

# Occupational therapy and collaborative consultation: a narrative review of the literature

## Terapia ocupacional e consultoria colaborativa: uma revisão narrativa da literatura

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**ABSTRACT:** This study aimed to perform a reflective analysis of the national scientific literature on the role of Occupational Therapy in the inclusive education by Collaborative Consultation, identifying the difficulties found in the practice, as well as the strategies used and the resulting benefits. We conducted a survey of articles published in four online journals in the field of Occupational Therapy and Special Education, with the following keywords: “*Occupational therapy*”, “*Collaborative Consultation*”, “*Educational Consultation*” and “*Educational Inclusion*”; four articles were selected and analyzed. As a result we have: deficiency in gathering human resources and providing material resources as the main barrier of inclusive education; the strategies used vary, but meetings between occupational therapist and school staff are reported in all articles; the possibility of solving problems and offering technical support are among the benefits cited. As a conclusion, the studies present the collaborative consultation as a promising service provision model, but there is a need to develop more researches on this topic.

**KEYWORDS:** Occupational therapy; Mainstreaming (education); Consultants.

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**RESUMO:** O objetivo deste estudo foi realizar uma análise reflexiva da literatura científica nacional sobre a atuação da Terapia Ocupacional na educação inclusiva por meio da Consultoria Colaborativa, identificando as dificuldades encontradas na prática, bem como as estratégias utilizadas e os benefícios resultantes. Foi realizado um levantamento de artigos publicados em quatro periódicos online na área de Terapia Ocupacional e Educação Especial, com os seguintes descritores: “*Terapia Ocupacional*”, “*Consultoria Colaborativa*”, “*Consultoria Escolar*” e “*Inclusão Escolar*”; quatro artigos foram selecionados e analisados. Como resultado temos: a deficiência na capacitação de recursos humanos e na provisão de recursos materiais como a principal barreira da educação inclusiva; as estratégias utilizadas variam, mas encontros presenciais entre terapeuta ocupacional e equipe escolar são relatados em todos os artigos; a possibilidade de resolução de problemas e o oferecimento de suporte técnico estão entre os benefícios citados. Como conclusão, os estudos apresentam a consultoria colaborativa como um modelo de prestação de serviço promissor, entretanto há a necessidade de desenvolver mais pesquisas sobre o assunto.

**DESCRITORES:** Terapia ocupacional; Inclusão educacional; Consultores.

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## INTRODUCTION

From the early 1990s, ensuring access to education to all people became a matter of remarkable ascension in academic and political environments. The World Conference on Education for All (Thailand, 1990) recalled “that education is a fundamental right of all, women and men, of all ages, all over the world”<sup>1</sup>.

Based on this premise, the World Conference on Special Needs Education (Spain, 1994) called upon the international community to add up efforts in the quest for improved access to education for those who present special educational needs (the term “special educational needs” is used to refer to children or young people whose special educational needs originate from disabilities or learning difficulties). The main document, which became known as “Declaration of Salamanca”, advocates the creation of an *inclusive education* in which children, youth, and adults with special educational needs can participate in the regular education system (unless there are significant reasons to act differently). The request addressed to governments is the “improvement of their educational systems to be able to include all children, regardless of their individual differences or difficulties”<sup>2</sup>.

Before the proposal of a systemic change, the challenges presented to schools are countless and multifaceted, which makes necessary the development and implementation of contextualized support policies.

To qualify and articulate initiatives in favour of inclusive education, people with different knowledge, perspectives, and experiences established partnerships to design interventions with common goals<sup>3,4</sup>. Teachers, psychologists, speech therapists, physical educators, physical therapists, and occupational therapists have been working in this context with a service provision model named *collaborative consultation*<sup>5,6</sup>.

Besides collaborative consultation, the literature points out two other models of services provision in the field of inclusive education: *direct care* and *monitoring*<sup>3,7</sup>.

At the collaborative consultation, the professional performance is guided by a cooperative philosophy in which those involved work for the same purpose, sharing goals, decisions, instructions, responsibilities, and problem solutions<sup>8</sup>.

The collaborative consultation has six guiding elements, which are:

(1) it is an aid or problem solution process; (2) it occurs between someone who receives help and someone who

gives help and who has the responsibility for the well-being of a third person; (3) it is a voluntary relationship; (4) both who helps and who is helped shares the problem solution; (5) its goal is to help solve a problem of current work of those seeking help; and (6) who helps is benefited from the relationship, so that future problems can be controlled with more sensitivity and ability<sup>9</sup>.

In the literature, we can find variations in the classification of these guiding elements<sup>10</sup>.

The occupational therapist is one of the professionals who has worked in the school context using collaborative consultation<sup>11,12,13</sup>. The emphasis of occupational therapy in the school context focuses on the occupational performance of the students to identify the elements that affect their ability of full participation in school activities, such as components of student skills, activity demands, physical and furnishing space, and routine. Before the identified demands, the services provided can be directed to the educational staff, parents, and/or the school community in general<sup>14</sup>.

Occupational therapists who work with this service model must be positioned as facilitators, elaborating a structure that encourages not only the awareness of those involved, but their instrumentalization, so that what Spinoza<sup>15</sup> called “*Conatus*” (term that can “be understood, ultimately, as a way for the individual to become more and more active”) can be increased.

From the above, this study aims to achieve a reflective analysis of the scientific literature on the role of occupational therapy in the Brazilian inclusive education with the collaborative consultation. To this end, we adopted the methodological principles of narrative review, since this technique allows the deepening in the critical analysis and interpretations on a specific topic, being possible for us to verify how it is at the current moment<sup>16</sup>. This study is, therefore, an attempt to deepen the discussions on this topic, reflecting on the characteristics of collaborative consultation, as well as its importance. We will also approach questions related to the topic of educational inclusion.

## DEVELOPMENT

We conducted a bibliographical research in four national online journals in the field of Occupational Therapy and Special Education (*Revista de Terapia Ocupacional da USP*; *Cadernos de Terapia Ocupacional da UFSCAR*; *Revista Educação Especial da UFSM*; and *Revista Brasileira de Educação Especial*), with

the following keywords: “*Occupational Therapy*”, “*Collaborative Consultation*”, “*Educational Consultation*” and “*Educational Inclusion*”. We selected four articles, which were analyzed with emphasis on the intervention strategies used and major difficulties and benefits pointed by the authors regarding the role of occupational therapists in the context of inclusive education with collaborative consultation. The data categorization of the four articles is presented in Box 1. The selected articles were identified as A1, A2, A3, and A4. Throughout the text, we sought to establish a dialogue between national literature and international theoretical references.

It is consensus that the enrollment of the student does not guarantee real inclusion, i.e., the fact that the individual *attends* the school does not mean that he/she *takes part* of the activities developed. Glat and Blanco<sup>17</sup> affirm that it is necessary to ensure the “possibility of admission and permanence of the student in school with academic success”. To enter this universe, many authors pointed out the difficulties found in the everyday life of educational inclusion involving the permanence of the student with special educational needs in the school and the teaching-learning process.

Ide et al.<sup>13</sup>, in research conducted with educational advisors, identified the school environment, the (lack of) training, specialized support, and partnerships as the main difficulties that teachers of students with special educational needs are facing. The authors of the four articles examined also found unfavorable elements, such as architectural barriers, shortage of adapted material, unpreparedness of teachers, and attitudinal obstacles detectable in demonstrations of clear piety or compassion.

Thus, the collaborative consultation programs are an alternative response to the need of developing models of service provision compatible with the objectives and purposes of inclusive education<sup>18</sup>.

Dunn<sup>19</sup> compared the collaborative consultation with the individual care model in a pilot study, which was attended by teachers and occupational therapists, and concluded that both services have been effective in achieving the objectives; however, teachers reported more positive interactions related to collaborative consultation.

The results found by Nochajski<sup>18</sup>, which indicate that the collaborative consultation resulted in benefits for both students and professionals involved, confirmed the notes of A1, A2, A3, and A4. These authors highlighted that the collaborative consultation enabled the resolution of problems that compromised the quality of learning and living; the improvement of the feelings of frustration and

impotence before difficulties; the promotion of personal and professional development of educators, allowing awareness regarding diversity and the need for the environment to facilitate the inclusion of children with special educational needs.

Regarding the strategies used, the articles analyzed showed: discussion of cases, guidance on particular characteristics of students, group dynamics, presentation of assistive technology and alternative communication, reading and discussion of texts, workshop of teaching material building, adaptation of furnishings, adaptation of pedagogic curriculum, and establishment of common goals. Weekly or monthly meetings between teachers (and other members of the school community) and occupational therapists (researchers) have been used as a strategy in all programs.

Although the articles consulted do not describe these meetings, they affirm that the contact allowed opportunities for the discussion of problems that pervade the daily lives of inclusive education, as well as the building of solution proposals, valuing teamwork. Villa and Thousand<sup>20</sup> consider essential to promote an environment that favors the discussion among team members about their feelings regarding collaboration.

From the reading, we were able to conceive that, if well structured and planned, these moments can provide the appropriation and unveiling of difficulties, the decomposition of sad passions and composition of happy passions, resulting in the increase of *Conatus*, becoming, thus, good meetings<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, one of the factors that can influence the success of collaborative consultation is the quality of the meetings/encounters and the link established between therapist and school community. In this sense, Bondy and Brownell<sup>22</sup> affirm that the quality of the established communication/collaboration can influence the effectiveness of the consultation.

The occupational therapist, a professional qualified to carry out the analysis of the situation that requires intervention, considering the various fields and contexts involved, can encourage the development of good meetings by targeted actions.

Regarding the collaborative consultation, it is important that this professional analyze: **the territory in which the school is inserted** (Young/adult population; business/residential neighborhood; social condition; access to culture/leisure; vulnerability to drugs, violence; who attends the school and what the school means to the surroundings); **the school context** (*Physical aspects* - big/small space; hygiene; accessibility; furnishings and layout of the classroom; existence of resources/multifunctional room; routine;

**Box 1** – Analysis of the articles that addressed the theme of the role of the occupational therapist with the collaborative consultation

	<b>ARTICLE 1 (A1)</b>	<b>ARTICLE 2 (A2)</b>	<b>ARTICLE 3 (A3)</b>	<b>ARTICLE 4 (A4)</b>
<b>Journal</b>	<i>Cadernos de Terapia Ocupacional da UFSCar</i> (Journal of Occupational Therapy - UFSCar)	<i>Rev. Brasileira de Educação Especial</i> (Brazilian Journal of Special Education)	<i>Cadernos de Terapia Ocupacional da UFSCar</i> (Journal of Occupational Therapy - UFSCar)	<i>Cadernos de Terapia Ocupacional da UFSCar</i> (Journal of Occupational Therapy - UFSCar)
<b>Title</b>	The Multidisciplinary context of the OT practice before the Inclusion paradigm.	Collaborative Consultation in Occupational Therapy for teachers of preschool children with low vision.	Reflections on the role of the occupational therapist in the process of educational inclusion of children with special educational needs.	Contributions of Occupational Therapy to the educational inclusion of children with autism.
<b>Author(s) and Publishing Year</b>	Toyoda et al., 2007.	Gebraei; Martinez, 2011.	Trevisan; Della Barba, 2012.	Della Barba; Minatel, 2013.
<b>Main difficulties found</b>	Unpreparedness of teachers, architectural barriers, shortage of adjusted material, and attitudinal obstacles detectable in demonstrations of piety or compassion.	Unpreparedness of teachers and school, lack of material resources and of specialized support services.	Unpreparedness of professionals, architectural barriers, and limitation of available materials.	Unpreparedness of the school environment in general and lack of support to meet the demands of the school routine of children with special educational needs.
<b>Strategies/Techniques used</b>	Weekly visits and systematic observation carried out in schools; organization and preparation of teaching materials	Meetings between teachers and researchers, in which were used slide presentations, interactive dynamics between researchers and teachers, workshop of toy and teaching material building, proposition of problem-situations, homeworks, reading and discussion of texts, and provision of informational support. Meetings between parents of children with special educational needs and researchers.	Weekly monitoring of student cases, provision of support for teachers, classroom observations, conversations with principals, other school professionals, and families, adequacy of furnishing and materials, recreational group activities, use of assistive technology resources and instrumentalization of teacher and school for the construction of educational proposals specific to each child.	Monthly meetings to discuss needs and advances, use of assistive technology, introduction of alternative communication, group dynamics, analysis of activities, facilitation of basic and instrumental activities of daily living, flexibility of educational planning and curriculum, discussion of common goals, guidance to teachers on the particularities of each student.
<b>Benefits identified</b>	Possibility of solving problems and providing technical support	Provision of assistance to deal with the difficulties of their students; the possibility of an exchange of ideas between professor and consultant; survey of important questions to be discussed for the benefit of students; providing better educational services for students with special educational needs.	Possibility of solving problems found in everyday life that compromised the quality of learning and living together, improving the feelings of frustration that compromised the quality of learning and living together, improving the feelings of frustration and impotence before difficulties, and promoting personal and professional development of educators. tion and impotence before difficulties, and promoting personal and professional development of educators.	Possibility of assistance to the actors involved in the process, allowing awareness regarding diversity and the need for the environment to facilitate the inclusion of the children.

outdoors, park, cafeteria; pedagogical meetings etc. *Material aspects* - what is available; what are the most used; who finances them; possibility of adaptation. *Human resources* - school team; existence of conflicts; role overloading; existence of other support services etc.), and **the community participation in school activities** (how is the family x school relationship; the existence of opportunities for meetings and dialogues between the family and school etc.)<sup>14,21</sup>.

Identification of peculiar characteristics suggest an individual look for each school environment, because, from the information collected through interviews and/or observation, the occupational therapist can introduce, in the consulting planning, specific elements, consistent with the reality of the workplace. Thus, this care can raise the probability of success, since it allows empathy between the participants and the service configuration. Consequently, this empathy can generate greater involvement of professionals who see the possibility of having their needs answered<sup>23</sup>.

But how do we measure the benefits? Only article A2 reported the application of tests to investigate the results achieved by the program. They consisted of a semi-structured interview, applied at the beginning of the program (pre-test) and a case study, applied at the end of the program (post-test).

About measurement, Chaves et al.<sup>24</sup>, in their studies, stated that the need to systematize the measurement of results obtained in interventions need to be considered and encouraged, since it promotes the scientific recognition of the profession, enables the production of specific knowledge of the field, as well as ensures the reliability of interventions. To the extent that the credibility of the work is ensured, the dissemination of it turns out to be a natural process<sup>24</sup>. Thus, we can infer the need to insert, in the collaborative consultation programs, reliable measures of assessment of the work carried out, so that, from the analysis of the results, we can identify and correct the flaws, increasing the service quality and the scientific consolidation of it<sup>7</sup>.

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Kammis and Dunn<sup>3</sup>, in a study from 1996, pointed out that collaborative consultation was a little-known model by occupational therapists. Coppede et al.<sup>25</sup> published in 2014 a survey of the national scientific production on contributions of Occupational Therapy in the process of educational inclusion and, from the 33 selected articles in the study, only one discussed the collaborative consultation.

Before these data, we can see the existence of a gap in the national scientific production that approaches this topic, being necessary to encourage the development of new researches and action plans involving occupational therapy and collaborative consultation<sup>18</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

This study identified isolated actions of occupational therapists in the Brazilian territory, which, adopting the collaborative consultation, develop important works in the school environment and contribute directly to real advances in the process of improvement in the Brazilian educational system. However, the deficiency in the gathering of human resources and in the provision of material resources is the main barrier of inclusive education. The strategies used vary, but meetings between occupational therapists and the school staff are reported in all programs and their quality is a factor that needs to be considered.

The studies affirm that the results of collaborative consultation are positive, but it is important that students and professionals that develop studies and researches on the role of occupational therapy in collaborative consultation become aware and prepare actions to measure the benefits achieved and share their experiences.

The provision of service by collaborative consultation demands more specific studies to systematize the theoretical approaches used, increasing the notoriety of the service and its offer.

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