts to define the problems, establish a diagnosis, construct strategies, and overcome obstacles.")

[43] Hernández, F. (1998). *Transgressão e Mudança na Educação.* Artmed.

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evaluation of performance. It is, above all, an ethical, human, and relational act. As Rios (2001, p. 24)[44] affirms, the true educator is one who engages in the educational process, offering their sensitivity, values, and ethical responsibility in service of the student's development. Their "soul", understood as a living, sensitive, and committed presence is what gives meaning to the act of teaching.

The presence of the educator as a whole person, teaching not only with reason but also with heart, is essential for fostering bonds of trust, respect, and attentive listening. Rios emphasizes that the ethical educator is one who understands teaching as an exercise in responsibility, openness to dialogue, and commitment to social transformation. In this sense, teaching becomes an act of generosity and hope.

This vision resonates with the words of Rubem Alves (2002, p. 100)[45], who argues that education must also be romantic-driven by wonder, a passion for knowledge, and love for students. Alves maintains that teaching is a form of poetry, in which the educator not only informs but also transforms, inspires, and touches the soul of the other. For him, a good teacher "is not the one who knows everything, but the one who delights in learning and teaching with joy and sensitivity."

By bringing their soul into the classroom, the teacher does more than share knowledge; they inspire, provoke, welcome, and challenge. They become a reference not only for what they know but, above all, for who they are: someone who teaches because they believe in the potential of others and in the transformative power of education as a practice of freedom.

IV. Conclusion

The integration of socioemotional competencies in legal education emerges not only as a pedagogical necessity but also as a call for educational systems that cultivate empathy, ethical awareness, and collective problem-solving, elements that remains largely absent in many law schools, where traditional models continue to prioritize technical content. This disconnect compromises the legal profession's capacity to respond effectively tp the multifaceted and interconnected challenges of contemporary society.

Interdisciplinarity and the implementation of active learning methodologies are not simply educational trends; they are structural imperatives for preparing legal professionals to engage with the complexities of modern human and social relations. In this regard, it is essential that higher education institutions, faculty members, and educational policymakers more systematically incorporate socioemotional competencies into law curricula, addressing elements such as empathy, emotional self-regulation, active listening, and critical thinking.

Despite significant challenges, including the rigidity of conventional legal curricula and the limited pedagogical training of faculty, practical experiences with innovative teaching strategies demonstrate that meaningful transformation is not only possible, but urgently necessary.

Thus, the adoption of these practices should not be seen merely as a response to evolving market demands, but as a critical step toward the realization of constitutional rights and the development of a more democratic, inclusive, and socially responsive legal culture. Such transformation is fundamental to empowering legal professionals to act as agents of social change and to strengthening citizenship in an increasingly complex world.

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