

Performances of Occupational Therapy in the museum context: awareness of the diversity

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Abstract: The paper discusses the Occupational Therapist actions in a museum. Therefore, we approach issues that characterize the areas of museum environment presenting it as a possible workplace for the professionals, and will discuss which activities can be performed by professional occupational therapy in a museum, its relevance, and the achievement gap when performed by the occupational therapist and other professionals. Thus, the study’s main objective is to present a new occupational therapy work field for the highlighting the importance of public awareness activities and how these can influence the museum visitor experiences. We report two distinct activities with visually impaired awareness theme, conducted between February and March 2015, at the Batalha Community Museum in Portugal. We report the activities and analyze the results, seeking to qualitatively assess the public participation, and its response to the impact that such activities may bear in the cultural inclusion of visually impaired people.

Keywords: *Culture, Vision Disorders, Social Inclusion.*

Atuações da Terapia Ocupacional no contexto museológico: sensibilização para a diversidade

Resumo: O artigo reflete sobre os resultados da atuação do terapeuta ocupacional em um museu. Para tal, são abordadas questões que caracterizam os domínios do ambiente museológico, apresentando-o como um lugar possível para o exercício da profissão, bem como se discute quais atividades podem ser realizadas pelo profissional de terapia ocupacional em um museu, qual a sua relevância e qual a diferença da realização quando feitas pelo terapeuta ocupacional e por outro profissional. Desse modo, o objetivo principal do estudo foi apresentar um novo campo de atuação para o terapeuta ocupacional, destacando a relevância das atividades de sensibilização do público e como estas podem influenciar nas vivências museológicas do visitante. São relatadas duas atividades distintas com a temática de sensibilização para a deficiência visual, executadas em 2015, no Museu da Comunidade Concelhia da Batalha, em Portugal. Relatam-se as atividades e analisam-se os resultados buscando aferir qualitativamente a participação do público e a sua resposta ao impacto que tais atividades podem surtir na inclusão cultural de pessoas com deficiência visual.

Palavras-chave: *Cultura, Deficiência Visual, Inclusão Social.*

1 Introduction

Since the origins of the profession of occupational therapy, it is difficult to find a concept that can encompass the plurality of human occupation. According to Carvalho (2010, p. 15), “A profession can be understood as a product of its time [...]”, so briefly, it will be traced back to the beginning of the grounds of occupational therapy.

Among the founders of the profession, there is Eleanor Clark Slage associated with Hull House¹. Her ideas were based on “[...] the principle that the behavior can only be organized by the act, the active and purposeful use of time in the context of a normal life [...]” (CARVALHO, 2010, p. 17). According to Carvalho, these ideas were instrumental in the theoretical and practical establishment of the profession.

However, when it comes to culture, it is important to note that, although it seems a new profession aspect, it is found since its birth, based on Slage’s experience at Hull House and the Arts and Crafts Movement². Although this aspect has been undervalued during a period in the history of occupational therapy, it is included in the present and includes the cultural access for people with disabilities.

The human occupation is the study object of occupational therapy and it is defined as:

Daily activities reflecting on cultural values, providing the structure for life and meaning to individuals; these activities meet human needs for self-care, entertainment, and participation in society (CREPEAU; COHN; SCHELL, 2003, p. 1031).

In Brazil, the trajectory of the profession acting consolidation focused activities related to mental health to the detriment of other possible in the culture field. It is suggested that this lethargy in response to a profession that announced promising for the inclusion of people in the exercise and enjoyment of cultural expressions was related to the trajectory of developments in the legislation that deals with the rights of people with disabilities. Therefore, when speaking of the role of the occupational therapist in museums, it is also referring to a poignant theme in the culture area: the inclusion of people with disabilities.

The year 2009 is a milestone in the relationship between museums and cultural inclusion in Brazil. It is observed in the text of Law 11,904/2009 (BRASIL, 2009), in the Statute of Museums, in particular, Article 2, listing the six basic principles of museums, being “the enhancement

of human dignity; the promotion of citizenship; universal access, respect, and appreciation for cultural diversity”. This law defines both the museum institution as traces the contours of its mission, indicating the basic social function of a remarkable inclusive feature. When defining what is the museum, the Law commits as the place of full social life, leading to inevitable way to seek conditions that increase and diversify its audience. However, being able to receive people showing sensory, intellectual and physical disabilities is, above all, make the museum an accessible place. This is obviously a difficult task.

The Statute Law of Museums arises in a context in which the inclusion is the goal of a national policy that includes also the cultural access for people with visual disabilities foreseen both Decree-Law 5296 of August 5, 2004 (BRASIL, 2004), as the promulgation of the text of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities in the Decree-Law 6949 of 25 August 2009. It would be desirable and expected that after six years, the Brazilian museums were already prepared to receive these people, without any kind of accessibility barriers - attitudinal, communication, architectural, methodological, programmatic or instrumental. However, the process is still ongoing and the results, though existing, are not full.

The reflection exercise presented in this text deals with an experiment conducted at the Museum of Batalha Concelhia Community (MCCB). This space, created only four years ago, is located in a *Vila* (as it is called a small town in Portugal) which has just over 15 thousand inhabitants. This museum, created to tell the story of the Council of Batalha, was designed to be a comprehensive museum.

When being assumed as an inclusive museum, MCCB offers to all visitors unique and personalized experiences through a museum enhancer program. This way of assisting “everybody” in respect for differences, has resulted in small gestures, all added together, make this affordable, comfortable and safe space (BATALHA, 2011, p. 14).

Responsible for MCCB’s accessibility program, Dr. Joséia Neves³ argues that the museum should be alive so that one can “see, hear, touch” and actively participate in the construction of the senses.

Thus, the museum provides cultural access to the most varied audiences (people with disabilities - Intellectual, sensory and physical -, foreigners, children, elderly people), so that everyone has access to the same experiences.

2 Objective

The main objective of this article is to discuss the possibilities of a new operation context for occupational therapy professionals from the experience developed in the MCCB and discuss the role of the professional in the field of cultural accessibility. Thus, it is possible to think about the role of the occupational therapist in a museum institution, especially in sectors that provide educational services, by its actions aimed to sensitize various audiences to the social and cultural inclusion.

3 Methods

Thus, they report two different activities, with the awareness theme for the visually impaired, conducted between February and March 2015 in the MCCB.

The activities reported here are part of internship plan of the author⁴, who received support from the Ministry of Culture through notice Connection Culture Brazil - Exchanges for an internship in Cultural Accessibility, lasting one year, in that museum.

During this period, the author must fulfill a total of 1040 hours, divided into four hours a day, five days a week to experience the most of the daily life of a museum. It is worth noting that even before starting a degree in occupational therapy, the author was already a fellow of the extension program "Knowledge Museum for All: "Cultural Inclusion for the Person with Disability"⁵, having accessibility training in museums and audio description with the aforementioned Dr. Josélia Neves.

The methodology of this report will be to describe the activities and show qualitative and quantitative data to promote discussion.

Qualitative data were collected through a diary field⁶ used by the author to safeguard her perceptions while a graduate in occupational therapy. Thus, the subjective becomes part of the evaluation process for the activity performed.

With respect to the quantitative data, the data were collected through a questionnaire applied to the participants at the end of the activities.

Since the opening of the museum, the educational service of the MCCB has been performing inclusive and awareness activities, because it is believed that these are essential to the museum be closed to visitors and give value to its mission of Museum for All. These activities are carried out by the museum staff, having a Conservative Museums and Tourism

Technical; it is noteworthy that both had training in accessibility with Dr. Josélia Neves.

The first activity that is already described comprises the educational service program of MCCB and it is called "Painting in the Dark". This is an awareness action to understand how a person with visual impairment has access to a painting in a museum. It consists of a normal tour, and at any given time, visitors get a sheet of paper and a pencil. They are then blindfolded and hear audio description⁷ of an exposed painting in the museum (Figures 1 and 2). The activity consists in an attempt to visitors try to draw (Figure 3), blindfolded, what they are hearing and subsequently compare their designs to the original frame.

A description was previously made without details, and the person who was guiding just explained that this activity was made because the visitors were in an inclusive museum.

When the author began to perform this activity, having experience in audio description, the description of the picture was detailed.



Figure 1. A group of visitors waiting for the audio description to start.



Figure 2. The author making an audio description for the group.

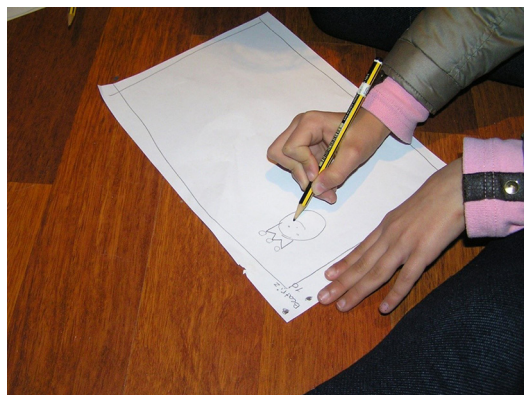


Figure 3. Drawing of a visitor.

Then, conversations were held on the visually impaired and what resources may allow a blind person visit a museum, without any barrier.

The activity included the participation of 40 students from a school in the region.

The second activity described was planned by the author requested by of the responsible for the museum, to integrate the actions that would be undertaken under the project “Holidays at the Museum”.

The proposal consisted of an afternoon with the theme of inclusion that was accepted and integrated into the program of “Easter Holidays in the MCCB” in March 2015.

The afternoon meeting consists of a starting conversation about the disabilities, followed by a thematic visit to MCCB, in which blindfolded participants explored the stations around the museum through the other senses (Figures 4 and 5). Then, they watched a short movie about school inclusion and then, there was a debate on the issue of the movie.

Following, participants were blindfolded again and went for a stroll through the *Vila da Batalha* (Figure 6), when they should review what were their greatest difficulties and explore the hearing and the sensations caused by the environment. To finish, a game was made that required the participant to overcome the lack of vision and trusted on his teammates to complete the activity. The afternoon had included 14 participants aged 6 to 12 years old.

4 Result/Discussion

Both activities at the Museum of Batalha Concelhia Community had a large membership from visitors. The first action described in this study was widely praised by the teachers who accompanied the group of visitors. Teachers commented on the relevance



Figure 4. Participants experiencing a sensory carpet inside the museum.



Figure 5. Touch station - exploring different textures linked to the permanent exhibition of the MCCB.



Figure 6. Visit to the Vila with blindfolded children.

of such activities with the children to build a more inclusive society, emphasizing the wealth of experience for their students, according to Michelon (2013, p. 191).

That one listening to a narration will mentally build his image narrated, particularizing it and making it unique, perhaps unrepeatable. A bit different is when the story takes place on an existing image. It is possible that the result of the image made by the listener is still in such a particular manner that it is unique.

When children compared their drawings with the original painting, they realized that each one had done the drawing in a different way and that none was equal to painting. This shows that, as much as the story is the same for everyone, it becomes unique as it reflects on subjective aspects and the cultural background inherent to the experiences of each subject.

Consequently, children eventually ask even more about visual impairment and, consequently, about the lack of accessibility resources in museums they had already visited. By continuing to tour in the upper floor of the museum, the children found a few more resources, and immediately they associated them to the previous discussion, and were able to formulate new opinions.

According to Michelon (2013), audio description has been used in various fields, including education and cultural products, and it has achieved its goal of being a potentiating resource for the inclusion of people with visual disabilities in society. However, in

[...] cultural context, above all, there were enthusiasts who defend as well as an accessibility tool, unraveling in proposed education opportunities for visual products, especially for moving or still images (MICHELON, 2013, p. 192)

In the affirmative to this discussion of the audio description, it became clear that this resource, besides ensuring access to information for people with disabilities can make playful explanation of a work of art in a museum and thereby expand visitor possibilities, allowing them to take the role of an active subject who builds his narrative by leveraging their senses.

Regarding the action taken in the “Easter holidays in MCCB”, a quantitative assessment of the activities carried out was made during the week, in which 11 participants answered a closed questionnaire.

The approval of the activities was unanimity among the participants. The options provided in

the questionnaire were: “I did not like it; I liked it more or less; I liked it; I liked it a lot”. All the participants opted for the latter alternative.

In addition, during the activities that followed during the week, children’s speech was defending the rights of people with disabilities, in particular, focused on access to culture.

Among the speech, the speech of these children are highlighted, written in the author’s field diary:

A girl participating in activities on the last day goes to the toilet⁸ of disability people and argues that she could use it because there was no one there. The other girl next to her (six years old) replies: “[...] the bathroom is not for people with disabilities, is for everyone. It is adapted and, therefore, it is equal to “our museum”, it is for everyone!” (Speech transcribed by the author).

At that time, it was noticed that the implicit message in outside activities, in fact, it is internalized by some participants. In addition to the inclusion discourse, on the girl talks, it was noted the construction of an emotional bond with the museum, developed with the depth that awareness activities bring to those who experience it.

The difference of these activities, specifically developed by an academic of occupational therapy, is based on the analysis of the activity.

This unique tool allows this professional scrutinize every bit of activity, realizing from the materials that will be needed until the risks that the activity can offer to participants.

Thus, before the performance of the activity, the occupational therapist will know, among other things, what will be worked (physical, mental or social) in every moment of the activity. Thus, it is important that it be fostered reflection on the role of the professional in a museum.

Occupational therapy look characterizes the teaching/learning process that contributes significantly to the formation of the occupational therapist. The effectiveness of awareness activities presented here includes their planning, analysis of actions before the discourse on cultural inclusion and the defense of public policies for the rights of people with disabilities. The diffuse transmission among the subject, the professional and the community occurs through the power of the perceptions of the participants intertwined in culture.

5 Conclusion

Through the data presented here, it is concluded that the visitors participated in awareness activities at the Museum of the Community Concelhia da

Batalha interested and integrated into the process, evoking a greater understanding of the plurality of society that permeates and gives relevance of museums cultural experiences in the life of a visually impaired person. Thus, it enables a critical look at the leisure and culture on places where all subjects must be equal before law enforcement.

All the activities were analyzed and prepared for the visitor to feel his own existence and that his problems are small in the face of experiencing living by others. It is observed that problematize the sensations in itself is a way to promote sensitivity and solidarity among human beings. Thus, it follows that when the visionaries experiencing difficulties that are faced by people with visual disabilities in museum environments, they make up able to understand them and eventually become able to contribute access. Therefore, it is understood that awareness activities are significant because instigate people to think about the world they live in and the plurality of conditions in which to live. This is an exercise of citizenship.

By working these activities with younger people, it is believed to be promoting a more critical environment that will help the future generation to demand a more inclusive and accessible society for people with disabilities.

Thus, it is concluded that occupational therapy plays an important role in the triad Subject-Culture-Environment. According to Mariangela Quarentei (2015) on her website “Collective Occupational”,

[...] Occupational therapy is intensely involved in the production of life... the creation of existence, modes of being in the world and... the own manufacturing of worlds. This understanding comes from the simple fact that human life constitutes, in one of its dimensions, a continuum of activities. Life is activity continuum.

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Author's Contributions

Desirée Nobre Salasar: performance, text design, organization sources, analysis and writing of the text. Larissa Dall'Agnol da Silva and Francisca Ferreira Michelin: review, analysis, and guidance. All authors approved the final version of the article.

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Notes

- ¹ “A kind of socio-cultural center where they develop educational and philanthropic programs that sought to break the isolation of the marginalized population, while aimed at engaging the most favored - university students, for example - in socially relevant actions” (MOREIRA, 2002 apud CARVALHO, 2010, p. 15).
- ² Arts and Crafts was an aesthetic movement that emerged in England in the second half of the XIX century. It defended the creative craft as an alternative to mechanization and mass production and preached the end of the distinction between craftsman and artist. This movement advocated a return to the simple life, in which the body and the mind could be engaged in the rewarding work that produced exquisite handmade objects (CARVALHO, 2010).
- ³ Specialist in Translation Studies from the University of Surrey, UK. Responsible for the Accessibility Plan of Batalha Concelhia Community Museum.
- ⁴ Co-authors teachers guide the internship plan at the Museum of Batalha, Dr. Francisca Ferreira Michelin in the field of museology and cultural accessibility, and Larissa Dall'Agnol in occupational therapy.
- ⁵ The extension program entitled “Knowledge Museum for All: Cultural Inclusion for People with Disabilities” is located in the Department of Museology, Conservation, and Restoration of the Institute of Human Sciences of the Federal University of Pelotas. It was awarded in the Edicts PROEXT/MEC 2011 and 2014 for development in 2012 and 2015, coordinated by Francisca Ferreira Michelin.
- ⁶ A field diary is a tool used by the occupational therapist, in which he notes his perceptions occurred during the performance of activities. It is an anthropological concept of qualitative methodology. According to Falkembac (apud LIMA; MIOTO; PRÁ, 2007, p. 99), it is “[...] a form of observation reports, comments, and reflections for individual professional and student”.
- ⁷ According to Motta and Romeo Filho (2010), audio description is the transformation of information key visual world so that people with visual disabilities can have the same information as the seers. Therefore, the AD is a form of inter-semiotic translation.
- ⁸ WC in Portuguese of Portugal.