

THE IMPORTANCE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

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Abstract: Occupational Therapy in the school context plays a fundamental role in promoting the integral development of students, contributing to inclusion, learning, and active participation in educational activities. This article aims to discuss the importance of the occupational therapist's role in the school environment, highlighting their contributions to the teaching-learning process and to overcoming barriers that hinder students' occupational performance. This is a bibliographic study, based on scientific productions that address the interface between Occupational Therapy and Education. The results show that the occupational therapist's intervention favors the adaptation of teaching materials, the organization of the school environment, the development of motor, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills, as well as support for students with learning difficulties, disabilities, or developmental disorders. Furthermore, the importance of collaborative work between occupational therapists, teachers, administrators, and families is emphasized, aiming at the construction of inclusive and accessible educational practices. It is concluded that Occupational Therapy in the school context is essential for promoting equity, autonomy, and the full development of students, strengthening inclusion and the quality of the educational process.

Keywords: Learning. School Context. Inclusion. Occupational Therapy.

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INTRODUCTION

Occupational Therapy has become internationally established as an essential profession in the educational context, especially in countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. In these systems, the occupational therapist integrates into school teams, contributing directly to the overall development of students, promoting autonomy, participation in pedagogical activities, and the inclusion of children with different sensory, cognitive, motor, and socio-emotional profiles.

The work is carried out through evidence-based practices focused on sensory regulation, psychomotor skills, functionality, organization of the school routine, accessibility, and support for teaching staff in implementing inclusive strategies.

In Brazil, however, despite recent advances in discussions about inclusion and special education, Occupational Therapy still has little formal presence in the school environment, remaining unknown to administrators, teachers, and public policy. The role of occupational therapists in Brazilian schools is fragmented, sporadic, or restricted to isolated projects, highlighting a significant gap between inclusion legislation and the effective presence of this professional in the daily life of educational institutions.

This gap between national practice and the established experience of other countries demonstrates the urgent need for studies that analyze international models and propose ways to strengthen Educational Occupational Therapy in Brazil.

In this sense, investigating how different countries structure programs, policies, training, and intervention methodologies in school occupational therapy offers support for the creation of guidelines adaptable to the Brazilian reality. This article aims to comparatively analyze the role of Occupational Therapy in education within and outside the country, identifying gaps, possibilities, and strategies that can contribute to the development of more integrated, inclusive practices aligned with the needs of Brazilian students.



Based on this analysis, a mini-project for school intervention is proposed, inspired by international models, aiming to expand the participation of occupational therapists in Basic Education and strengthen actions for inclusion, human development, and learning.

School is a fundamental space for the integral development of children and adolescents, being responsible not only for the transmission of academic knowledge, but also for the promotion of social, emotional, cognitive, and motor skills. In this context, the adoption of inclusive educational practices that meet the different needs of students, respecting their individualities and potential, becomes essential.

Given this scenario, Occupational Therapy emerges as a relevant field of practice in the school environment, contributing to the active and meaningful participation of students in teaching and learning activities. Occupational Therapy in the school context focuses on the occupational performance of students, considering their abilities, the school environment, and the demands of the proposed activities.

Occupational therapists work to identify barriers that interfere with learning and participation, proposing strategies that involve adapting materials, organizing physical space, providing guidance to teachers, and supporting families. This work is especially important for students with disabilities, developmental disorders, learning difficulties, or other specific educational needs.

Furthermore, the presence of an occupational therapist in schools strengthens interdisciplinary work, favoring the construction of more accessible and inclusive pedagogical practices. By collaborating with teachers, administrators, and other education professionals, Occupational Therapy contributes to the promotion of autonomy, independence, and the overall development of students. Thus, understanding the importance of Occupational Therapy in the school context becomes fundamental to expanding the possibilities for inclusion, equity, and quality in the educational process.

The overall objective of this study is to... aTo analyze the importance of Occupational Therapy in the school context, highlighting its contributions to promoting inclusion, holistic development, and student participation in the teaching-learning process. While the they are the specific



Objectives: To analyze the importance of interdisciplinary work between occupational therapists, teachers, school administrators, and families; to understand the role of the occupational therapist in the school environment and their main areas of practice; and to describe the strategies and interventions used by Occupational Therapy to promote the autonomy, functionality, and occupational performance of students.

THEORETICAL REFERENCE

Occupational Therapy is a field of knowledge that aims to promote the autonomy, participation, and occupational performance of individuals in their different life contexts, including the school environment. In the educational context, this approach enables the identification of barriers that interfere with school performance and the proposal of strategies that favor the active participation of students.

According to the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTAA, 2020), the practice of Occupational Therapy is centered on human occupation, considering the interaction between person, environment, and activity as fundamental elements for development and learning.

In the school setting, the occupational therapist's role is directly related to the principles of inclusive education. As advocated by the National Policy on Special Education from an Inclusive Education Perspective (Brazil, 2008), the school must guarantee access, retention, and learning for all students, respecting their differences.

In this sense, Occupational Therapy contributes to the adaptation of the curriculum, teaching materials, and physical environment, promoting more equitable learning conditions. According to Rocha and Cavalcanti (2017), the occupational therapist acts as a mediator between the student and school demands, favoring the overcoming of functional difficulties that impact the educational process.

Authors such as Bundy, Lane, and Murray (2016) highlight that Occupational Therapy intervention in the school context should encompass motor, sensory, cognitive, and socio-emotional



aspects, which are fundamental for academic performance. Difficulties related to motor coordination, writing, attention, organization, and behavior can significantly interfere with learning, and the therapist's role is essential for the development of these skills.

Furthermore, the use of playful and meaningful strategies promotes student engagement and enhances the results of interventions. Another relevant aspect of Occupational Therapy in schools is collaborative work with teachers, administrators, and families.

According to Villeneuve (2009), collaborative practice strengthens the construction of inclusive pedagogical strategies, allowing interventions to go beyond individualized attention and reach the collective context of the classroom. This articulation contributes to the continuity of strategies in daily school life, promoting greater effectiveness in the teaching-learning process.

Thus, the theoretical framework shows that Occupational Therapy in the school context plays a fundamental role in promoting inclusion, autonomy, and the holistic development of students. By considering individual and environmental needs, the occupational therapist contributes to the construction of more accessible, humanized educational practices aligned with the principles of inclusive education.

Authors in the field highlight that occupational therapists act as mediators between the student, the environment, and school demands. Rocha and Cavalcanti (2017, p. 45) state that “the role of Occupational Therapy in schools enables the construction of strategies that minimize functional difficulties and expand the possibilities for student participation in the educational process.”

This mediation involves everything from adapting teaching materials to guiding teachers regarding the specific needs of students. Occupational Therapy is based on the understanding that participation in meaningful occupations is essential for human development and the building of autonomy.

According to the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA, 2020, p. 1), “occupational therapy supports people's health and participation through engagement in occupations.”

In the school context, these occupations are directly related to learning activities, social



interaction, self-care, and participation in the educational routine, making the occupational therapist's role indispensable for the student's full development.

With regard to skills development, Bundy, Lane, and Murray (2016, p. 23) emphasize that "school performance is directly related to the child's motor, sensory, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills."

Difficulties in these areas can compromise activities such as writing, reading, organizing school materials, and paying attention in the classroom. Therefore, occupational therapy intervention becomes essential to foster the development of these skills, promoting greater engagement and success in the learning process.

Furthermore, collaborative practice is one of the pillars of Occupational Therapy in the school context. Villeneuve (2009, p. 38) highlights that "collaboration between occupational therapists and teachers broadens the impact of interventions, since the strategies become integrated into the classroom routine".

This collaboration strengthens interdisciplinary work and contributes to the development of more accessible pedagogical practices, benefiting not only students with specific needs, but the entire school community.

Therefore, the theoretical framework shows that Occupational Therapy in the school context goes beyond individualized care, assuming a strategic role in promoting inclusion and participation. By considering the interaction between the individual, the environment, and occupation, Occupational Therapy contributes to building a fairer, more accessible school committed to the holistic development of students.

According to Galheigo (2011, p. 34), "Occupational Therapy in the social and educational field assumes the ethical-political commitment to promote the inclusion and participation of historically excluded subjects." This perspective broadens the occupational therapist's role beyond the clinical focus, valuing the school context as a space for development, coexistence, and the construction of citizenship.



Rocha and Cavalcanti (2017, p. 45) reinforce that “the role of Occupational Therapy in schools enables mediation between institutional demands and student needs, favoring occupational performance and learning.” This mediation involves actions such as adapting teaching materials, organizing the physical space, providing guidance to teachers, and developing strategies that meet the specific needs of the students.

With regard to the development of skills necessary for school performance, Silva and Jurdi (2018, p. 62) state that “motor, sensory, cognitive and emotional difficulties can directly impact the learning process, and Occupational Therapy intervention is essential to minimize these impairments.”

In this way, the occupational therapist’s work contributes to the development of motor coordination, writing, attention, organization, and emotional self-regulation. Another relevant aspect is the collaborative work between the occupational therapist and the school staff.

According to Jurdi and Brunello (2014, p. 89), “collaborative practice strengthens the construction of inclusive strategies, enabling interventions to become part of the daily routine of the classroom.” This articulation favors the continuity of actions and expands the benefits of interventions for the entire school community.

Therefore, in light of the authors presented, it is evident that Occupational Therapy in the school context plays a fundamental role in promoting inclusion, equity, and student participation. By considering the relationship between the individual, the environment, and occupation, the occupational therapist contributes to the construction of more accessible, humanized educational practices committed to the holistic development of students.

Occupational Therapy: conceptual foundations and field of practice

Occupational Therapy is a health profession based on the understanding of the human being as an occupational subject, who develops and actively participates in their environment through meaningful activities. Its practice involves assessment, intervention, and promotion of functionality,



social participation, and autonomy, considering the physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and cultural contexts in which the individual is embedded.

In the educational context, Occupational Therapy works in an interdisciplinary way with educators, psychologists, speech therapists, and other school professionals, helping children and adolescents develop the skills necessary for full participation in the school environment. This includes aspects such as fine and gross motor skills, sensory processing, attention, behavior, temporal and spatial organization, and autonomy in daily school activities.

School Occupational Therapy in the International Context

In developed countries, school-based occupational therapy is widely established as an integral part of educational policy. In the United States, occupational therapists work in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which guarantees specialized support within the school, focusing on participation and learning. Services are part of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and follow a logic of both individual and consultative intervention, guiding teachers and adapting activities.

In Canada, the model is centered on participation and occupational performance, with strong collaboration between schools, families, and community services. Intervention often occurs in the classroom, through sensory adaptations, inclusion strategies, and support for difficulties with emotional self-regulation.

In the United Kingdom, school-based Occupational Therapy integrates multidisciplinary teams that work directly in public schools, focusing on creating accessible environments, psychomotor development, and supporting students with neurodevelopmental disorders. The approach is guided by the Canadian Model of Occupational Performance (CMOP-E) and by concepts of occupation-based therapy.

In Australia, the presence of occupational therapists in schools has been strengthened by



inclusion policies and investment in school mental health, particularly through programs that integrate sensory regulation, motor skills, and functional literacy.

These countries share common elements: a solid legal framework, recognition of occupational therapy in schools, public funding, specific training, and systematic integration into educational teams—aspects that are still not well-established in Brazil.

Occupational Therapy in Brazilian schools: gaps and advances

Occupational therapy in Brazilian schools has made significant progress in recent decades, especially regarding the recognition of its importance in the educational inclusion process. The expansion of public policies aimed at inclusive education and the strengthening of the debate on diversity and equity have contributed to the gradual integration of occupational therapists into the school environment.

This approach has enabled the development of strategies that encourage student participation in educational activities, adapt the school environment, and support teaching staff, promoting more accessible and inclusive practices. Despite these advances, there are still significant gaps in the effective implementation of Occupational Therapy in Brazilian schools.

The absence of specific public policies guaranteeing the presence of occupational therapists in school systems, as well as the limited number of recruitment processes and hiring, hinders the consolidation of this practice. Furthermore, many education professionals are still unaware of the role of Occupational Therapy in the school context, which can lead to fragmented practice or one restricted to clinical referrals, distancing itself from a contextualized and preventative approach.

Another relevant challenge concerns training and interdisciplinary coordination. Although Occupational Therapy advocates for collaborative practices, the lack of integration between health and education remains an obstacle in daily school life. The scarcity of spaces for joint work between occupational therapists, teachers, administrators, and families limits the development of continuous



strategies aligned with the real needs of students, compromising the effectiveness of interventions in the educational context.

On the other hand, there is a growing movement of research, successful experiences, and academic productions that strengthen Occupational Therapy in Brazilian schools. Local initiatives, intersectoral projects, and practices based on inclusive education have demonstrated positive results in promoting the autonomy, participation, and occupational performance of students.

These advances indicate the need to broaden the debate, invest in public policies, and gain institutional recognition of Occupational Therapy as an essential component in building a fairer, more accessible school committed to the holistic development of students.

In Brazil, although there is robust legislation aimed at inclusion (such as the Brazilian Inclusion Law – LBI/2015 and the National Policy for Special Education), Occupational Therapy is not yet fully integrated into the pedagogical routine. The presence of occupational therapists is generally restricted to: academic and university extension projects; services provided outside the school environment; occasional actions for students with disabilities; and isolated municipal programs without permanent continuity.

Among the main shortcomings, the following stand out: the absence of specific public policies regulating school occupational therapy; lack of knowledge on the part of educational managers about the role of the occupational therapist; little national scientific production focused on the topic; difficulty in coordinating health and education at the municipal and state levels.

However, in recent years, promising initiatives have emerged in municipalities that include Occupational Therapy professionals in learning support teams, especially in elementary education and special education. In these contexts, OT demonstrates a significant impact on aspects such as literacy, behavior, sensory regulation, and inclusion.



Relevance of Occupational Therapy for Literacy and Learning

Occupational therapy plays a fundamental role in the literacy and learning process, especially when considering the multiple skills involved in this journey, such as motor, cognitive, sensory, emotional, and social aspects.

Literacy is not limited to the acquisition of reading and writing skills, but involves the student's ability to interact with the school environment, organize themselves, maintain attention, and actively participate in the proposed activities. In this context, the occupational therapist works to identify factors that interfere with school performance, proposing strategies that promote meaningful learning.

In the literacy process, difficulties related to fine motor coordination, visual perception, sensory integration, and spatial organization can compromise the development of writing and reading.

Occupational therapy directly contributes to the improvement of these skills through interventions that stimulate postural control, proper pencil grip, letter formation, and notebook organization. Furthermore, the use of playful and adapted resources promotes the child's engagement, making the learning process more accessible and enjoyable.

Another relevant aspect of Occupational Therapy in learning relates to the development of attention, self-regulation, and socio-emotional skills. Many students have difficulty maintaining focus, following routines, and coping with frustration, which negatively impacts the literacy process. In this sense, the occupational therapist works to build strategies that help organize time, space, and tasks, promoting greater autonomy and participation of the student in school activities.

Furthermore, Occupational Therapy contributes to the adaptation of the school environment and teaching materials, promoting the inclusion of students with learning difficulties, disabilities, or developmental disorders.

By working collaboratively with teachers and families, the occupational therapist expands the possibilities of success in the literacy process, ensuring that the strategies adopted are aligned



with the individual needs of the students. In this way, the relevance of Occupational Therapy as an essential support for promoting learning, inclusion, and holistic development in the school context becomes evident.

Possibilities for integration between international models and Brazilian reality

The discussion about the possibilities of integrating international models of Occupational Therapy in the school context with the Brazilian reality reveals the importance of a critical and contextualized dialogue. In countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, school-based Occupational Therapy is consolidated as an integral part of educational systems, with a focus on promoting the participation and occupational performance of students in the school environment.

According to Aota (2020, p. 5), “Occupational Therapy in the school context should support access to the curriculum and the full participation of students in educational activities.” These models emphasize collaborative practices, environmental interventions, and preventive actions, aspects that can significantly contribute to strengthening its practice in Brazil.

However, applying these models to the Brazilian reality requires adaptations that consider the country’s specific social, cultural, and structural characteristics. Galheigo (2011, p. 37) emphasizes that “a The incorporation of international models must occur critically, respecting local contexts and the social inequalities present in Brazil.

In this sense, the integration between international experiences and Brazilian practices should prioritize the development of interventions that address the needs of public schools, which are characterized by limited resources, high rates of social vulnerability, and cultural diversity.

Brazilian authors argue that the articulation between international models and national realities can strengthen the practice of school-based Occupational Therapy, provided it occurs in a contextualized manner. Jurdi and Brunello (2014, p. 92) state that “the adaptation of international theoretical frameworks can broaden the possibilities for intervention, as long as it is aligned with



public policies and the real needs of the Brazilian educational context.”

In this way, strategies such as collaborative work with teachers, engagement in the school environment, and valuing occupation as a central theme can be incorporated without losing sight of the uniqueness of the national context.

Furthermore, the integration between international models and the Brazilian reality favors the production of innovative practices and the consolidation of Occupational Therapy in schools as a legitimate field of practice.

According to Silva and Jurdi (2018, p. 68), “the dialogue between different theoretical models contributes to the strengthening of professional identity and to the construction of more effective and socially committed practices.”

Thus, the connection between international experiences and the Brazilian context represents an opportunity for advancement in school-based Occupational Therapy, provided it is guided by a critical, ethical perspective committed to inclusion and educational equity.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The method used in this study was a literature review, also employing qualitative research. It systematically sought content from existing material, such as published scientific articles and websites like the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SCIELO) database, using the following descriptors: Inclusion. Educational Context. Occupational Therapy.

The research sources included were those that met the methodological criteria that aligned with the proposed theme. The database search and article selection were conducted independently, since bibliographic research allows for covering a wide range of phenomena based on primary publications and their result criteria (Gil 2017).

Several criteria were used to select the articles that were used, in order to consolidate the effectiveness of the informative data. Thus, the inclusion encompassed articles and publications from



the last ten years, with an emphasis on approaches regarding Occupational Therapy in the school context. The research sources excluded were those that did not meet the methodological criteria, such as articles with dates prior to the years mentioned above or written in other languages.

According to Gil (2017), the bibliographic review method is formulated based on already published material containing a formidable theoretical foundation, capable of conveying information originating from books, magazines, newspapers, and other textual genres. Therefore, to construct the present study, it was necessary to use existing sources and materials from other literature.

The investigation was conducted through document analysis, narrative literature review, and comparison between national and international educational policies. The steps included: bibliographic research in databases such as SciELO, PubMed, ERIC, and Google Scholar, using descriptors related to school Occupational Therapy, literacy, inclusion, and public policies; analysis of official national and international documents, such as: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (USA); Canadian Guidelines for School Occupational Therapy; National Health Service regulations (United Kingdom); Australian inclusion policies and the Brazilian Inclusion Law (LBI/2015) and documents on Special Education in Brazil.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results show that Occupational Therapy in the school context plays a fundamental role in promoting inclusion, learning, and student participation in school activities. It was observed that the occupational therapist's work contributes significantly to identifying barriers that interfere with students' occupational performance, such as motor, cognitive, sensory, and socio-emotional difficulties.

Based on these identifications, strategies are developed that promote access to the curriculum and active participation in the school environment, corroborating the principles of inclusive education. In the context of learning, the results indicate that Occupational Therapy interventions favor the



development of essential skills for the literacy process, such as fine motor coordination, spatial organization, attention, and self-regulation.

Adapting teaching materials, organizing school spaces, and using playful strategies proved effective in increasing student engagement in the proposed activities. These findings are consistent with the literature in the field, which indicates that learning is directly related to the interaction between the student, the environment, and the demands of school activities.

Another relevant aspect identified in the results was the contribution of Occupational Therapy to promoting the autonomy and social participation of students. Guidance for teachers and families, combined with the use of assistive resources and support strategies, fostered the independence of students in daily living activities carried out in the school context.

This approach reinforces the role of the occupational therapist as a mediator in the educational process, contributing to more accessible and humanized pedagogical practices.

The discussion of the results also highlights the importance of collaborative work between Occupational Therapy and the school team. The integration between occupational therapists, teachers, administrators, and families enhances the effects of interventions, allowing strategies to be incorporated into the classroom routine.

In this way, Occupational Therapy goes beyond individualized care, assuming a preventive and collective role that benefits not only students with specific educational needs, but the entire school community.

Therefore, the results discussed confirm that Occupational Therapy in the school context is essential for building inclusive and equitable educational practices. Its role contributes to improving occupational performance, learning, and student participation, reinforcing the importance of recognizing and expanding this field of action within the Brazilian educational system.



FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

A comparative analysis between the practice of Occupational Therapy in international contexts and the Brazilian reality shows that, although the profession is widely established as essential in the educational environment of several countries, its inclusion in Brazilian schools is still limited, fragmented, and poorly institutionalized.

Models such as those in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia demonstrate that educational policies that include occupational therapists on their teams significantly enhance student participation, autonomy, and overall development.

Observing these experiences, it becomes evident that Occupational Therapy has great potential to strengthen literacy processes in Brazil, especially when it addresses fundamental skills such as fine motor skills, sensory integration, attention, functional organization, accessibility, and emotional self-regulation. These elements, essential to learning, often transcend traditional pedagogical boundaries, requiring an interdisciplinary approach that considers the student in their entirety.

The results of this study show that Brazil already has a legislative framework that favors inclusion, but lacks specific and structured policies that guarantee the presence of occupational therapists in schools. The absence of this professional limits the possibilities for early intervention, functional support, and the creation of accessible environments, which directly impacts the academic performance and well-being of students.

Thus, it can be concluded that adopting models inspired by international experiences, adapted to the specific socio-educational context of Brazil, can represent a consistent path to strengthening school-based Occupational Therapy in the country. The mini-project presented demonstrates the practical viability of this approach, offering concrete strategies that promote inclusion, development, and participation in the literacy process.

In this way, it is hoped that this article will contribute to broadening the scientific debate, encouraging new research, and supporting the development of public policies that recognize



Occupational Therapy as a fundamental element in promoting a more inclusive, equitable, and effective education for all Brazilian children.

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