

Original Article

The body approach as a strategy used by occupational therapists to community health agents¹

A abordagem corporal como estratégia utilizada por terapeutas ocupacionais junto a agentes comunitários de saúde

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How to cite: Cirineu, C. T., Assad, F. B., & Uchôa-Figueiredo, L. R. (2020). The body approach as a strategy used by occupational therapists to community health agents. *Cadernos Brasileiros de Terapia Ocupacional*. 28(1), 74-85. <https://doi.org/10.4322/2526-8910.ctoAO1903>

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to reflect on the strategies used by occupational therapists researchers to assist the Community Health Agents (ACS) in their work process for the facing of challenges arising from everyday life, in the personal and professional aspects. Intervention research held to 49 ACS of a family health program (PSF) and Community Health Agents program (PACS), the Municipal Secretary of Health of a city in the State of São Paulo-Brazil. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 56 years old, most (42) female. The data were collected in eight meetings, with three distinct groups, conducted by the body approaches and participant observation to observe and compare the reflections arose. It was possible to carry out the qualitative analysis of the data from the materials collected in groups such as search as diaries participant observation and photographic records. Thus, we created the following categories: Heterogeneity, Hierarchy, Imitation, Spontaneity and Analogy. The body approach strategy provided participants a greater self-reflection about their work process. The researchers provided different body experiences to the ACSs to identify needs, issues of daily life, in search of problem solutions and rescue of occupational roles of each participant, allowing them an opportunity to actively

¹This article is part of the Course Conclusion Work entitled “Theater in Occupational Therapy: re-signifying everyday scenes”, held at Centro Universitário Claretiano de Batatais, São Paulo, Brazil. Research submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the Centro de Saúde Escola, University of Medicine of Ribeirão Preto, University of São Paulo - USP, approved under number 584/07/COORD.CEP/CSE-FMRP-USP.

Received on Mar. 3, 2019; 1st Revision on May 10, 2019; 2nd Revision on May 29, 2019; Accepted on June 17, 2019.



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engage in the construction of their existential reality, their subjectivity experience, to be a person and the (re) meaning of their daily life scenes.

Keywords: Occupational Therapy, Group, Health Promotion, Community Health Agents.

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é refletir sobre as estratégias utilizadas por terapeutas ocupacionais pesquisadores no auxílio a Agentes Comunitários de Saúde (ACS) em seu processo de trabalho para o enfrentamento de problemáticas advindas da vida cotidiana, nos aspectos pessoais e profissionais. Optou-se pela pesquisa-intervenção realizada com 49 ACS dos Programas de Saúde da Família (PSF) e Programa Agentes Comunitários de Saúde (PACs), da Secretaria Municipal de Saúde de uma cidade do interior do Estado de São Paulo-Brasil. A idade dos participantes variou de 19 a 56 anos, a maioria (42) do sexo feminino. Os dados foram coletados em oito encontros, com três grupos distintos, conduzidos pelas abordagens corporais e observação participante, com a finalidade de observar e comparar as reflexões surgidas. Foi possível realizar a análise qualitativa dos dados com base nas compilações dos materiais coletados nos grupos, como diários de pesquisa da observação participante e registros fotográficos. Desta forma, obtiveram-se as seguintes categorias: Heterogeneidade, Hierarquia, Imitação, Espontaneidade e Analogia. A estratégia da abordagem corporal proporcionou aos participantes uma maior autorreflexão quanto ao seu processo de trabalho. Os pesquisadores proporcionaram aos ACS diferentes vivências corporais com finalidade de identificação das necessidades, questões da vida cotidiana, na busca de soluções de problemáticas e resgate de papéis ocupacionais de cada participante, possibilitando-lhes uma oportunidade para envolver-se ativamente na construção de sua realidade existencial, a vivência de sua subjetividade, de modo a constituir-se como pessoa e a (re) significação de cenas do seu cotidiano.

Palavras-chave: Terapia Ocupacional, Grupo, Promoção de Saúde, Agentes Comunitários de Saúde.

1 Introduction

Since the 1990s, the choice of *daily life* as a theoretical-methodological position of Brazilian occupational therapy has been gaining. This period highlights a break with the positivist interpretation and proposes practices based on a critical perspective (Galheigo, 2012; Salles & Matsukura, 2013; Salles & Matsukura, 2015) describing the occupational therapist as a social articulator, whose ethical-political commitment is to promote social participation and the emancipation of people and collectives (Galheigo, 2012, 2014).

Thus, the target participant of occupational therapy actions are people, groups or populations that suffer segregate effects of the current system and, mainly, a non-singularization and massification of habits, resulting in overwhelming conditioning of bodies and subjectivity modes (Saito & Castro, 2011;

Liberian et al., 2011), with a direct impact on corporeality, its contexts - including work - and life projects, with significant unfolding in daily life.

Therefore, Guimarães (2002) emphasizes that the everyday life and daily life have different meanings, characterizing daily life with more elaborate objectification when compared to the concept of the everyday life, which is understood as a dimension of common sense, considering everything that human beings are capable of living and feeling (sufferings, pleasures, joys, sorrows, destruction and constructions).

Thus, Salles & Matsukura (2013) highlights that through the historical process, the everyday life that men learn from the social environment and constitute themselves, considering what was built in the past and aiming for the possibilities of the future. In this sense, “[...] the history is the substance of society”, in which man is the one who has social objectivity, responsible for the construction and transmission of any and all social structures (Heller, 2008, p. 12).

Based on this perspective, Heller (2008) points out that throughout the historical course, the man is the one who gives meaning to history, allowing space for everyday life, placing it in the center of this event.

Thus, the author states that:

Everyday life is every man's life. Everyone lives it without exception, whatever their position in the division of intellectual and physical labor [...] Everyday life is the life of the whole man; that is, the man participates in everyday life with all aspects of his individuality, his personality. In it, all the senses, their intellectual capacities, their manipulative abilities, their feelings, passions, ideas, ideologies are “put into operation” (Heller, 2008, p. 31).

Therefore, considering that some developments of everyday life have repercussions on corporeality or vice versa, it is necessary to emphasize that this concept has sustained discussions and practices in the field of occupational therapy.

Corporeality is an existential condition in the human (Liberian et al., 2011), or even by the set of sensations that arouse connections with the body; sensations related to body experiences, building the understanding of the body as a place of self-happening and as a field of organization of meaning networks. Obstacles, challenges, and changes that occur in the process of living and “making a body” in the world participate in corporeality, which continues to form throughout life (Castro et al., 2011).

Therefore, every doing, every experience, every human activity operate new structures in a body. Thus, occupational therapy has been thinking about practices that interfere with the building of this body; seeking the valorization of the singularity and the subjectivation processes of individuals and collectives.

Expressive activities, including bodily activities such as theatrical games, are a suggestion on occupational therapy practices.

1.1 The body approach as a strategy

Expressive activities, including bodily activities, such as theatrical games, offer spaces for the recomposition of participants' subjectivities and resingularization processes since these activities constitute flexible and plastic structure languages

capable of allowing the exchange of experiences and facilitating the communication between people, especially when the common language is insufficient to externalize singular experiences (Castro et al., 2001), especially in a group context.

According to Liberman et al. (2011), the use of theatrical games can be considered an opportunity to get closer to the body and the other's body, revealing traits, modes of functioning, thought activation, memories and imaginary as a result of this meeting.

These practices provide the self-recognition and the rediscovery of perceptions not captured or forgotten in the course of daily life, which we often overlook due to the mechanization of doing. In this way, body practices, especially in groups, broaden the forms of agency of the participants who present new effective bonds of mutual trust and express a great desire to be inside life, in their unique and singular ways and not their margin. Therefore, for Saito & Castro (2011), body practices, such as theatrical games, empower life and new social networks, and are instruments of emancipation and reconstitution of stories and contexts, promoting new forms of meaning, emancipation, and sense-making.

According to studies developed by Assad & Pedrão (2013), the use of body practices through spontaneous daily theater is an important tool in mental health care that provides a creative construction process for the search of solutions for problems of everyday life.

In addition to promoting health space and improving quality of life, the use of body practices is also considered as a pedagogical strategy that enables exchanges of experience among all involved (Toldrá et al., 2014).

As pointed out by Boal (2005), body theater and body approaches in their practices constitute a social and political space, in which the search for effective social transformations occurs. According to Boal (2005) and Spolin (2008), theatrical games provide experiences, reflections and contact opportunities and focus on subjectivity and emancipation processes, capable of resonating in individual and collective, personal and professional contexts. Therefore, we considered the daily scenario of ACS for this investigation.

1.2 Community Health Agents

The ACS's role is the development of responsibility actions together with the Basic Health Unit, in order to fulfill basic duties, such as: registering and collecting data from families; identifying risk situations; developing basic health actions that cover the most diverse areas with emphasis on health promotion and disease prevention; accompanying families monthly, providing guidance on the use of health services; promoting actions that raise awareness and mobilize the population regarding basic sanitation and the environment; informing the multidisciplinary team about the social dynamics of the community; promoting endemic disease control actions together with health services (Beluci, 2003; Associação Paulista de Medicina, 2004; Malfitano, 2007).

In general, the Community Health Agents have a very exhaustive and delicate work to deal with daily difficulties, such as problems and particularities of various dimensions of their registered families, and often the ACSs have to help solve them.

Moreover, there is also a lack of preparation for these professionals to work in teams, which implies interpersonal conflicts.

Thus, a space for expression of the agents' difficulties and/or desires is necessary, as well as the recognition of potentialities, minimizing problems found in individual and collective contexts. Therefore, the aim of this article is to reflect on the strategies used by occupational therapists to assist Community Health Agents in the work process to face daily problems from the personal and professional aspects.

2 Method

This is an intervention research conducted with 49 Community Health Agents of the Family Health Programs (PSF) and Community Health Agents Program (PACs), of the Municipal Health Secretariat of a city in the interior of the state of São Paulo - Brazil, divided into three groups, named according to their place of work: Group 1 - House of Agents (Santo Antonio District) with 23 participants, Group 2 - Children's Square (Vila Maria District) with 15 participants and Group 3 - UBS (Altino Arantes neighborhood) with 11 participants.

The coordination of the PSF and PACs chose the research participants. Once selected, the researchers contacted the agents, when they knew the objectives of the research, and then asked to participate, ensuring confidentiality in the disclosure of data. Then, they signed the Free and Informed Consent Form, and it was guaranteed that non-participation would not imply demands for their work. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 56 years old, with 85.7% being female, with the participation of only 7 men.

We decided to do intervention research as this is an intervention practice used in research, which seeks to constitute a group beyond the hierarchies that govern the relationships in the health field, and understand the complexity of the reality investigated (Mendes et al., 2016). The intervention research was conducted with people whose expectations, motivations and interests were diverse and often different, with different knowledge, experiences and practices, and it is also necessary to consider the relationships between the people who accompany and those who are accompanied.

Groups conducted by body approaches (theatrical games) were performed and the records were made through participant observation research diaries, with the researchers' implication, to observe and compare the reflections that emerged in each of the groups, in each meeting with all those involved in the intervention practice process.

Therefore, 8 meetings were held with each of the three groups, using theatrical games (Boal, 2005; Spolin, 2008), practices based on spontaneous theater references, psychodrama (Aguiar, 1998; Moreno, 1975) and researchers' own theatrical repertoire. There were a warm-up and relaxation dynamics proposals at the beginning of each group, such as general warm-ups for the body, gestural dynamics of knowledge of the other and self-knowledge, relaxation, workshops with music to experiment with rhythms and movements, manual activities, games, observations games and games for self-perception and other perception. Then, they discussed daily problems, from which scenes emerged spontaneously and improvised.

It was possible to perform the qualitative analysis of the data based on the compilations of the materials collected in the groups, participant observation research diaries, and photographic records. Thus, the following categories were obtained:

1. Heterogeneity (how participants related to each other and how this relationship influenced positively or negatively on the group functioning);
2. Hierarchy (how much each group was able to expose problems and issues of various everyday situations, emerging more than others, while somebody takes the center on others at different times);
3. Imitation (the ability of each individual to creatively recreate and relive the issues raised in each meeting based on reproductions and imitations);
4. Spontaneity (the ability of each participant to express their feelings and expose the group in an authentic and spontaneous way) and;
5. Analogy (the ability to associate scenes with their daily life).

The philosophical reference of Agnes Heller's Theory on the Daily Life was the supporting theoretical foundation for the development of the research. In this sense, “[...] history is the substance of society”, in which man is the one who has social objectivity, responsible for the construction and transmission of any and all social structures (Heller, 2008, p. 12).

For Salles (2011), through the historical process, the men learn from the social environment and constitute themselves, considering what was built in the past and aiming for the possibilities of the future.

In this context, Agnes Heller's theory reveals that everyday life happens in productions and social exchanges among people, highlighting that this insertion of the individual constitutes a web of social relationships in different daily activities (Heller, 2008).

Regarding the ethical aspects, this research project was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the School Health Center of the Ribeirão Preto Medical School, University of São Paulo - USP, and was approved under number 584/07/COORD.CEP/CSE-FMRP-USP.

3 Results and Discussion

The qualitative analysis of the results was performed considering Heller concepts that support the daily theory (Guimarães, 2002; Salles, 2011), based on the compilations of the collected materials, which were: groups, participant observation research diaries, and photographic records, emerging the following categories: *Heterogeneity, Hierarchy, Imitation, Spontaneity and analogy.*

3.1 Heterogeneity

When faced with the characteristics of the individuals, similarities and differences were observed - age, gender, education, the territory of operation, life history, among others - which implies obstacles and, at the same time, advances for the functioning of the group. The differences enabled me to learn how to approach all the members. In this category, based on narratives about the particular experiences of each

community health agent during home visits, for example, it was possible to share with the collective, so that all could reflect on what could be changed or transformed in a particular situation of daily life work, to then enact and re-signify the actions and forms of relationships that were addressed in a given context.

According to Heller's ideas, approaching heterogeneity is to understand that daily life occurs between the singular and the collective, between the micro and macro contexts of individuals (Salles & Matsukura, 2013, 2015). However, for Heller (2008), everyday life is heterogeneous because there are several segments of human activity with different levels of importance and meanings (Heller, 2008) and what makes this composition, permeated by various activities, developing in the course of individual history (Salles, 2011).

The sharing of experiences and stories by the ACSs and their staging allowed them to exchange daily experiences and a joint search for solutions, despite the heterogeneous characteristics, providing more reflective thinking when referred and directed to the "other". Also, there was an establishment of a bond between the members of each group and how it was changing throughout the process. In this sense, according to Liberman et al. (2011), theatrical games use various body techniques and approaches, which can be understood as possible strategies that can be applied by occupational therapists through the approximation of their own body and the other's body, revealing traits, modes of operation and activation of thoughts.

The strategies that the body uses, based on cultural and artistic experiences, as in the case of this study, have contributed to the occupational therapy scenario, from a transversal perspective, which concerns all areas or fields of activity. Based on the above, sharing knowledge of different people implies that the occupational therapist can also channel tensions that arise between these people in different forms of relationships, facilitating a space of openness, understood as sensitive, for all involved socially (Castro et al., 2016).

Based on the meantime, Salles (2011) states that through the historical process, the men learn from the social environment and constitute themselves, considering what was built in the past and aiming for the possibilities of the future.

Based on the understanding that everyday life is also the life of the individual, this is particular and generic, that is, the man is always in a relationship with other men (Heller, 2008), because the individual man is always related to the context in a given historical moment, in a web of relationships with other men that happens at the same time and space (Salles, 2011).

In everyday life, human life develops through social relationships between men, articulating between social production and reproduction, between what is public and what is private (Heller, 2008). The man can only reproduce when he assumes a function in the social context through objectivations that "[...] presupposes a man's action on the object, transforming it for its use and benefit" (Guimarães, 2002, p. 12).

Because men are born in daily life, they "[...] assume functions of daily life and perform them in parallel", because there is a reality of building a relationship with their social environment as with their own lived experience (Heller, 2008, p. 38).

In this sense, it was possible to observe the heterogeneity in the ACS groups, highlighting moments and situations in which some individuals of certain groups showed greater affective bond among themselves, demonstrating actions of

companionship towards each other, while in other groups individuals revealed a more aversive relationship, that is, difficult to contact, less friendly, making it clear that they could not relate in a healthy way, impairing the functioning of their work and their own quality of life.

For Almeida (2003), throughout life, the human being goes through various social interactions, constituting an endless social network that allows the insertion and interaction with each other in constant exchanges of experiences, contributing to the development of their self-knowledge, imposed by the community in which it operates.

3.2 Hierarchy

As observed in the field, the groups were able to raise several significant problems: work-related problems, verbalizing that the population served by the public service has no information about the role of the community agent; intrinsic content speaking, feelings of anguish, fears, limitations, and frustrations in the face of situations in certain home visits and problems of interpersonal relationships.

Immersed in this multiplicity of spheres of activities, hierarchy is an integral part of life, when a given activity takes a central and decisive place in relation to other forms of activities (Heller, 2008) because it is not possible to do everything at the same time, selecting and choosing the consequence of the actions (Guimarães, 2002).

During the use of group body strategies, participants could reflect that there are many demands in their daily work, but some of them need to be prioritized according to the needs of the patient. In this sense, it was possible to empower members to better organize their routines, so as not to overload them with the excesses of labor demands.

Therefore, it is understood that the scenes emerged from those most significant problems for the groups. For Castro et al. (2016), the body approach used by the occupational therapist as a strategy has an aesthetic and artistic experience, facilitating access to everyday elements that are often difficult to codify, especially when the scenes are experienced in the singular.

3.3 Imitation

About the imitation process, each group showed that the creative process occurred in a peculiar way. In some meetings, the scenes did not materialize, and in others, it was possible to relive the problems brought from everyday life, with scenes full of meanings.

The process of imitation contributed to a potential creator, which tends to give meaning and concreteness to certain possibilities of actual facts or events.

According to Castro et al. (2016), the experience of creation, understood as an occupational therapeutic strategy and offered to occupational therapeutic processes enabled to escape of the imprisonment of repetition and the experience of meaningless rupture situations, allowing reinventing the individual.

In this sense, by stimulating the imitation process through creativity, the occupational therapy seeks to promote contact between the subjective and objective aspects of the individual's reality, allowing space for more integrative forms of expression of personality.

From this point of view, “there is no life without imitation” because without imitation it would be impossible to work and exchange between men and mimesis is considered the enabling act for the assimilation of everything that happens in the surrounding. Mimesis enables the relationship of the individual with the social environment (Heller, 2008, p. 55).

Based on this concept of Heller, it is important that the occupational therapist, in his daily practice, using the body approach as a therapeutic strategy, understands the forms of imitations, as well as the types of languages that are culturally immersed, based on personal characteristics and characteristics of social groups (Castro et al., 2016), as possible in this study.

However, according to Guimarães (2002), the mimesis can be understood as the first action of daily life, because imitations have always existed in human history.

3.4 Spontaneity

In the three groups, through the theatrical games, the body approach was a vehicle of human expression, in which the individual relived daily situations, involving social conceptions, enabling everyone to participate actively and spontaneously, by expressing their innermost feelings. The participants dramatized their problems in an uncompromising way to the formalities, but spontaneously.

For Spolin (2003), spontaneity occurs when the human being is free to act and interrelate with the surrounding environment, which is constantly changing. It allows a man to release static patterns of behavior, broadening new discoveries, experiences and creative expressions.

Thus, Guimarães (2002) points out spontaneity as one of the characteristics of daily life, which is related to social behaviors linked to unplanned actions and without considering consequences in the future, being reinforced by Heller (2008) as a dominant feature of everyday life since it is shown in the forms of private and/or public motivations.

Based on this concept of spontaneity pointed by Heller and approaching the scenario of this study, the occupational therapy, using body strategies, enables the individual to express, articulate and interact with each other in different ways, either through images, colors, sounds and rhythms, appropriating the verbal and nonverbal, to facilitate subjective understanding and possible daily exchanges through body relationships and expressions with oneself and with one another (Castro et al., 2016).

3.5 Analogy

In some themes, such as interpersonal affective relationship and work-related aspects, there was a subjective reflection, with conflict resolution.

According to Ostrower (1987), the associations are spontaneous and establish combinations that are interconnected with ideas and feelings, revolving around hypotheses of what could be changed or reformulated.

Thus, the analogy is a classification of the contemporary man based on experiences already lived and/or known, being possible, at first, a quick orientation of the singular man to later understand him (Heller, 2008).

In this sense, Guimarães (2002) and Salles (2011) complement that all these concepts, mentioned earlier in the categories, articulate with each other and draw attention to be careful with their crystallization, so as not to turn to an alienation, understanding that everyday life can be a propitious field for alienation when the individual lives a life restricted to norms and routines, characterized by a conformism, in which he assumes roles that are imposed by society in an unconscious way.

In front of this contemporary reality, there is a need to broaden concepts and practices that go beyond traditional therapeutic models so that therapeutic actions are facilitated in people's own territories of life, that is, in the community, neighborhoods, contexts in which people live their daily lives (Castro et al., 2016).

Therefore, the body approach - through theatrical games - used in this study as the occupational therapeutic strategy can be considered an experience that evokes living forces in subjectivity and bodies, connecting people in a sensorial way to their surroundings and reality (Castro et al., 2016).

4 Final Considerations

The body approach - through the theatrical games - allowed the participants to experience expressively, creatively and productively everyday situations, so that the involved could reflect and (re) signify situations of their daily work.

As an individual and an integral part of the group, the ACS brought current questions and rescued their own history and occupational roles, allowing the articulation between what is unique with what is collective in the work process. The proposal to use the body approach as an occupational therapeutic strategy with community health agents enabled the members involved to experience, create, (re) experience everyday work situations, to transform their actions, based on knowledge and collective exchanges.

Intervention research provided a more horizontal relationship, reducing the distances between therapist-patients relationships, enabling group dynamics with approximations of their real work situations and life histories.

The body approaches (based on theatrical games), used as an occupational therapeutic strategy, facilitated the whole therapeutic process, allowing participation among the members.

When analyzing all the material based on the Theory of Daily Life, especially on the concepts of Agnes Heller, this theoretical foundation of philosophical support is extremely relevant to support the practice of occupational therapy, including the body strategies.

Thus, the work of the occupational therapist, using body approaches in his clinical practice, enables openings to meet others, facilitating the sharing of experiences and transformations in daily life.

However, this study is not concluded but it opens up so many possibilities such as offering useful contributions and information that can guide the search for interventions and actions in care based on body approaches in the occupational therapy setting.

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Author's Contributions

Cleber Tiago Cirineu, Francine Baltazar Assad and Lúcia da Rocha Uchôa-Figueiredo contributed to the writing of the text. All authors approved the final version of the text.

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