THE PLAYFUL AND HEALTH EDUCATION: A PROPOSAL FOR TEACHING SELF-CARE TO CHILDREN

O LÚDICO E A EDUCAÇÃO EM SAÚDE: UMA PROPOSTA DE ENSINO DO AUTOUCIDADÃO ÂS CRIANÇAS

EL LÚDICO Y LA EDUCACIÓN EN SALUD: UNA PROPUESTA PARA LA ENSEÑANZA DEL AUTOUCIADADO PARA LOS NIÑOS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: expose the experience of Nursing undergraduate students on the use of the playful in health education activities with children participating in the science outreach project “Creating a space for human development”. Methodology: this is a descriptive study, with an experience report design, on the work of Nursing undergraduate students during the implementation of health education actions in a Primary Education School, with 90 children aged from 6 to 11 years, within the period from February to December 2011. Results: the project made it possible to know another way of care, which allows watching over the health and well-being of the individual, the family, and the community. Conclusion: it shows to be of vital importance to respect the values and experiences presented by the study participants, since popular wisdom often constitutes the foundation for constructing scientific knowledge. Descriptors: Child Health; Health Education; Health Promotion; Child Education; Nursing.

RESUMO

Objetivo: expor a experiência de acadêmicas de Enfermagem sobre a utilização do lúdico em atividades de educação em saúde com crianças participantes do projeto de extensão universitária “Criando um espaço para o desenvolvimento humano”. Metodologia: trata-se de estudo descritivo, do tipo relato de experiência, sobre a atuação de acadêmicas de Enfermagem durante a implementação das ações de educação em saúde em uma escola de Ensino Fundamental, com 90 crianças de 6 a 11 anos, no período de fevereiro a dezembro de 2011. Resultados: o projeto possibilitou conhecer outra forma de cuidado, que permite zelar pela saúde e pelo bem-estar do indivíduo, da família e da comunidade. Conclusão: mostra-se de vital importância respeitar os valores e as experiências apresentadas pelos participantes do estudo, uma vez que o saber popular, com frequência, constitui a base para a construção do conhecimento científico. Descriptores: Saúde da Criança; Educação em Saúde; Promoção da Saúde; Educação Infantil; Enfermagem.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: exponer la experiencia de académicas de Enfermería acerca de la utilización del lúdico en actividades de educación en salud con niños participantes del proyecto de extensión universitaria “Creando un espacio para el desarrollo humano”. Metodología: esto es un estudio descriptivo, del tipo reporte de experiencia, acerca de la actuación de académicas de Enfermería durante la implementación de las acciones de educación en salud en una escuela de Educación Básica, con 90 niños de 6 a 11 años, en el período de febrero a diciembre de 2011. Resultados: el proyecto posibilitó conocer otra forma de atención, que permite velar por la salud y el bienestar del individuo, la familia y la comunidad. Conclusión: se muestra de importancia fundamental respetar los valores y las experiencias presentadas por los participantes en el estudio, ya que la sabiduría popular, a menudo, constituye la base para la construcción del conocimiento científico. Descriptores: Salud del Niño; Educación en Salud; Promoción de la Salud; Educación Infantil; Enfermería.

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INTRODUCTION

Childhood represents one of the important periods for constructing values, since this is the developmental phase in which the individual is more sensitive to learning and incorporating positive habits for her/his health. For this reason, the health education made since childhood constitutes an important strategy for health promotion; using the playful by means of games, plays, songs, and puppets favors the teaching/learning process. The playful has a “potential for transforming the everyday practices of children, able to evoke development in its multiple dimensions and lead to putting into practice its potential”.

And, also, this methodology facilitates understanding and interpreting what has been transmitted, allowing a spontaneous and natural learning by the child.

In face of this premise, we designed the health education action named “Hygiene means Health”, conducted in June 2010 by the undergraduate students who, at that time, were attending the curricular activity “Educational Processes II” at the School of Nursing of Universidade Federal do Pará (UFPA). This action was taken with children aged 6 and 7 years in a public school in the town of Ananindeua, Pará, Brazil, and it consisted in surveying their previous knowledge on healthy hygiene habits, and based on this knowledge, formulate activities to reinforce those behaviors regarded as most appropriate for health maintenance. In addition to the lecture, there was also a musical presentation with some songs from a children’s TV program. In order to also reach the parents and relatives of these children, we prepared two folders addressing in a simplified way everything which was exposed during the activity. As there was a need to observe the knowledge absorbed by children, the undergraduate students adapted some games, such as hangman and word search, so that children could apply the knowledge they gained.

Given the positive experience, we observed the possibility of modifying the action and turning it into a project. Thus, in 2011, we started the science outreach project named “Creating a space for human development”, whose proposal was creating a space to stimulate child development by including the nurse into the school context and, thus, provide the children with means and knowledge so that they could create, recreate, and transform their reality.

The project was developed by two students from the Nursing undergraduate course, having as its target public 90 children aged between 6 and 11 years, enrolled in the first grade of Primary Education in a public school in Belém, Pará, Brazil. Its main goal was stimulating the understanding that the health condition is produced in relations to the physical, economic, and sociocultural environments, identifying risk factors to the individual and collective health observed where they live. This provides the Nursing undergraduate student with an interaction with the reality of poor children and their educators, offering them a practical work experience, as well as the chance to learn diversifying and expanding knowledge aspects in their training.

The education activities carried out in the project consisted in the use of mini-lectures, where we also used puppet theater, plays, songs, stories, and staging for the presentation of themes, thus seeking a higher use and better interaction between children and students. As a way of promoting the understanding of knowledge, we used several games, group ballad singing, and dynamics which, in most cases, were adapted to the themes and the age group of children.

Thus, it is believed that such experiences should be shared, so that it is possible to stimulate and encourage the establishment of more actions and/or activities with a sociocultural and education nature in schools and, with this, contribute to enrich knowledge not only of the Brazilian nursing, but also of other professions within the health field, for improving the relationship between the professionals and the community.

This article aims to expose the experience of Nursing undergraduate students about using the playful in the development of health education activities with children participating in the science outreach project “Creating a space for human development”.

LITERATURE REVIEW

◆ Health education in childhood

Currently, health education has been seen as an important tool for constructing knowledge, seeking the individual’s autonomy to perform self-care, since it constitutes a set of knowledge and practices which enable transforming the reality of the individual and the community. In order to reach such a transformation, there is a need to take into account “the subjectivity and singularity of subjects, their culture, experiences, and knowledge, enabling the development of their autonomy”.
Health education may be understood as the sum of the knowledge acquired by the individual through her/his own experiences, with education interventions. These actions were planned in order to lead the individual, group, or community to use the knowledge received in its reality and, through a reflection, voluntarily accept the behavioral measures presented during the education activity. Educating for health does not involve just the transmission of knowledge in lectures or health campaigns, since the mere transmission of knowledge may not be accepted by the community, nor achieve the needed changes to provide an improved quality of life within that group.¹

For this, there is a need to lead this community to a critical thought about certain habits, diseases, their causes and consequences, making people construct, on a more accurate way, their own conceptions about the disease and the way how to avoid it, allowing to change their reality.⁴

It is known that most health problems affecting people results from their lifestyle, that chronic diseases, such as hypertension, diabetes, stress, among others, are directly related to poor nutrition, alcoholism, smoking, lack of physical exercise. A large part of these behaviors are acquired during childhood.⁵ And, by starting school life, the child brings along these values originated in their interaction in the intrafamily environment and their relationship to other social groups, which may positively or negatively influence on their health.⁶ Childhood is a period when the child accepts more easily information, this is an opportune time to learn about personal care. Hence the importance of including health education into childhood, offering the individual the chance to have, from an early age, healthy behaviors and avoid those regarded as harmful to health.⁵

The school should be understood as a space of relations, a privileged space for the critical and political development, contributing to the construction of personal values, beliefs, concepts, and ways of knowing the world and it directly interferes with the social production of health.⁷⁻⁸

In this context, the school, as the place where the child spends several years of her/his life, is regarded as an ideal place for education and health promotion, by taking a critical role in child development, due to its social role and its ability to conduct a systematized and continued work.⁵

As mentioned earlier, it is during childhood that the individual can acquire knowledge and develop skills more easily. For this reason, the health education practiced since childhood constitutes an important strategy to reduce health-related costs, because, by knowing the disease, its causes and consequences, it is possible to prevent its onset, avoid expenses with medicines and medical treatments, among others. Another important aspect to be highlighted is the fact that stimulating in the child the development of skills and healthy habits will cause impacts on society in the short, medium, and long term, because the changes which happen in the individual’s reality during childhood may be embodied and taken or adopted until adulthood, besides fostering the critical education of these children, turning them into adult people concerned and committed to social reality.¹

♦ The playful and child education

“The word playful has its origin in the Latin word ‘ludus’ and it means ‘games’ and ‘play’”.⁹⁻¹⁰ In this playing, there may be observed the amusement and games, which facilitate the child’s learning. Besides, the child, through playing, can develop various skills, such as imagination, creativity, attention, memory, reflection, and discovery, contributing to the construction of their identity and autonomy.⁵ So, “the child is, above all, a human being intended for playing. The game is, thus, a trickery that nature has found to lead the child to adopt an activity which is useful to her physical and mental development”.⁹⁻⁵

It is believed that it is through play that the child fits into reality, as it is during the act of playing that the child reflects, reorganizes, and constructs her/his world.¹ Some authors⁹⁻¹¹ regard the playful as one of the most effective ways to interact with the child, because play is the way how she works, reflects, and discovers the world around her.

The playful is a methodological resource which allows a more comprehensive development and a more realistic view of the world, because it enables the child to analyze, criticize, express her/himself, and change her/his reality.⁹ And, also, this methodology facilitates the understanding and interpretation of what is being transmitted, enabling a spontaneous and natural learning, stimulating creativity, critical thought, ability to socialize, and transformation of the world, leading the child to reproduce reality, according to her/his will, and experience her/his experiences so that it leads to the construction of her/his knowledge.¹ As the following statement shows:

The use of songs, games, theater, and puppets streamline the teaching-learning...
The child’s learning is more effective through the playful, as this facilitates understanding and fosters the acquisition of knowledge by enabling her/his active participation in the knowledge construction process. The act of playing has an important role for constructing the child’s thought. Learning takes place through the formation of concepts and one of the most important fields for the formation of new concepts is playing.6,9

♦ Nursing in the fulfillment of health education activities

According to the National Curriculum Guidelines for the Nursing Undergraduate Course10, it is a nurse’s task conducting actions aimed at health prevention, promotion, protection, and rehabilitation, both at an individual and collective level. This professional must be able to act with a sense of social responsibility and a commitment to citizenship, promoting the human being’s integral health. Thus, health education becomes a tool so that the nurse can fulfill the actions aimed at health prevention, promotion, protection, and even rehabilitation.

Since the 1980s, the nurse has been included into the education context, when health promotion, health care procedures, such as hygiene and feeding, prevention of health problems and accidents became included into the tasks of this professional. Thus, education is closely connected to health, and it should be included into school training.1,11

METHOD

This is a descriptive study, with an experience report design, on the work of Nursing undergraduate students during the implementation of health education actions conducted with 90 children in a public school, within the period from February to December 2011.

For carrying out this study, the source consisted of documents resulting from fulfilling the project, such as the work plan for scholarship holders, the reports of each action conducted, in addition to the final report submitted to the Pro-Deanship for Science Outreach of UFPA. We also searched for material in the databases of the Virtual Health Library with the following descriptors:

- Health education, child health promotion, health at school, and nursing.

**TELLING THE EXPERIENCE**

The project structuring was a time when we regarded as relevant our participation along with the professors responsible for putting the proposal within the parameters established by the Pro-Dean for Education and Science Outreach (Proex) of UFPA. The first contacts with the school provided us with the opportunity to directly interact with the school community and know the reality experienced by these children, their families and the school staff. In a dialogue with the principal, the following themes were suggested for discussion with students: hygiene, feeding, school violence, and sexual education. In a conversation with children selected to participate in the project, we observed the need for also addressing themes such as environment, waste care, and politeness.

Thus, for developing educational technologies and for conducting the health education strategies, we adopted the sensitizing education as a means for reaching the school community, seeking not only to “dictate” what is right or wrong, but rather to provide children and their relatives with knowledge and encourage them to develop skills and healthy habits by formulating their own concepts based on what was transmitted. For this, we used group ballad singing, board games, word searches, crosswords, serial album, and posters as strategies to improve understanding of some concepts on bodily, oral, and environmental hygiene (at home and school). We used different games, such as playing pictures and words, dramatization, and puppets to help acquiring good feeding habits. We also adapted the use of group dynamics, such as: the dynamics on the “spread of diseases” to show children the importance of vaccines to health. There were other kinds of play, which motivated children to show their vaccination records so that we could check whether their vaccinations were up to date.

We, the undergraduate students, took the role to plan, design, execute, and assess the effectiveness of health education activities. In planning, after setting the theme of the week and preparing the education plan, containing the objectives and goals for each activity, as well as the methodological proposal to be used, the materials needed for preparing and implementing the education actions and the action programming, then started the process of selecting the activities to be conducted, in...
addition to the collection of material required for preparing the education action. That done, then, the actions were drafted, by preparing the teaching material: slide presentation, serial album and/or posters, always containing illustrations and an accessible vocabulary, and the development and/or adaptation of games, group dynamics, group ballad singing, among others. And, finally, the execution: the actions took place on Wednesdays, in the afternoon shift, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m..

For conducting group activities, we always tried to use large facilities which enabled developing them in a comfortable and safe way for children. The actions were started with a chat on the topic of the day, in order to observe the prior knowledge on the subject, followed by the lecture, and, subsequently, the playful activities. It can be noticed that, during the actions, both children and teachers showed their interest in the selected theme, expressing their doubts and curiosity about the subject, especially those related to interaction within the school environment. Generally, the mini-lectures were programmed not to exceed 15 minutes, so that they were not tiresome. For the playful moment, we made available from 45 to 60 minutes, depending on the kind of play and, also, the perception of the acceptance of children with regard to the selected leisure activity.

For assessing the results of education activities, we designed a logbook in which the positive and negative points of each action were recorded, in addition to the difficulties presented at the time of implementing the schedule of each activity, which, then, were compared to the education plans in order to observe whether the objectives proposed for each action were fulfilled or not, and, thus, point out which methodological strategies were more effective to address the themes.

Regarding adoption of the playful as a methodological strategy, it is possible to see that when the theme was addressed through dynamics, games, puppet theater, and skits, children’s understanding and apprehension was much more satisfactory than when only a Datashow presentation or a dialogued exposition was conducted. It may be noticed, too, that the use of videos was not well accepted by the group, since some children were not attentive at the exposition time.

In an assessment conducted along with the coordinators of the project, about the impact that the education actions provided the students with, we noticed that, despite the difficulties, children were able to understand that caring for the environment, giving the correct destination to garbage, having adequate hygiene and feeding, having good relationships with their schoolmates and relatives are factors which interfere with their health. And that caring for health is important so that they become healthy adults and committed to the welfare of the community in which they live.

Working in the project enabled experiencing the science outreach tripod, that is, research/teaching/extension, and interacting with the community allowed knowing its reality, observing its problems, socializing knowledge kinds and, through the exchange of experiences, contributing to changes in the reality of that group, besides providing the university, through its students and teachers, with knowledge on the community which it serves.

We reached the project’s end certain that the work was fulfilled, because we could go beyond the university walls and provide a socialization of scientific knowledge with the community by showing the school that it is possible and needed to carry out health education and, thus, promote the development and training of individuals committed to the individual and collective welfare. Regarding teachers, it was possible to show that it is possible to leave traditionalism and make learning more enjoyable and effective by using the playful. Considering that educating is also a way of caring for, we sought to present children knowledge, skills, and abilities for self-care, not only by reproducing a need established by an adult, but as a way to interact with their own body and watch over it. Finally, for we, members of the science outreach group, the project allowed knowing another way of care, different from clinical care, a caring which enables us to watch over the health maintenance and well-being of the individual, her/his family, and her/his community.

**FINAL REMARKS**

It is believed that the inclusion of Nursing undergraduate students into health education activities actively contributes not only to their professional training, but also to their development as citizens, since by sharing the population’s reality, they develop a social responsibility sense, becoming professionals and people committed to the community welfare.

For undergraduate students who participated in the project, it was an immense satisfaction to conduct the activities with a sociocultural education nature, as the feeling...
of living along with a community and sharing their reality is indescribable.

Surely, the experience was important for our growth, both personally and professionally, since we could learn that it is not enough to arrive at the school and “unload” the knowledge acquired in college if we do not show the community how to deal with that knowledge, if we do not try to understand its reality.

For us, undergraduate students, developing the project represented a very important time of the academy, because we sought to commit ourselves at most for conducting the education activities. These activities required preparation, effort, and commitment so that we could always find the most suitable and “fun” way to bring knowledge to those children. Sometimes the planning and execution of actions was an exhausting work, but the conception that the community needed a stimulus which encouraged the positive transformation of its reality and that we, playing the role of caregiver nursing, were able to contribute to this change was an encouragement to move forward.

The project “Creating a space for human development” was designed so that we could share with poor children and, consequently, with their relatives, the knowledge which we have received from the academy. During our walk, we realized how important it is for us, prospective nurses and health educators, to respect the values and experiences brought up by these people, always remembering that the foundation for scientific knowledge, often, is popular wisdom.

Using the playful as a teaching/learning strategy enabled to achieve 90% of our objectives, since we realized that the better prepared our activities were, the greater the understanding of children, who acquired more knowledge.

REFERENCES


The playful and health education...
