

Constructing an occupational therapist in the reflective practice group: a space for action-reflection-action

Construindo-se terapeuta ocupacional no grupo de reflexão da prática: um espaço para ação-reflexão-ação

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ABSTRACT: Occupational Therapy training demands diversification of scenarios and teaching-learning strategies. In the third cycle of the practice unit at UFSCar, students are subdivided into reflective practice groups, in the process of active methodology, anchored in the constructivist spiral. This study reports this experience through the thematic analysis of the teaching records. Topics include (a) initial reflections: welcoming reception and institutional issues; (b) understanding of the people undergoing care in occupational therapy; (c) place of field/service/institution; (d) the singularities of the subjects; (e) reflections on being an occupational therapist; (f) responsibilities, concepts, and tools of work. Such space for reflection distances itself from the urgent demands of the practice, which satisfies the students, who notice their feelings, concepts, and values that must be revisited and, sometimes, modified for the exercise of the professional practice.

KEYWORDS: Occupational therapy/education; Education; Teaching/human resources; Professional practice; Health human resource training.

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RESUMO: A formação em Terapia Ocupacional demanda diversificação de cenários e estratégias de ensino-aprendizagem. No terceiro ciclo da unidade de prática na UFSCar os estudantes subdividem-se em grupos de reflexão da prática, em processo de metodologia ativa, ancorada na espiral construtivista. O presente trabalho relata tal experiência por meio da análise temática dos registros docentes. Os temas abarcam (a) reflexões iniciais: acolhimento e questões institucionais; (b) compreensão das pessoas sob cuidado em terapia ocupacional; (c) lugar do campo/serviço/instituição; (d) singularidades dos sujeitos; (e) reflexões sobre ser terapeuta ocupacional; (f) responsabilidades, conceitos e instrumento de trabalho. Tal espaço para reflexão distancia-se das demandas urgentes da prática, gerando satisfação entre os estudantes, que percebem seus sentimentos, conceitos e valores que devem ser revisitados e, algumas vezes, transformados para o exercício da prática profissional.

DESCRITORES: Terapia ocupacional/ensino; Educação; Ensino/recursos humanos; Prática profissional; Capacitação de recursos humanos em saúde.

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INTRODUCTION

The pedagogical project of the undergraduate course in Occupational Therapy at the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar) focus on the offer of educational experiences that foster the construction of theoretical-practical knowledge supported by the reflexive practice¹ in its insertion in the field of health, education, social assistance, juridical-social, work, as well as in intersectoral practices^{2,3}.

The initial training in Occupational Therapy involves the construction of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that (a) incorporate, theoretically and practically, the relationship and understanding between individuals, their daily activities, and the insertion of care in occupational therapy in the context, (b) acquire mastery of the occupational therapy process from the point of view of clinical-professional reasoning, as well as the ability to discern the context of application of this knowledge and (c) sustain the ethical work with clients and their families, the personal and intersectoral support network, and the community⁴⁻⁶.

In addition, a diversification of teaching-learning scenarios is required, which favors a broad participation of students and teachers in the service network of the city, fulfilling thus a fundamental mission of contributing to the construction of new practices with social impact^{4,6}. The current curriculum is constituted by axes of theoretical-practical knowledge and one of them, the axis of Simulated Supervised Practice in Occupational Therapy – PSSTO, was the one that least changed in the curriculum restructuring of 2015, which left the integrated curriculum focused on active learning methodologies⁶ for the construction of a hybrid process³.

The PSSTO axis gradually develops from the initial grades of the course to activities of increasing complexity – observation, assisted practice and autonomous supervised practice in different areas, institutions and levels of performance⁷ – and reflection of the practice, from the emerging issues, and not more by content, as in traditional training⁸, seeking to solidify the professional identity and the technical, ethical, and personal qualification of the student. In the third cycle of the PSSTO axis, students are inserted in different fields of activity (mental health and physical adult and child-rearing, general adult and pediatric general hospital, and social field) and are subdivided into Reflective Practice Groups/RPG. Each group contains a maximum of 10 students, representatives of all fields, considering life

courses. Thus, there are two groups for “Childhood and Youth” and two groups for “Adult and Elderly.” Students live two fields throughout the year, one from each life cycle, with four hours of practical activities under the supervision of preceptor-teacher, and two hours in the RPG, with a facilitator-teacher.

The methodology used in the RPG is the Constructivist Spiral⁸. This, as one of the active learning methodologies, is characterized by the construction of knowledge in six cycles. Focusing on problematization, part of the students’ experience, and previous knowledge, it stimulates critical and reflexive attitudes towards this experience so that, through the recognition of doubt and uncertainty, research questions can be formulated and answered in the light of scientific evidence⁸.

The Constructivist Spiral, influenced by Problem-Based Learning, works on real events, activating students’ previous knowledge and stimulating the collaborative construction of knowledge, from problem, textual or simulated situations, and in Problematization, which is shown as an active and less controlled methodology, because it comes from the experience of real situations and demands interventions in practice, focusing on the action-reflection-action cycle. This way, the Constructivist Spiral enables the construction of knowledge through a variety of triggers (textual, simulated, or real problem situations) favoring teaching and learning from different perspectives⁸.

In RPG, although the students are inserted in real scenarios of professional practice, the triggers usually used are written narratives about the practice, but with themes pertaining to the programmatic content of the discipline: 1. Subject and target population in occupational therapy; 2. Identification of needs in occupational therapy; 3. Actions/procedures in occupational therapy. Depending on the reflections in the group, which progresses in a singular way, there may be thematic developments.

From the triggered reflection, a provisional synthesis is constructed (hypotheses from the students’ previous knowledge) and learning questions are elaborated to allow the evaluation of such hypotheses. Students have a week to answer questions using academically qualified material or directed interviews and observations, depending on the issue. At the next meeting, the questions are discussed and a final synthesis is elaborated with the contribution of all the participants, which, according to the students, allows for a broader and integrated understanding of what has been studied, making learning meaningful⁹.

We also emphasize that at the end of each meeting, an evaluation of the group work is done, aiming to highlight the favorable points and those that need improvement about the participation of each student, including the facilitator's. As emphasized by Cardoso et al.⁹, the facilitator's way of working is central to the methodological proposal, favoring communication, and fostering reflection and knowledge construction, in a collaborative way.

Thus, this study reports the experience that has been developed with junior and senior college students in the RPG, highlighting the main reflections of the practice, as well as the learning questions generated in the collaborative process.

METHODOLOGY

The authors, based on their work as facilitators of the RPG, carried out a systematization of the annotations of their records in notebooks of the discipline, seeking to elucidate recurrent themes in the reflection of the students from certain triggers and how such reflection was expressed in learning questions. These records, used by teacher-facilitators to support their teaching process during the RPG, contained information about (a) the sequence of knowledge construction through each student's contribution to the provisional and final synthesis, (b) prepared learning questions, (c) evaluation of the collaborative work from each day.

Results: the contents of the reflections in the RPG

The six themes identified addressed (1) the initial reflections: the field – from the welcoming reception to institutional questions; (2) people under care in occupational therapy: expectations in life, family and social expectations, emotional aspects, coping with adverse situations, impact on daily life; (3) where am I? The place of the field/service/institution; (4) subjects' singularities: what are the demands and needs? (5) authorization to feel: reflections on being an occupational therapist and the handling of feelings in the therapeutic relationship; (6) actions in occupational therapy: responsibilities, concepts, and work tool.

1) Initial Reflections: the field – from the welcoming reception to institutional issues

When the field of practice welcomes students with pedagogically organized activities and their natural anguishes of the initial process of practical training, we

realize that students feel ready to learn, recognizing their value and their place in the team and institution. The opposite may block learning situations, and this aspect needs to be worked both in the field and in the RPG.

As the students, in this cycle, are not responsible for the services, they have a keen reflexive look at the problems that, even with possible distortions due to lack of experience and repertoire, may be important for the field, to identify failures in its process of work or functioning, such as the precariousness of the health system, transportation (which makes it impossible for the user to arrive at the service), institutional problems, and broad social criticisms related to the social place of the target subjects of the interventions. This material is resumed in later meetings in order to shape and make possible constructions of knowledge.

2) People under care in occupational therapy: life, family, and social expectations, emotional aspects, coping with adverse situations, impact on daily life

The first theme worked on is "Target Subject and Population in Occupational Therapy." In the Childhood and Youth groups it is possible to observe the focus given by the students to the deficits, difficulties, pathologies, social, educational, familiar and contextual demands.

However, initially, we seek to problematize the themes "childhood" and "adolescence" in addition to the possible difficulties experienced by the target subjects through exercises that aim to approach the students and the infant and child universe, both contemporary and from a review of their own childhood and adolescence. It seeks to look at the target population through their interests, actions, daily activities, desires, potentialities, and contexts of life.

Some hypotheses constructed include: (a) children have their development process influenced by life contexts, especially in family, school and community, (b) children who are in a continuous process of growth, presenting motor, cognitive, and social potential, (c) the difficulties are presented based on the demand, by a socially accepted standard, and (d) the demands presented are made, most of the times, by the adults who live around them, however, they also can/must be heard and seen in their peculiarities.

Some of the questions that have already emerged in the groups were: "how can family and school influence children and adolescents' growth process?"; "what are the potentialities presented by the children observed by the occupational therapist?"; "how do children usually

communicate and express themselves?"; "what is the role of the school in the development process of children and adolescents?"

In the Adult and Elderly groups, the work on the narratives of this theme raises hypotheses about the various problems that the target subjects face, mainly from two perspectives (a) the social constructions around the different problems (physical deficiencies, mental illness, marginality, and social vulnerability) and (b) from the subjective-individual perspective (of subjects and relatives) to face the problematic situation.

Some learning questions arising from these hypotheses include topics to be explored with the subjects of the interventions themselves: "in a few years, how would you like to be regarding your activities?"; and search for academic-scientific material to help the understanding of these issues: "What is the social impact of the problematic situation on the lives of individuals and families?", "How does the subject's expectation influence treatment in occupational therapy?", "What is capacity?", "How people face new and disturbing situations?"

3) Where are we? The place of the field/service/institution

In some meetings, field or institutional issues, thematic initially transversal, take the core of the reflections. In order to understand the service and its relationship with the intersectoral network, we sometimes use tools such as the flowchart, which allows visualizing the input and output of the target subject, routing processes, constructing an understanding of the service inserted in a care network and political-institutional relations.

Institutional criticism can occur insofar as one understands the space of care, the service proposal, and possible institutional engagements and paralysis for which students can criticize, but also think/construct strategies to return to the field in a positive and productive way. RPG arises proposals for institutional intervention, often simple and focused on specific problems such as the construction of a mural to facilitate the communication of the team.

4) Singularity of the subjects: which are the demands and the needs?

The reflections from the second theme, "processes of identification of needs in occupational therapy," lead

the students to reflect beyond the problematic situation specific to each field, seeking to understand what the subjects desire. In this sense, they can list processes by which they identify needs (observation, listening, dialogue/interview with the subject and their relatives, process of carrying out activities, specific protocols and standardized tests), but what is central is how subjects perceive their problems and what are their expectations regarding occupational therapy care. In the case of child and adolescent care, the expectations of the family gain an important focus on the reflections, as well as the analysis of how the child and/or adolescent himself expresses what he expects from this care.

The initial hypothesis approaches: "the contexts of life are fundamental in the process of understanding the experience of the subject"; "occupational therapy work has a broad scope, because it is the whole being and the everyday is everything, which leads to the necessity of listening beyond the problem"; "It is not only the breakdown of daily life, what about the social aspect?"; "I think patients want to do it as before. But we need to look at what is possible, to empower duties"; "the needs change over time." From these hypotheses, some elaborate learning issues were: "what is the difference between need and demand?"; "what does the literature indicate about the evaluation in Occupational Therapy"; "how to identify needs when time is short?"; "how to identify needs different from what the subject points out?"; "what is the definition of daily life?"

5) Authorization to feel: reflections on being an occupational therapist and the handling of feelings in the therapeutic relationship.

In the discussion about the identification of needs, when one moves towards the construction of the subjects' senses, students report situations experienced in practice and open space to be questioned about the subjects' feelings about what happens/happened to them and how they perceive and deal with their feelings in contact with the other. In this direction, the bond appears as a word that seems to be the solution for all the answers.

The initial hypothesis "nothing is possible without a bond," opens space to learning questions that allow to deepen the reflections on the therapeutic relation in the occupational therapy: "what is a bond?"; "how have authors in occupational therapy addressed the therapeutic relationship?". In this process, we also encourage discussion about what students feel in contact with each

other, perceiving and naming feelings, reflecting on what generates such feelings, be they linked to the initial learning situation such as insecurity, fear, excessive criticism, (b) feelings for situations similar to those of the subjects, (c) feelings arising from the relationship with the other, (d) feelings and reflections related to what it is to be a good occupational therapist.

Hypotheses and questions revolve around “each person has a way of relating in life”; “being in occupational therapy, needing help, all this generates different feelings and emotions,” generating learning questions such as: “how can the occupational therapist’s feelings be used as a source of information about the subjects’ needs?”; “how is the therapeutic relationship constructed in occupational therapy?”; “how to identify the process of transference and countertransference?”.

6) Actions in occupational therapy: responsibilities, concepts, and tool of work

In practice with adults, this theme has been linked to the construction of the responsibility of the occupational therapist in the conduct of the therapeutic process, in a construction in which the process is collaborative, but the actions must be responsible. This theme is worked through the discussion of the narratives and experiences of the field and of learning questions that usually leave for practical explorations and interviews with professionals. It is common to see actions for body and emotional care, but not always focused on insertion and social participation, generating learning questions such as: “how does the social aspect appear in interventions in my field of practice?”, “what is the social aspect for occupational therapy?”.

In the Childhood and Adolescence group of students, the interest for the activities emerges strongly in the narratives and reflections. In this direction, themes such as “play” and the role of activities in the action of the occupational therapist are approached from different triggers. It reinforces that the discussion transcends the specificity of the fields of action, but focuses on occupational therapy and its instrument of action. Thus, some learning questions in this theme include: “what is the role of the activity in the action of the occupational therapist with children and adolescents?”, “how can the act of playing be explored in different fields of practice?”, “how to understand the concept of activity in the field of occupational therapy assistance with children and adolescents?”.

DISCUSSION

Based on the integration between the experiences in the fields of action and the space for reflection, the RPGs distance themselves from the urgent demands of the practice¹⁰ – specifically worked on field supervisions¹¹. In addition, they present a pedagogical proposal that calls for the joint construction of training strategies among the different actors (teachers facilitators of reflection, teachers from the practice fields, teachers from other educational units/courses of the course in said semester/year), so to enhance the learning of the professional practice.

The Constructivist Spiral⁸ allows for flexibility so that practical experiences are potent for the reflexive process that, in turn, instrumentalizes new experiments in the practical field from the new understandings constructed¹. Thus, concepts previously worked in other disciplines (subject in its totality, everyday life, bond) can be deepened and worked theoretically as one understands its importance in professional practice (meaningful learning).

This way, the problem of our target population is worked on the interrelationship between the subjectivity of the *subjects*, in the experiences of situations that imply changes in their daily life or limitations according to the social position they occupy, and the *social constructions* around this problematic situation, marking positions of exclusion. We open spaces for reflections on the demands of society, institutions, and projects, but especially on the *demand and desire* of the subjects, which may be different from the *needs* identified from the narrative-scientific technical knowledge^{12,13}. These reflections encourage questions about actions in occupational therapy that envisage the construction of a shared history, in which both can invest¹⁴.

In this process, by exploring rationalities and emotions⁸, students experience *real* thoughts and feelings as occupational therapists, and being able to talk about these experiences is valued as something very important. Having a guaranteed momentum in the curricular structure to reflect on their own “study” seems to generate greater satisfaction among students, as they perceive their feelings, concepts, and values that must be revisited and sometimes modified for the exercise of professional practice¹².

In RPG, the focus is occupational therapy, and the fields of action act as scenarios of practical-professional life. Thus, space is created to reflect on the interventions and their different objectives, on the place given to

the insertion and social participation of the individual and collective subjects that are under our care, and the discussion of the activity/play as something that, in a contextualized way, is integrated with the subject delineating the subject's daily life.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to portray the experience that has been developed with the students of the third cycle of the educational axis of Simulated and Supervised Practice of the undergraduate course in Occupational Therapy at UFSCar. From this experience, it is possible to observe that the teaching-learning process of the practice involves a constant and intense challenge in the relation between thought-practice, action-reflection-action, essence of the professional activity in occupational therapy. In this sense, RPG has been configured as a space in which

students have the opportunity to realize a meaningful learning process. We have evaluated that this experience has enabled growth and professional maturity.

This study comes from the report of the experience and reflections of teachers, therefore, it is worth pointing out the demand for systematized studies that focus on this theme to better subsidize discussions regarding professional training in the fields of health, education, and social assistance, constituted of hybrids and complex needs. We argue that the action-reflection-action process is not only appreciated as an educational strategy, since it is an agency that is essential for professional practice. This process, by allowing reflection on practice, contributes to the construction of a solid professional identity, recognizing common characteristics of its action, and a flexible one, by allowing itself to be constructed with singular subjects in complex contexts.

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