CRAFT AS CONTEXT IN THERAPEUTIC CHANGE

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Abstract:
Craft has been one of the first therapeutic occupations of occupational therapy. However, it has been used as an occupation-focused practice without theorizing and specifying its value and position in the contemporary practice. The situation poses a challenge to define the therapeutic use of craft. The purpose of this article is to compose a starting point for the arguments and for the reasoning behind the choice of craft as therapeutic activity.

The basis for craft as a context in therapeutic change can be elaborated by defining craft as an activity and by describing the therapeutic nature of craft. Craft in therapeutic change, and the therapeutic use of craft will be analyzed with the concepts of craft as therapy and craft in therapy. This is carried out by analysing the concepts and their differences as well as by comparing them with art and music therapy.

Key words: Craft, Therapy, Therapeutic, Change.

INTRODUCTION

The use of craft has been significant in occupational therapy since of the early history of the profession. Historically, the use of occupational therapy as an integral aspect of treatment has fluctuated in relation to the prevailing understanding about the causes of mental illness or disability and other social and political factors.1

Originally occupational therapy was called work therapy and it meant economic help and keeping the patient active. Craft was mostly concretized in a model of work therapy which also included elements of leisure time activities.2 The patients learnt valuable and useful skills, and the same time improved their physical condition.3 Particularly those who dealt with disabled or mentally ill patients recognized the benefit of art and aesthetic impulses as a considerable focus area of therapy: aesthetically oriented art and handicrafts were introduced in occupational therapy.4

Throughout the history of occupational therapy, trends calling for a return to the therapeutic use of arts and crafts, or alternatively, for their abandonment have both reappeared. Craft has been used as a therapeutic tool or an occupation-focused practice without clearly theorizing and specifying it.5 The literature discussing this field of domain has concentrated mostly on practical knowledge that is needed when therapists use craft with patients in their therapy and activity programs.6,7 Drake (1999) argues that some of the textbooks in the field do not even mention craft in the indices or tables of contents even though they describe craft in therapeutic use. This is characteristic of the ambivalence felt by occupational therapists with respect to craft as a valuable modality.

Recent discussions by occupational therapists have strongly suggested that although craft is relevant to occupational therapy, there are uncertainties about its position in the contemporary practice. Harris’s (2008)8 findings among occupational therapists suggest that while craft-making has therapeutic value and that reasoning about the therapeutic use of craft is similar to reasoning about other therapeutic activities; the personal experience of craft-making has a strong influence on the selection of craft as activity.

While craft as one type of purposeful activity has been a traditional modality, the therapeutic activity has not been adequately demonstrated in research.9,10,11,12 Drake (1999) argues that occupational therapists have intuitively understood that craft is a valuable therapeutic media for rehabilitation. However, there is some scientific evidence to show how craft can perform rehabilitative functions and therapeutic change efficiently.10,11,12 Drake (1999) suggests that in a clinical setting craft is also useful during short hospital stays.

The situation poses a challenge to define the concept of craft and also the therapeutic use of craft to contribute to the value of craft in occupational therapy. The main focus in practice is that therapists are able to fit the therapeutic activities and contexts together so that a specific craft can be chosen for a specific need.

MATERIAL & METHOD

This article explores the ways occupational therapists can
compose a basis for the reasoning behind the choice of craft as a therapeutic activity. The themes taken into consideration are:

- craft as an activity
- the therapeutic nature of craft
- craft in therapeutic change

The basis for craft as a context in therapeutic change can be elaborated by defining craft as an activity and by describing the therapeutic nature of craft. Craft as an activity is defined by bringing new concepts of craft science into examination. The therapeutic nature of craft is described based on the literature on craft in therapy and rehabilitation. Then craft in therapeutic change, and the therapeutic use of craft, are elaborated with the concepts of craft as therapy and craft in therapy. This is carried out by analysing the concepts and their differences as well as by comparing them with art and music therapy theories.

This research is based on articles touching upon craft (6) and the therapeutic nature of craft (12), and articles and theories on art (2) and music (4) therapy. The data was searched manually through library collections and e-journals in order to find relevant research literature. A critical appraisal was conducted in order to ensure the suitability of the studies and to ensure their quality. Literature was analysed and collected using inductive content analysis.

RESULTS

CRAFT AS AN ACTIVITY

Craft can be described as a distinctive knowledge that is intuitive and expressed through making and doing. This refers to the act of making, to bodily kinaesthetic intelligence and to intuitive learning which occurs in the craft process by evaluation and apprenticeship.

Kojonkoski-Rännäli (1995) has divided the concept of craft into six following elements: 1) Craft can be seen as a basis for human activity, for which the individual has a natural need. 2) Making an object by hand creates an organic connection between the individual and nature. The craft process leads the maker to learn to respect and understand nature. 3) The concrete object, the external result, is of great importance to the development of the individual’s self-concept and self-esteem. 4) Craft as an integrated activity, where the same individual is in charge of all the phases of the process, 5) results to the growth of internal qualifications and abilities in harmonious balance between the various sides of his or her personality. 6) It can be said, that the craft process develops the individual’s pragmatic sense, which helps him or her to analyze the relations between different events and situations in life.

Craft as an activity can also be divided to ordinary craft and holistic craft. These concepts refer to the design and manufacturing process of handicraft and the role of the maker in that process. In the holistic craft process, all the phases are conducted by the same person either on his or her own or in a group. The maker is in charge of the ideas, the design, the preparing and finally the assessment of the artefact and the production process. The concept of holistic craft process is often referred to simply as holistic craft. Holistic craft comprises all the phases of the craft process, so that if some phase is left out it becomes ordinary craft. Ordinary, reproductive craft is craft without the maker affecting the design phase. Here the maker uses a ready-made design that contains the aesthetic or technical qualities of the artefact or a series of technical solutions. Ordinary craft can also be a process in which the maker reproduces a previously learned model or technique. This kind of craft can be labelled as the making of the object. Thus the craft-maker is for example copying the product from a model, using strictly guiding instructions or utilising prepared substances.

THE THERAPEUTIC NATURE OF CRAFT

Tubbs and Drake (2007) describe the therapeutic nature of craft as something that enhances personal strengths and functioning by sensory, psychological and social significance. Craft can help clients realize that through the design process, or process of taking raw materials or minimally prepared substances and processing, assembling, and forming them, the clients can do the same with their lives.

Schütz (2003) refers to the therapeutic process of craft with three dimensions. He illustrates the therapeutic nature of craft through the materials and the artefacts, the self-reflection and the social dimensions related to craft. The main basis for the therapeutic nature of craft is the opportunity to create a safety zone which makes it possible to analyze events and situations in life, difficult emotions and experiences from a symbolic distance. Regression that takes place in creative activity can be said to be in the service of the ego.

The analysis revealed that craft can be usefully in achieving therapeutic changes in following areas: physiology (heart rate, respiration etc.), psychophysiology (pain, level of consciousness etc.), sensomotor development (internalization of visual, tactile and kinaesthetic functions, fine motor coordination etc.), perception (discrimination of differences etc.), cognition (learning skills, knowledge, attitudes, short and long-term retention etc.), behaviour (activity level, activity level, safety, accuracy etc.), craft-related skills (composing, craft techniques, using equipments and materials etc.), emotions (anxiety, depression, motivation, imagery etc.), communication (verbal and nonverbal...
communication, expressive skills etc.), interpersonal (role behaviours, relationship patterns, sensitivity etc.) and creativity (inventiveness, artistry etc.).

It can be concluded that craft can be an empowering way to functional mental health as it minimizes the exposing stressors and holds positive illusions, while it can strengthen the sense of coherence and self-confidence and self-acceptance. Craft may act as a cognitive filter and distraction by maintaining positive mood in cases where a cognitive filter is needed to distort negative information or thoughts in a positive direction, or where it is needed to isolate or represent them in an unthreatening a manner as possible.

CRAFT IN THERAPEUTIC CHANGE

In therapy clients can find craft meaningful in many ways and that meaningfulness is essential to the process and effectiveness of therapeutic change. This therapeutic change based on craft can be elaborated with the help of Bruscia’s (198722; 1998 a23; 1998 b24) classifications from music therapy. Accordingly, craft can be divided to craft as therapy and craft in therapy, two methods to be used in different phases of a therapy process. The difference between these two concepts becomes clearer, when we examine the meaning attached to them.

Craft can also be compared with the self expression of improvisational models used in music therapy, and be examined by applying Bruscia’s (1987) division of the absolute and referential points of view. Craft can be viewed as a catalyst for emotional experiences and cognitive processes – that is the absolute sense. In that case craft has the role of therapy (craft as therapy). On the other hand, craft can be seen as unconscious self expression – that is the referential sense, and thus craft has the role of a therapy method (craft in therapy).

In the absolute sense, craft as therapy, the meaning of craft can be in craft itself, since the whole process of working by hand or the final artefact can be therapeutic. The therapeutic issues are accessed, worked through, and resolved through using craft. An individual generates new craft experiences through cognitive processes. Craft, making by hand, the interaction between the material, the tools and techniques, self-expression, the reflective process or the interaction with other people hold the central place25. Thereby craft itself becomes therapeutic. The therapeutic change is based on the relationship between the individual and craft. Making by hand and the potential element of intervention may bring about changes in emotions, bodily and sensory experiences, patterns of thought, actions and behaviour. In these cases the therapy or the therapeutic process is described afterwards as craft and by the terminology of craft.

If the main focus of therapy is in learning and self expression, an individual acts either on her/his own or with another person. The role of the therapist is mainly to support and stimulate the emerging and the deepening of the relationship between craft and the individual. Therefore the role is more of a mentor of the craft process than that of a therapist26. This kind of method works best for example in performance areas that include daily living activities, play or leisure activities, craft-related work or other productive activities. The activities may include for example motor and process skills performance components.27 It is also suitable for cases where there is a need for self-expression or cathartic processing or a need to try out different methods and the limits of self expression. It is also useful when the client has challenges in verbal or cognitive processing, as well as for those with a tendency to over-intellectualise their experiences. In these cases concentrating on making by hand may create a symbolic distance or a certain kind of a metaphor.

From the referential point of view, craft in therapy, craft has an external relevance. It has a symbolic quality and the context of craft has a high significance. Here, the artefacts and the associations and conceptions triggered by the craft process are of a therapeutic nature or they are the material of therapy. The issues processed with the aid of craft can be related to past or present life experiences, as well as to constructing the future. In a referential process self expression craft may be considered as something that operates as an instrument for expressing the inner world. The individual describes in her/his craft process – in the self-made artefact or a product made by someone else – some image, person, perception, situation or emotions from her/his own world of experience or cultural background.

The referential approach is successful when the focus is for example in psychosocial skills and psychological performance components. It is most useful in situations where there’s a need to process conscious emotions, events, thoughts and memories, or the aim is to unblock and deal with unconscious issues from various areas of life or the psyche. These cases can be referred to as psycho-dynamically oriented therapy. In craft the referential process is based on the fact that craft acts as the instrument of therapy. The focus is in the interaction between the therapist and the client. In craft this can also take the form of interaction with the material that is worked on. The language of craft and the craft process is thus intertwined with the expression of unconscious issues so that the therapy and the therapeutic process is described with terms not related to craft. The process can be described as some kind of metaphorical communication between a therapist and clients29. The concepts used are closely related to, for example, the self, identity and change.
In the craft-making process conscious issues may be expressed through bodily actions, such as in the banging of the looms or calming routine-like knitting. Thus the mind has time to go through and organize what has happened and plan for the future. This process can also occur by memorizing self-made artefacts, looking at photographs of them, or by a form of social interaction. Interaction and guiding skills are essential for the therapist, and the role is closer to the role of a therapist than that of a mentor.

In practice, however, the role of craft in the therapeutic process doesn’t have to be dualistic in the sense described above. Craft can act both as a form of therapy and as a tool for it, while the focus may shift during the therapy process. In therapy, the needs of the individual dictate the role of craft in each phase. Therefore craft can be applied in various ways during the one and the same therapy process.

**CONCLUSION**

From the perspective of craft, the type of the activity will be chosen in accordance with the client’s needs. Craft as therapy and craft in therapy can involve activities from either ordinary or holistic craft. For example ordinary craft can be a protective factor minimizing the feelings of distress or lack of motivation. Besides developing sensomotory skills, learning new skills, relaxation, improving moods and satisfaction can also mean restructuring the ego. Holistic craft can create skilled labour. In self expression holistic craft can sustain one’s self image while providing experiences that integrate the ego. We can talk also about coping and about modifying the ego.

Craft can be utilized as therapeutic media for rehabilitation or as a systematic method of therapy where craft as a concrete activity empowers the individual. It is based on the elements of the activity, on the close relationship, on the trust that builds up within the client, on the experience of understanding and interpreting the clients and their needs, and on the development of cooperation in activity.

Because therapy is used in a variety of clinical situations, the process of therapeutic change can be described in different ways. Craft as a context in therapeutic change may have the following main functions (see Bruscia 1998 b):

- The *didactic* area of practice pursues to support the individual in enhancing satisfaction in life and a sense of meaningfulness.
- The *recreational* area consists of functions that increase life quality and wellness by pleasure in life, recreational activities or by taking part in social and cultural activities.
- The *ecological* area of practice applies craft in different contexts related to health and well-being; core activities may include an empowering intervention in family, workplace, community, or in society or culture.

Craft as therapy and craft in therapy can be implemented on a helping (auxiliary), fortifying (augmentative), intensive or primary level (see Bruscia 1998 b). The scope and depth of the activity as well as the significance of the intervention and the therapeutic change vary according to the level of practice. The helping level refers to using craft in its different forms as a therapeutic activity. On this level craft can be a hobby or a self-treating activity that is not aiming at a systematic therapy process. The purpose is to benefit from the therapeutic qualities of craft. On the fortifying level craft can support the treatment or rehabilitation plan as a whole. Thus craft provides practical or therapeutic support to another form of treatment. On the intensive level craft could have an independent position in the therapy process as a specific form of treatment. On this level craft could be part of rehabilitation or therapy. On the primary level of practice craft therapy would focus solely on the client’s therapeutic needs. Here the process and the aims of therapy extend to the medical and ecological area of practice.

When craft is applied in a therapy process, the focus is in craft, in the activity itself and in the emotions, experiences and language connected to it. The handicap, illness, pain and sense of unworthiness or some other issue that is considered a difficulty, are all put aside. Craft is an active, holistic function where the design or making-process, or e.g. the touching and looking at the artefact produce various psychophysical meanings. It can be said that craft can appear as an area of life that individuals can fully control according to their own terms, so that it supports the sense of control in life. Craft can help in attaining a feeling of life management and fully functional personality in situations where all the other areas of life are uncontrollable. The craft maker can tap into the different elements of craft just like Kojonkoski-Rännäli (1995) have described as resources and do so in the way they want.

Craft as therapy and craft in therapy can be used within the evolving relationship between a client and a therapist to support and encourage physical, mental, social and emotional well-being. While using craft can not do everything, it is an important and valid treatment medium among other treatment activities. Craft can offer an empowering context for
therapeutic change.

REFERENCES

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