

Theater workshops as therapeutic occupational possibility in a therapeutic residential service*

Oficinas de teatro como recurso terapêutico ocupacional em um serviço residencial terapêutico

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ABSTRACT: This study aimed to investigate the potential of therapeutic use of theater as an occupational therapy intervention resource in the social reinsertion of the users of a Therapeutic Residential Service located in the countryside of São Paulo state. Weekly theatrical workshops with the duration of approximately one hour were conducted for six months with nineteen residents. The workshops were based on the technique of the Theater of the Oppressed and on the theater games of Viola Spolin. Data were recorded on audio, field journal and photography, and a thematic content analysis was performed. It was concluded that the theater workshops constituted distancing spaces of institutional routine, causing the subject to take ownership of their creative power and leading to the rediscovery of themselves and of other possibilities of social reintegration. Theatrical workshops asserted their potential by allowing the subjects to experience and (re)invent life production modes, as well as develop strategies to deal with everyday difficulties.

KEYWORDS: Occupational Therapy; Home care services; Mental health.

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RESUMO: Esta pesquisa objetivou investigar as potencialidades do uso terapêutico do teatro como recurso de intervenção terapêutica ocupacional na reinsertão social dos usuários de um Serviço Residencial Terapêutico localizado no interior paulista. Para a coleta de dados foram realizadas oficinas teatrais semanais de aproximadamente uma hora, por seis meses, com dezenove moradores. As oficinas se basearam na técnica do Teatro do Oprimido e nos jogos teatrais de Viola Spolin. Os dados foram registrados em áudio, diário de campo e fotografia, e foi realizada uma análise temática do conteúdo. Concluiu-se que as oficinas de teatro constituíram espaços de distanciamento da rotina institucional, provocando os sujeitos a se apropriarem de sua potência criativa e conduzindo à redescoberta de si mesmos e de outras possibilidades de reinsertão social. As oficinas teatrais afirmaram sua potencialidade ao possibilitar que os sujeitos experimentassem e (re)inventassem modos de produção de vida, bem como desenvolvessem estratégias para lidar com as dificuldades cotidianas.

DESCRITORES: Terapia Ocupacional; Serviços de assistência domiciliar; Saúde mental.

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INTRODUCTION

The 1970s and the 1980s in Brazil were marked by the strengthening of the struggle of social movements due to the end of the military dictatorship and the gaining of democratic rights. The Mental Health Reform and the Brazilian Psychiatric Reform movements provoked deep changes in the design of health care and the organization of assistance, with the main conquest being the formation of the current National Mental Health Care Policy¹.

The experiences of deinstitutionalization and the creation of open services enabled the construction of a new health care model, composed of a network of open services (1989). In the 2000s, starting with Presidential Decree No. 7508/201, the Psychosocial Care Network (RAPS) became essential for the execution of Mental Health Care².

In the discussion of alternatives and solutions for overcoming the asylum model, issues related to users from long hospitalization periods, whom had lost their family and social ties and/or did not have immediate conditions to resume an autonomous life arose³. To do so, an attention strategy for these users was established – the Residential Therapeutic Services (RTS) – by Ordinance/GM No. 106/2000 MS⁴. The RTSs are housing services linked to mental health teams, and should be integrated with public health services. Their main guidelines are: “to ensure social interaction, psychosocial rehabilitation and the rescuing of the individuals’ civic consciousness, promoting affective ties, reinsertion in the space of the city and rebuilding of family references”⁴.

The substitute health services are considered by Rotelli⁵ as intermediates in the deinstitutionalization process and, with this in mind, the interventions that are performed should no longer be centrally focused on intervention or on the cure, but should focus on help for reconstruction with subjectivity, which is often lost by institutionalization⁵.

Rotelli’s⁵ idea concerning the deinstitutionalization process is intertwined with occupational therapy when it realizes the subject of care as a complex whole, historically and socially constructed, without reducing them to their psychological distress and recognizing the patient’s potential. Thus, both propose therapeutic and care interventions with a view to regaining autonomy and social participation⁵.

Describing the occupational therapeutic process, Francisco⁶ underlines the importance of significant human activities such as production of spaces and human transformation.

Among the possibilities of occupational therapy resources, it is considered that Arts, and among them Theatre, have a great importance for the strengthening

of the individual assuming a protagonist role in that experience, providing the individual with the possibility of experimenting for themselves, as well as finding a way to exist and to explore their possibilities⁷.

In this sense, this study aimed to investigate the potential of the therapeutic use of Theatre as a resource of occupational therapy intervention for the social rehabilitation of the users of a Therapeutic Residential Service. It should be noted that this research is the result of the final course paper carried out by a student of the Occupational Therapy program.

Ethical aspects

The project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Philosophy and Science, UNESP-Marília, under no. 0522/2012. The participants were informed about the research and after agreement, signed a free and informed consent form.

Study scenario

The RTS where this work was developed is located in a city in the state of São Paulo. It should be highlighted that this service is currently managed by a psychiatric hospital, in contrast with the National Mental Health Policy.

The service hosts 19 users, 15 of whom identify themselves as belonging to the female gender and 4 to the male gender, with an average age of thirty-five years and six months. All users have diagnoses of chronic mental disorders and have an institutional trajectory with over 10 years of experience in closed institutions. Of the 19 users, 18 were formerly inpatient in the hospital that manages the RTS.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study is a qualitative research of participative nature. The perceptions and reflections of the researcher were considered relevant and were compared to those of the participants. Therefore, we sought to seize the subjective aspects linked to the social reality in which the study was developed^{8,9}.

After explaining the research project and making the necessary clarifications, a personalized invitation was delivered personally to each user. The content was read to those who were not literate.

Theatre workshops were developed weekly for over 6 months, with an average duration of 1 hour, in the RTSs’

own spaces or, sporadically, in an OT group treatment room, courtesy of the mental institution that manages the service and which is located next to the RTS. The workshops were guided by the Theatre of the Oppressed techniques, developed by playwright Augusto Boal, and theatre games proposed by the American educator Viola Spolin¹⁰⁻¹³.

The records of the elaboration and development of workshops were organized in planning sheets proposed by Spolin (p. 25)¹⁰, and recorded in audio, photographs and a field journal.

In order to understand the users' motivations for participation in the workshops, an open interview was held with the individuals, starting with the question: "Would you like to participate in the theatre workshops? Why?". To identify the perception of users in relation to the experiences undertaken, another individual, open interview was held at the end of the study, with the following question: "What did you think of the theatre workshops?". The records were analyzed and interpreted based on the thematic content analysis methodology. The systematization of the content from the records developed a core of meaning, whose presence and frequency have meaning for the analyzed object⁹. From the data analysis emerged the results and the categories explained below.

RESULTS

Eight women and one man were considered active and direct participants, but all users participated sporadically or indirectly, and the number of participants in each workshop fluctuated between 4 and 12 users.

To better understand the data, it should be noted that the identification of the participants was made through the initials of their names and of the researcher by the letter "P". For the presentation of the results, the initial interview was considered as the starting point, according to the categories concerning the aspects observed and developed during the workshops. General aspects of the construction process of the characters and the final presentation are presented later. At the end, the results of the final interviews regarding the expression of feelings and reviews from users on the study as a whole are presented.

From the content analysis, in line with the objective of this study, six categories emerged relating to aspects that were observed during the study process, as follows: lack of initiative, participation and bond; understanding and developing thought; involvement and concentration of the group; body language; collective construction processes; and final presentation.

Initial interviews

The initial interviews were answered by all 19 users. Within the responses, there were questions about the proposal and the degree of difficulty of the activities that would be carried out and also about what is Theatre. To address these questions a theatrical game was held, which allowed for experimentation and reflection on the subject. The users concluded that the theatre is a storytelling medium. During the theatrical game, feelings such as insecurity and resistance on the part of some users were observed regarding participation.

Lack of Initiative, Participation and Bond

The insecurity of most participants to experiment exposing themselves and taking initiative became evident. In some moments, the expression "I don't know" was reproduced mechanically, reflecting and reinforcing the insecurity of participants in an experience that seemed new, also generating anguish. This fact was not made explicit by A., who stood out assisting in the mediation of the group, especially regarding the lack of initiative from the other participants, which was explained in his quote:

A.: Come on guys! You can't talk while doing the test. Keep talking: do this, do that, it cannot be done, it's rude.

In the course of the study it was possible to observe that some participants started to participate more actively, as for example, when R. began doing warm-up stretches before requested.

The questions from the users against the proposed new corporal experiences also reflected a sense of anguish, a fact that could be perceived in the realization of the Walk Through the Space game⁷. During this game, O. remained paralyzed, referring to being in this position for not knowing how to walk whilst dragging her feet. As a strategy to counter this difficulty, it was proposed that the participant and the researcher experienced the walk together, which was reported by O. as being a hard, yet pleasant experience.

By confronting discourses and mechanized practices with the objective possibility to experiment and grow, participants leave their comfort zone, related to the internalized stigma of madness. Encouraging, motivating and clarifying the potential of each participant were shown as being fundamental to begin deconstructing such a discourse.

During the workshops, the shared dialogue began to permeate life stories, anxieties and questions about the consequences of institutionalization. Expressions of singularities and particularities through performing theatre were also observed.

When establishing commitments and assuming responsibilities concerning the workshops, these workshops began to occupy a significant space in the daily life of the participants, assigning them new meanings and changes in their routines, as it was possible to perceive in the speech by N. in response to the researcher:

N.: Honey, today I took a shower earlier, and I didn't go help in the laundry room so that I could participate in the theatre.

Abstract comprehension and Communication

At the beginning of the study, the theatre games involving understanding of abstract, non-verbal communication and group integration, such as: untie a knot formed by clasped hands and the Rhythm Machine¹² were either little understood or totally not understood by some participants.

During the activities involving verbal language, memory and creativity, participants reported great difficulties. For this, experiences related to other artistic languages were offered, such as watching movies and improvisations, listening to and interpreting music, reporting experiences and creating stories.

Assuming that groups are subjectivity rich production spaces, activities with degrees of reasoning complexity tasks were repeated, reproduced, interpreted and collectively improvised, making a move towards internalizing the group's capacity for understanding the subjective¹⁴.

Involvement and Concentration

The factors related to this issue were linked to the domestic issues of the group, such as the dispersion of some participants due to external factors and also facts of everyday life that affected relations, such as relational difficulties. A predominance of some aspects of the internalization of the old institutional routine was observed, such as compliance with medication schedules, when the participants would suddenly remove themselves from the room.

In some workshops, more intense physical activities were used as warm-up activities to allow for a reduction

of the group's anxiety, this was quoted by RR. as being positive:

RR.: It's better, because it activates the head better, right!

The commitment of the participants with the date and time of the workshop, as well as the involvement of the group was built over the period of the meetings. One could observe gradual growth and adhesion to group workshops, expressed in the final presentation, collectively built in an active and purposeful way.

Corporal expression

The conscious experiences in our daily lives, such as jogging, talking, expressing feelings and listening were pointed out by the participants as being challenges. With this in mind, different forms of support and accompaniment were used, such as: verbal stimuli, demonstration and presentation templates and presentations of vocal and corporal techniques to facilitate actions. Most of the corporal activities were developed individually at first, and after being internalized they were performed together, which proved crucial, because beyond the qualitative result, those who had an easier time were taken as references by the group and also assumed the function of support.

Aesthetic experimentation in rhythm games, such as the orchestra and its director¹² and image games enriched the repertoire of movements and encouraged experimentation with new physical possibilities and new forms of communication.

Collective construction process and final presentation

From the beginning, the participants were given the idea of collective construction which reflects the process of the work of the group, which was outlined as the group began to make the space their own.

In one of the meetings the film "I Clowns" was shown¹⁵, in order to relate this to corporal experiences, and from here began the drafting of the final presentation by the participants. N. proposed the construction of a piece related to the circus theme, then began the process of constructing the characters and the exchange of experiences between participants.

Together with each participant, a scenic object was made for each character, with the proposal of facilitating the creative process of character building, development of responsibility and taking caution with their individualities.

According to Boal, building a character implies that the actor performs internal searches and, in the course of this process, it will be possible to discover abilities and features that until then were hidden in the subconscious¹³. In this sense, it is possible to check that this process facilitated self-knowledge and a new perception of reality by the participating individuals.

One of the tests was based on the Image Theatre¹³, in which it was proposed that each participant should introduce their character through striking gestures and/or sounds, then the other participants were asked to change and experiment with other characters in order to give their perception of the other. With this, it was possible to add new elements to the characters. With the development of this game, it became clear that the otherness and group perceptions, apparently so difficult to be worked with initially, had developed through workshops.

As each character was built, the group sought a way to tell a story that would relate, needing assistance to aesthetically reframe the work process and to also incorporate the challenges and likewise, the exceedances. At the end of the workshops and during the preparation for the presentation, organizational tasks also became a collective responsibility.

The final production was presented to the students, staff and lecturers of an University. Then, the group was invited to perform the opening of a scientific event.

Rotelli⁵ points out the need for jobs that are outside the walls of hospitals, of innovative experiences, creating production spaces and reproduction of life that are able to break away from the stigma of madness and, ultimately, rebuild historical subjects, that is, those who move forwards with their own lives consciously and understand the intrinsic potential to every human being to transform and be transformed by the environment in which he/she lives.

These new social experiences were significant and had transformative potential, initiating a reflection about the different roles that could be occupied in society.

Final interviews

After these presentations came the final stage of the study, in which the group made a retrospective and were then asked about the importance of the study. In response, the motion relating to changes in routine was highlighted, as CL. said:

CL.: It is good to do something that messes with people's heads!

Participants were questioned about the experienced process and the answers expressed satisfaction about the results, as well as the importance of activities that, according to them, gave new meanings and movement to their lives. Among the reports, the importance of recovering memories from the period prior to institutionalization and the change of routine by the workshops were highlighted, as well as the break from idleness and inactivity and the possibility for having fun.

DISCUSSION

In the process of institutionalization, the dimensions: singularly and particular to the individuals are restricted through the routines imposed, punishments for "disorder", impossibility of choice and making decisions that constitute attempts at the homogenization and standardization of these individuals^{16,17}. However, the subjective movements of resistance to this annulment are always present¹⁸.

To this end, it is necessary for the process of deinstitutionalization to build spaces for socialization, expression and artistic production, as these promote exchanges and affect material production and the resignification of everyday life, so that each individual can also develop his or her own aesthetic potential¹⁹.

It was possible to verify that the participants, even when entered into an RTS, still feature the marked traits of their institutional trajectories. In this sense, to understand that artistic language provides for a new communication process, which began as an open creative process²⁰ and which opened possibilities for experimentation and for new life experiences.

Due to the new possibilities for communication, Theatre as an occupational therapy resource has allowed and facilitated experimentation with new forms of expression beyond what is daily experienced²¹. Theatre also leads to the development of corporal skills and to the search for other forms of communication.

However, taking ownership of yourself implies a (re)education of the senses and of perception, because communication occurs through sounds, images and words²². The body is understood as a place that records the conscious and subconscious trials and experiences of life, in which it is possible to pass through the subjective and objective aspects of our experiences¹⁹.

The combination of different artistic languages enabled the work with aspects of imagination and perception, elements that are essential for the creative processes²³.

In this sense, Boal¹³ discuss in his theory that the Aesthetic Space is like a dichotomous and dichotomizing mirror, i.e., on stage it is possible to see, ponder a situation and have experiences about the impossible.

This work was able to contribute to overcoming difficulties promoting the individual to be creative and spontaneous during the activities, working with self-esteem and self-confidence, learning to deal with anxiety and with coexistence, challenges characteristic of deinstitutionalization²⁴.

Occupational therapy in conjunction with art can provide new social experiences, allow individuals to observe different ways of producing a life, allowing people to experience new and significant situations and create a context of a social life that facilitates reflections, thus, the artistic experience can be transposed into existence²⁰.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The therapeutic use of theatre as a resource of occupational therapy intervention in the social rehabilitation of users from a RTS presented potential by providing experimentation and reinvention of their ways of (re)producing their lives. Theatre workshops gave brief spaces from an everyday life crystallized by

institutionalization, favoring users to take ownership of their creative powers, leading them to possibly rediscover themselves.

Thus, the theatre workshops have contributed significantly to the process of (re)construction of the subjectivities of the users, giving potential for the therapeutic and aesthetic use of the art of theatre as a possibility in the process of occupational therapy to provide for the social reinsertion of the users from a RTS.

Thus, this work has reaffirmed the potentiality that aesthetic experiences have for (re)educating the senses and consciousness, mediating the relationship between the individual and the world. The art of the theatre can be carried over between different artistic languages, which proved valuable in this study, because beyond the references to the development of the proposed activities, it became a part of the participants' daily lives.

The same Art, by enabling the reinvention of the way life, intertwines with occupational therapy, which in turn provides support to overcome the conflicts and contradictions that emerge in the creative and expressive processes. As such, they are both there for the same purpose: to enable individuals to have opportunities to be (re)created as the protagonists of their own stories.

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