

## The therapeutic play in nursing graduation: from theory to practice

O brinquedo terapêutico na graduação de enfermagem: da teoria à prática

El juguete terapéutico en la graduación de enfermería: de la teoría a la práctica

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The study's purpose has been to identify the use of therapeutic toys by nursing undergraduate students when taking care of hospitalized children, and also to discuss the consequences of its use in the nursing academic trajectory. **Methods:** It is a qualitative research, which was carried out at a Federal Nursing School from the State of *Rio de Janeiro*, having 17 participating students. Data were collected over the period from October to November 2016, through semi-structured interviews, and they were assessed by the thematic content analysis technique. **Results:** The therapeutic play is introduced to the student during theoretical classes; unfortunately, they do not have the opportunity to apply it in practice. Its practical use would make it safer providing care to children, added to the quality of the care provided and the benefits for those children. **Conclusion:** The therapeutic play teaching should happen in the practical field, not only in the theoretical one, thereby contributing to a better training of nursing undergraduate students and improvement of the pediatric care quality.

**Descriptors:** Play and playthings, Nursing Undergraduate Students, Teaching, Pediatric Nursing.

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** identificar o uso do brinquedo terapêutico pelos acadêmicos de enfermagem no cuidado à criança hospitalizada e discutir as implicações de seu uso na trajetória do acadêmico de enfermagem. **Método:** pesquisa qualitativa, desenvolvida em uma Escola de

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Enfermagem Federal no Rio de Janeiro com 17 acadêmicos. A coleta de dados foi realizada em outubro e novembro de 2016 por meio de entrevista semiestruturada e tratados com a técnica de análise de conteúdo temática.

**Resultados:** o brinquedo terapêutico é apresentado ao aluno no conteúdo teórico, porém sem a oportunidade de aplicá-lo na prática. Sua aplicação prática o deixaria mais seguro para prestar assistência à criança, somado à qualidade do cuidado prestado e os benefícios para ela. **Conclusão:** o ensino do brinquedo terapêutico deve acontecer em campo prático, e não somente no teórico, contribuindo, assim, para melhor formação do enfermeiro e melhoria da qualidade da assistência pediátrica.

**Descritores:** Jogos e Brinquedos, Estudantes de Enfermagem, Ensino, Enfermagem Pediátrica.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Identificar el uso del juguete terapéutico por los académicos de enfermería en la atención al niño hospitalizado y discutir las consecuencias de su uso en la trayectoria del académico de enfermería.

**Método:** Investigación cualitativa, desarrollada en una Escuela Federal de Enfermería en Río de Janeiro con 17 académicos. Los datos se recolectaron en octubre y noviembre 2016 mediante entrevista semiestructurada y se trataron con la técnica de análisis de contenido temático. **Resultados:** El juguete terapéutico se presenta al alumno en el contenido teórico, pero sin oportunidad de aplicarlo en la práctica. Su aplicación práctica lo dejaría más seguro para ayudar al niño, sumado a la calidad de la atención ofrecida y los beneficios para él. **Conclusión:** La enseñanza del juguete terapéutico debe ocurrir en el campo prático, y no sólo en el teórico, contribuyendo así para mejor formación del enfermero y mejoramiento de la calidad de la asistencia pediátrica.

**Descriptor:** Juego e Implementos de Juego; Estudiantes de Enfermería; Enseñanza; Enfermería Pediátrica.

## INTRODUCTION

Therapeutic Play (TP) is a structured toy for the child to alleviate their anxiety through experiences in the hospital, which pose a threat to the child. Furthermore, it makes possible the understanding of the procedures to which the child will be submitted.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the TP is configured as a care tool, since it establishes a strong transforming influence in the maintenance of health.<sup>2</sup>

With regards to the nursing profession, the *Conselho Federal de Enfermagem (COFEN)* [Federal Nursing Council], through its Resolution No. 546/2017, states that it is the competence of the nurses working in pediatrics to use the therapeutic play technique while taking care of the hospitalized children and their relatives.<sup>3</sup> However, despite the *COFEN*'s recommendation, it is seen that many professionals who work in pediatrics do not use this tool.

In a study carried out in *São Paulo* (Brazil), nurses reported unpreparedness for TP use, as well as difficulties due to the lack of time to use it.<sup>4</sup> This makes us reflect that knowledge about TP, both theoretical and on its effective practical application, it is essential for the professional to be able to apply it safely, as well as to incorporate it into his practice.<sup>5</sup>

It is necessary that the training of these professionals include the humanistic principles capable of stimulating creativity, as well as the adoption of new communication strategies in child care.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, there is a need for discussion within the universities and the hospitals themselves

about the importance of the use of the playful approach<sup>7</sup> and the therapeutic play by the nursing academics, with the purpose of using it in a way that maximizes its benefits.<sup>1</sup>

In a research carried out to understand the meaning attributed by the nursing undergraduate regarding the TP teaching and practical use, the academics identified it as a necessary and important intervention in the promotion of qualified and humane care. Therefore, the authors emphasized the importance of knowing other realities, with a view to increasing knowledge in this respect and improving the pedagogical practices conducive to learning about the TP, based on the student's own viewpoint.<sup>8</sup>

Given the aforementioned, this study targeted to identify the use of TP by nursing undergraduate students when taking care of hospitalized children, and also to discuss the consequences of its use in the nursing academic trajectory.

## METHODS

It is a descriptive research with a qualitative approach,<sup>9</sup> which was carried out at a Federal Nursing School from the State of *Rio de Janeiro* with 17 (56.7%) nursing undergraduate students from a class of 30. Out of those, 12 (70.6 %) were female and 5 (29.4%) were male. The average age was 24 years old.

The participants selection was based on the following inclusion criteria: academic students over 18 years old, attending the ninth graduation period, since they have already completed the two required disciplines of Nursing in Child and Adolescent Health (I and II).

In the aforesaid institution, the theoretical content of the TP is offered in the seventh semester of graduation, in the required discipline Nursing in Child and Adolescent Health II, which addresses the health of children and adolescents hospitalized. Nevertheless, in the practice scenario, there is no application of TP in a systematized manner.

Data collection took place from October to November 2016, through a semi-structured interview, divided into two parts: the first part related to the characterization of participants (identification, age, gender) and the second part with open questions, which enabled the interviewed develop on the topic addressed: What do you think about the use of the therapeutic play? Have you ever used a therapeutic toy while taking care of a child during graduation time? Please, talk about it.

The interview lasted approximately 15 minutes, with prior scheduling in classrooms of the Nursing School itself. Participants were informed and clarified about the objectives of the study, all signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF).

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed in full and analyzed following the three phases of the thematic analysis: pre-analysis, with floating reading to know the content of the empirical material generated by the interviews; material exploration phase, when raw data were transformed into units that represented meanings and then aggregated into categories; treatment phase and interpretation of the results,<sup>8</sup> when it was possible to make inferences in light of the scientific literature on therapeutic play.

The research was approved by the Ethics Research Committee of the institution where it was performed, under the Legal Opinion No. 1.786.857, and respected all aspects contained in the Resolution No. 466/12 from the National Health Council.<sup>10</sup> The anonymity of the participants was preserved with names being used of children's story characters to identify them.

## RESULTS

The following thematic units appeared from data analysis: The use of the Therapeutic Play during graduation time; Therapeutic Play teaching during graduation for its use in the future professional life; The child care quality through the use of the Therapeutic Play.

### The use of the Therapeutic Play during graduation time

This unit demonstrated that the students had the TP topic in theoretical classes in the discipline of Nursing in Child and Adolescent Health II, but did not have the opportunity to do so in the clinical field.

*We have the concept of what it is, it works, which is good practice, but, particularly, I have never seen the application. (Fiona)*

*We have a discipline, Child Health II, in the pediatric ward, we had toys available. I did not have the opportunity to use it because I did not develop any activity that required the use of it. (Jerry)*

*I learned in the classroom that we had the use of the therapeutic play, but I never saw it in practice really. (Emily)*

*No, I did not get the chance. I do not remember seeing someone using it. I just remember seeing it in the classroom, not in practice. (Princess core)*

Despite the lack of opportunity to use the TP, students create their own playing strategies to facilitate the approach to the child, as seen in the lines below, judging the experience as positive, once the child accepted to perform procedures more easily.

*No, therapeutic play no. I already used my equipment with children just to pretend: I used my stethoscope for her to listen to me. I saw an academic in pediatrics using it as a syringe and EVA doll for the child to vaccinate and it was positive. (Hans Solo)*

*I've seen a person using it, which was not really the TP. It was an academic who drew a picture with the child, trying to show what would be done. But in the form of a drawing, she took the sheet and drew it with her pen. But toy, I never saw it. (Punky)*

### Therapeutic Play teaching during graduation for its use in the future professional life

The students underline that the TP should be used still during graduation time, so that they can use this instrument after being trained in their workplaces, encouraging the creation of toy libraries for the possible use of the TP and instructing the team to make use of this practice. Moreover, they believe that it would be possible - through the use of the TP - to test the effectiveness of this therapy as described in the scientific literature.

*Nursing is the category that is very close to the patient and I think that since graduation, you already can stimulate the use of the toy, you will use it in your professional future (...) you will already know that you have the possibility of using it or even to encourage the creation of a toy library and use the TP. (Batman)*

*The therapeutic play is a form of therapy that we can use after being graduated (...) you have to be applied during graduation to be prepared to use it later. (Darth Vader)*

*I would have had the experience just to see if I could apply it as it was in theory, and if it would really make it easier for me to take care of children. (Dot)*

In addition to agreeing that TP teaching should begin at graduation, they pointed out that their application should be more encouraged in academia, because by stimulating the use of that instrument, academics would feel more secure in approaching most children.

*I should be more encouraged. Although we have this class within the curriculum, I do not see so much incentive for us to actually use it. (Mulan)*

*It helps those who are insecure. You use that instrument and you become confident, then, you will be able to take a better approach with that child. (Cinderella)*

*The nursing student can find in the TP a way to get closer to the patient (...) before performing the procedure, he has the possibility to review all the contents there with the child, the procedure step by step (...) then becoming more confident. (Jerry)*

### The child care quality through the use of the Therapeutic Play

This thematic unit reveals that the student recognizes the benefits of TP to improve the quality of care provided by nursing students, they stated that their use would be extremely valuable, since it would create a link between the nursing team, the family and the patient.

*If the student knows how to use this resource well (...) I think it will create a better bond during the care. (Mandy)*

*It will create a contact, a stronger bond between the academic - patient, patient - team, patient - family, academic - family, academic - team. (Aurora)*

Students also recognized that the TP facilitates and saves time, as well as changing the child's view of hospitalization, as well as the health professional's image, resulting in less traumatic care for her and her family.

*Oh! By using the TP it was so much easier, do you understand it? You reach out to a child that she is scared to death of a procedure and then you use the toy to demonstrate how that procedure is going to be done, let the child do it on you and you on him/her. (Mulan)*

*Over time you will know how to deal best with the child, you will save time in the care approach. (Emily)*

*You are able to provide a better care, you can change the child's viewpoint about the hospitalization (...) he will use, let's say, a toy syringe on some doll, and right there it will change the child's viewpoint about the professional as well. (Hans Solo)*

## DISCUSSION

The study results, which were obtained through the interview with the nursing undergraduate students, have allowed to identify the use of the therapeutic play in the care of the hospitalized child and to discuss the implications of its use in its trajectory, evidencing the importance of incorporating it into the theoretical field and practical teaching of pediatric nursing, once defined as an important instrument in child care.

The nursing students showed that the teaching of the TP was restricted to the theory and that they did not have the opportunity to apply it in a practical field. These same results were found in a study<sup>11</sup> conducted in a pediatric unit of a hospital from *Montes Claros* city, *Minas Gerais* State, in which the nursing team reported having heard about this technique during their professional training, however only in the theoretical part, not developing the part practice. Consistent with this reality, although nurses and nursing graduates are able to recognize the importance of playing, few are those who systematically apply this activity.<sup>12</sup>

Bearing this in mind, the content on TP should be addressed in undergraduate and its application stimulated in the practical field in pediatrics, as evidenced in a research with nursing students of a public university of *São Paulo*. In it, undergraduates affirm that teachers charge the theory of TP, but in practice, it is not done and added to the lack of stimulation, since, when stimulated, it favors awareness of its use.<sup>8</sup>

Another aspect that emerged in the results was the initiative of the academics to create their own playing strategies to facilitate the approach of the child in performing procedures, such as drawings, hospital equipment and flexible and innocuous materials (EVA). These results point to the lack

of material resources in child care settings, being a limiting factor for the implementation of the therapeutic play. Thus, many professionals improvise with available resources and others do not feel motivated to play with the material that is offered to them.<sup>6</sup>

For the interviewed students, the use of the TP in the undergraduate trajectory can stimulate the future professionals to use it in their workplaces, besides, it would be a possibility to observe the effectiveness of this therapy as it is described in the scientific literature. In this regard, a study<sup>4</sup> carried out with nurses in a private hospital in *São Paulo*, pointed out that for nurses to introduce TP practice in their daily lives, it is necessary to base it on the recognition of playing as a basic need for the child and the development of fundamental skills related to its use.

The data also revealed the potential of the TP to enable nursing students to feel more secure. Consequently, when applied during their care, the safety in dealing with the child was evident, corroborating with data from a study<sup>13</sup> that showed the technical inexperience of the undergraduate nursing student regarding the use of TP, which makes he repeats the "technical approach", seeking to overcome the insecurity during his child care. This evidences the importance of providing the student with the practice of this instrument during his fieldwork in practical teaching in the pediatric ward.

Concerning the TP teaching as an intervention instrument in nursing, this has been done since mid-1980, at different levels of professional training.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, in many public and private institutions, it is seen that this content is not addressed in the curriculum,<sup>8</sup> even in some States, such as *São Paulo*, where the Regional Nursing Council recommends teaching the TP in graduation courses.<sup>15</sup>

The deponents also recognized the benefits of the TP to improve the quality of care provided to the child, such as the creation of a bond between the child, the nursing team and the family. Thus, play should be considered by the nurse as the most appropriate way to approach the child, developing empathy between them, making possible the understanding of the world through their eyes, and then promoting a relationship of trust, tranquility and safety.<sup>16,17</sup>

Considering the interviewees, the TP also facilitates and optimizes the time in the care provided and allows even less traumatic care for the child and his family. Regarding the time spent in the development of assistance, the literature indicates that play is characterized as a medium activity, in other words, a tool that aims to facilitate or lead to established objectives. The child becomes more collaborative and the procedure, although painful, is no longer traumatic for her.<sup>11</sup> Thus, with the child's help, the time is reduced.

According to a research<sup>14</sup> performed with nursing professionals from a pediatric hospitalization sector of a hospital in *Rio de Janeiro*, the child may feel afraid of the nursing professional, since he associates his presence with procedures that may cause him some painful sensation. Therefore, the use of TP makes children see it as a professional that not only performs painful activities, but also plays.<sup>6</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Through this study was possible to verify that the TP, in spite of the general agreement of its benefits, is underutilized in the nursing professional formation since the knowledge is restricted to the theoretical part.

Nursing undergraduate students do not have much opportunity to use the TP during graduation time. Bearing this in mind, it is necessary to reflect on the need to present the content regarding the therapeutic play in a practical field, and not only in the theoretical one. Furthermore, the academy must have a facilitating and stimulating attitude, allowing the academic to experience the therapeutic action of this intervention. This resource, besides having benefits for the child and his family, can contribute to the student's resourcefulness and assistance by giving him more security during his approach to this population.

As a study limitation, it is worth mentioning that this research has addressed only the reality of a single institution in the State of *Rio de Janeiro*. Therefore, it is necessary to expand the knowledge about this topic by performing other researches in several scenarios.

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