

Occupational therapy intervention with children survivors of war

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Key words

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- Mental health
- Preventive health care

Abstract

A preventive occupational therapy program with children surviving the Kosovo conflict is examined. The objective of the program was to facilitate the emotional expression of traumatic experiences in order to prevent the development of future psychological problems. The intervention was based on a community-centred approach with spirituality as a central focus of the intervention. The Model of Human Occupation and the Occupational Performance Process Model were utilized to guide the identification and intervention of occupational performance issues. The children's return from a land of war to a land of children demonstrates the potential of occupational therapy intervention in this field. With increasing awareness of populations facing social and political challenges, there is a growing importance of the concept of occupational justice and the need to work against occupational apartheid.

Résumé

Cet article décrit un programme de prévention en ergothérapie qui était destiné aux enfants ayant survécu au conflit du Kosovo. L'objectif du programme était d'aider les enfants à exprimer les émotions qu'ils avaient ressenties lors d'expériences traumatiques afin de prévenir l'apparition de problèmes psychologiques. L'intervention était basée sur une approche communautaire s'articulant autour de la spiritualité. Le Modèle de l'occupation humaine et le Modèle du processus d'intervention dans le rendement occupationnel ont été utilisés pour cibler les difficultés en matière de rendement occupationnel et pour déterminer les interventions requises. Le retour des enfants d'un monde de guerre vers le monde de l'enfance démontre la possibilité de proposer une intervention ergothérapique dans ce domaine. La conscientisation de plus en plus grand face à la détresse des populations confrontées à des problèmes politiques et sociaux entraîne une augmentation de l'importance du concept de la justice occupationnelle et du besoin de lutter contre l'apartheid occupationnel.

No man is an island, no one is complete alone, man is a piece of the continent, a part of the whole, if a piece of land is destroyed by the sea, it does not matter if it happens in Europe, in your friend's house or in your own house. The death of any being makes us smaller, because we are integrated in humanity. For that, do not ask for who the bells are ringing, the bells are ringing for you.

John Donne

There are no words to describe the mental and emotional state of people following the tragedy of war. In particular, children who remain in the city during the war are left with unforgettable traumatic experiences from witnessing atrocities, living through the violence and the fear of the constant threat of death. For 12-year old Maida, "War is the saddest word that I can pronounce. It is a bad bird that never rests. It is the death bird that destroys the houses and steals us our infancy. War is the evil bird that converts the world into hell." (Unicef, 1993)

Prevention, as opposed to treatment, has been the focus of discussion in occupational therapy for some time. In 1973, West stressed the need for preventive occupational therapy for children in community psychosocial settings, as interventions that identify risks and promote well-being outweigh those of treatment. We believe occupational therapy interventions focused on prevention are critical for children impacted by war.

Occupational therapists' abilities to innovate and highlight the strengths of the community are invaluable tools of intervention where there are few economic resources and disadvantaged social and cultural environments. For example, Wilcock (1998) urges occupational therapists to expand their roles to include the promotion of health and well-being with all persons, especially those living under grave political and social conditions. Kronenberg (1999) introduced the concept of occupational apartheid, referring to chronic (established) environmental conditions that deny marginalized populations (individual, community and societal levels) access to rightful meaningful occupations, which jeopardizes their health and well-being. This defines health and well-being as a fundamental human right to access meaningful occupations.

The role of occupational therapy is to empower members of the community to recognize their own potential through meaningful occupations and to work towards occupational justice. When working with children in areas affected by war, occupational therapists aim to enable the development of strong internal resources that will contribute to healthy development and the prevention of psychological consequences of trauma. In spite of the unique potential of occupational therapy in this field, very few occupational therapy programs have been reported with refugees and children who have survived a war.

In the present paper, we describe a preventive occupational therapy program in mental health for children who have suffered traumatic experiences due to the war in Kosovo. The program is focused on secondary prevention, which is aimed at preventing further development of trauma to chronic or serious problems. We provide a description of the context where the program was implemented, a description of the intervention program, an analysis of the outcomes and a discussion of the role of occupational therapy in this field of practice.

The program had two main objectives:

1. To contribute to the prevention of long-term psychological consequences such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, or personality disorders that can develop as a result of unexpressed trauma experienced during war.
2. To detect for referral children who have already developed further trauma.

The project was a six-month program designed and implemented by the first two authors: an occupational therapist and an occupational therapy student at the time of the project. A volunteer Canadian occupational therapist, Steve Johns and a clinical defectologist (a special education educator with training in psychology and neurology), Lulezim Arapi (who was a member of the local Kosovar community) continued the project. The project was developed in conjunction with Doctors without Borders (Spain) and Clowns without Borders (PSF) a non-government organization (NGO) based in Spain whose mission is putting smiles on the faces of children.

The physical environment: Gjakova

Gjakova was born in a green land surrounding a mosque in the XVI century. It is a moderately sized town of 60,000 people located in the southwest region of Kosovo. Before the war, 90% of its inhabitants were ethnic Albanians and 10% were Serbians. Following the conflict, Serbian soldiers returned to their country leaving Gjakova to ethnic Albanians. However, 20% of the city was left partially destroyed and 40% completely burned down. Eleven year-old Besart said in one of her stories that "even the sun and the clouds are crying for destroyed Kosovo, all in blood." Gjakova was especially punished during the war because it was an important centre for Albanian culture and the headquarters of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK). It was the prime target for ethnic cleansing.

Milosevic's new government marked the beginning of 10 years of Serbian oppression. During the 10 years before the conflict, Kosovo was completely dominated by Serbians. Albanian culture, social expression and political involvement were completely suppressed by the Serbian government. For example, before the war, Serbian and

Albanian children had to attend different primary schools with the best ones reserved only for the Serbian children. Only the Serbian population had the right to receive secondary education. As a result, a parallel education system was developed with Albanian children being taught in private houses by teachers who were supported financially by family and friends. Similarly, businesses functioned on two levels: an official level that was conducted by the Serbians and an underground level conducted by the Albanians.

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For the past 10 years, the people of Gjakova have suffered repeated episodes of oppression, which have led to an accumulation of traumatic experiences. When the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) started their military campaign in 1999, the people of Gjakova underwent three months of intense adversity. Jeta, a 12-year-old child in Kosovo said "the robberies, evacuations, massacres, and torture, were our daily bread." While many Albanians fled from Gjakova to refugee camps in Albania, Macedonia and other countries, it is important to note that 60% of the population did not abandon Gjakova. For 3 months, these people remained hidden in their basements.

Important factors to consider in understanding trauma have been documented as distance to trauma, frequency and duration (Agger, 1994). Accordingly, we can appreciate the existing level of trauma in the community in Gjakova. For 10 years, the population had submitted to a constant violation of their human rights. The last three months were the harshest in frequency, and intensity. They suffered massacres, rapes, burning and shootings often occurring daily. Virtually the entire population had experienced atrocities or had witnessed them committed on members of their family.

Effective program planning requires an understanding not only of the past but also the present conditions that influence the psychological state and hence the occupational performance issues of the community. In addition to past traumatic experiences related to war, new sources of trauma are continually introduced to the lives of the people in Gjakova. The predominant source of new trauma is the status of prisoners. More than 1600 boys and men who are claimed to be imprisoned in Serbia are missing. For six

months following the war, there had been no news of their whereabouts. In addition, there were new mass graves discovered everyday, each one destroying the families' hopes for finding lost relatives. Thirteen year old Elza said:

Now we have freedom and we have to be happy as the rest of the world, but this is not happening here because from my city Gjakova, Serbians took, while they were leaving, 1600 hostages. This worries us a lot. We are waiting for their release.

The harsh winter, a lack of adequate housing and shelter, and poverty are also sources of new trauma. An estimated 70% of the population in Gjakova are unemployed; the teachers with whom we were working received their last salary 10 months before the war began. Land mines are eternal sentinels, which kill and maim children. "I draw a house in fire and flowers, under there are mines, so we must be careful when we play," said 8 year old Arjona.

Finally, the most pertinent source of new trauma is the present political situation. The Albanian population believed that they had finally won their independence, and that the Serbians would return to Serbia. For the Albanians, this rationale gave meaning to their suffering. Eleven year old Gembiana wrote "Our hands are waiting for freedom, but you can not win freedom without blood."

This was not the reality. Kosovo continued to be politically unstable with conflicts occurring between NATO soldiers and groups belonging to the former Kosovo Liberation Army, and with violations of the peace agreement by Serbian soldiers.

In the last 50 years, there have been more than 400 armed conflicts, 150 of which were considered serious. Between 1945 and 1995, 25 million people died; 17 million of these were civilians. Ninety percent of the weapons used were sold by industrialized countries (Monestier, 1999).

The effect of war and trauma on children

Children have become an integral part of the armed conflicts. They are lost, separated from their families, abandoned, orphaned, tortured, mutilated, sexually abused and kidnapped. They also die of famine, become compulsory soldiers obligated to kill, or live by the thousands in refugee camps, with the company of their traumatic memories. Half of all conflicts of the war involve a child. Children are chosen as targets to break the morale of the enemy or to kill a potential enemy in the future. Some mines are designed specifically to harm children. For example, butterfly mines are shaped in the same shape and are colourful. Particular harm is directed toward girls through sexual abuse and their obligation to deliver a child from the enemy. This violation causes continuous mental

torture during the pregnancy and when the child is born. The consequences of war, hunger and the disappearance of medical services kills 20 times more people than war itself. UNICEF confirms that everyday between 35,000 and 40,000 children die due to the lack of basic attention (Monestier, 1999).

Although the origins of war are based on political reasons initiated by and aimed at adults, the consequences of trauma due to war are harshest on children. All of these events can develop psychological consequences and psychosomatic trauma such as PTSD (Monestier, 1999). In 1990, it was considered that 12 million children of the 20 million children displaced due to war had different levels of psychological trauma.

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*...war experience affects the
essence, the soul of the child.*

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Fraenkel and Tallant (1987) state that children who have suffered from trauma "harbour intense feelings of fear, anger and insecurity which, when repressed, often lead to maladaptive behavioural responses" (p.59). When left unexpressed, childhood traumatic experiences can manifest themselves later in life as psychological conditions such as depression, personality disorders or PTSD and maladaptive behaviour (Driver & Beltran, 1998; Gravrilovic, Lecic-Tosevski, & Jovic, 1998; Hubbard, 1998; Monestier, 1999; Valent, 1995). These maladaptive responses can manifest in physical aggression towards peers and siblings, sleeplessness, withdrawal, anxiety, fear and silence. They lose their interest in play experiences, and tend to repress even the more elementary feelings such as love for their parents.

Gavrilovic et al. (1998) in their study comparing, among other factors, childhood traumatic experience due to war and the symptoms and development of PTSD in adulthood report that childhood trauma is a risk factor that predisposes the individual to development of mental health problems. Similarly, Valent (1998) studied detailed testimonies from holocaust survivors and found that post-traumatic responses have more complex manifestations than PTSD that can affect the trauma survivor's personality, morality and existential meanings. Finally, Driver and Beltran (1998) report that children with trauma from war and displacement showed poor school performance, problematic social interactions, and difficulties with gross motor activities such as sports. Regardless of the level of psychological trauma, it is clear that traumatic experiences due to war have debilitating consequences that affect the occupational performance of a child for the rest of his or

her life. Early intervention is therefore essential in order to prevent the trauma from becoming the cause of complex problems later in life.

Boris Cyrulnik (2002) in his book, *The Ugly Ducks*, relates childhood resilience after trauma to the inner resources of the child, that depend on their first emotional relationships, the meaning that the child and the society gives to the traumatic event, and the support of the society. The author believes the concept of resilience is quite related to spirituality.

The impact of war on children's spirituality

Spirituality is a key dimension in occupational therapy models of practice, but definitions of spirituality and its relation to occupation have eluded us (Unruh 1997). Urbanowsky and Vargo (1994) defined spirituality as "the experience of meaning in everyday life" (p.88). This vision is close to Viktor Frankl's logo therapy. Frankl spoke of how finding meaning in daily life helped him to survive being imprisoned in the brutal concentration camp of Auschwitz. Paraphrasing Nietzsche, he wrote that if one has a reason to live, one could survive anything (Frankl, 1946).

Egan and DeLaat (1994) suggested that spirit is the true self that we try to express in all our activities. Spiritual well being is a function of being connected with oneself, others and creation, and that spirituality united our true self with the greater whole of all being. This definition of spiritual well-being introduces us to the community dimension of spirituality, which Liz Townsend referred to as inclusiveness (Townsend, 1997).

Unruh (1997) suggested that if the writings of people who are deeply involved in their occupations are examined, we discover that spirituality can be expressed through engagement in occupations with personal meaning in our lives. Occupations related to art, nature and religion can facilitate spiritual expression.

In a war situation, all these dimensions of spirituality are greatly affected. Needless to say, war experience affects the essence, the soul of the child. The child may experience life to have no meaning. What is the meaning of all this suffering? What is life? What is man? It is extremely hard for children to understand the reality that affronts them, to connect with their own feelings, when they suffer emotional problems, when all their values are in crisis. War confronts children with the dark side of life. Human values such as love, friendship or solidarity may seem an illusion, and can be replaced by revenge, hate or violence.

I tried to draw in this picture Serbians without spirit. I do not think that in the world anybody will survive after seeing how criminal they are: children without a head, they killed babies in the mother's body, and force sister to drink their blood. Killing parents besides the

children, rape daughters behind parents; those are not part of human. This massacre was so terrible. Serbian took the sons of my aunt and now we do not know anything from them. The hate in our heart was so big. There are not Serbians because I have so many bad words to say to them. (Orjeta, 13 years)

The basic human need and capacity to connect with others is also at risk. They may lose the most significant people in their life, even friends and close family.

In my school teaching is started. Your empty place is searching for you. We cover with flowers. We cover with tears. (Dielleza, 11yrs) I must leave you father without saying goodbye to you, and with tears on my eyes and pain in my heart. I walk through the road of sadness. (Gjylizare Morina)

Children who have emotional problems may be isolated by their own communities, and may be called crazy. The community network may be broken, including their traditions, rituals and ceremonies. The child may have lost his or her sense of belonging, of feeling part of a community.

Under war circumstances, an example of occupational apartheid, children have no access to meaningful occupations. For example, some children in Gjakova spent three months hidden in the basement. Their most important occupations were modified due to war; games became war games. The mosque was severely damaged during the war period, with no celebrations. The children had no access to artistic expression or nature, due to ongoing combats and the presence of mines.

Underlying philosophy and theoretical base of interventions

Interventions were based on a set of principles, including a community-centred approach (Algado, 2000), transcultural and holistic occupational therapy, and meaningful occupation as the core of intervention. We based the term on the client-centred approach (Canadian Association of Occupational Therapy [CAOT], 1997) and applied it to communities. A community-centred approach is the belief in the inner potential that communities have in themselves, based on the humanistic philosophy of the occupational therapy profession. The occupational therapist becomes a transferrer of knowledge, while the main resources are found in the community. We walk with the communities, not for the communities; they are the main character of the story of their life.

The focus of the program was at the community level. Members of the local Albanian community were encouraged to become self-sufficient, independent promoters of children's mental health. They were known as *Mental*

Health Promoters. A complementary treatment program with a special children's space was developed where children with complex problems were referred for individual treatment to a clinical defectologist.

Transcultural occupational therapy goes further than recognizing the beauty of all cultures to introduce culturally meaningful occupations in the intervention. Activities reflect the values and traditions of the culture in order to make occupations meaningful. For example, children worked with their own teachers, sang songs and poems in Albanian and played games with culturally familiar themes.

Holistic occupational therapy means consideration is given to the physical, social, psychological and especially the spiritual dimensions of the human being. Previous experience with Bosnian and Mayan refugees (Algado, Gregori & Egan, 1997) and with adults with mental illness who are homeless has taught us that the spiritual dimension is the most important one. Meaningful occupation is the core of therapy. As meaningful occupations form the basis of occupational therapy, care was taken to ensure that activities were significant for the children.

The Model of Human Occupation (Kielhofner, 1995) and the Occupational Performance Process Model (CAOT, 1997) formed the theoretical basis of the intervention. Theoretical approaches outlined below were incorporated in identifying occupational performance issues and planning interventions. The Model of Human Occupation has been used by the first author in previous intervention programs with Mayan Indian refugees in Guatemala (Algado et al., 1997), Bosnian refugees, prisoners and immigrants in Spain, and with street children in Mexico (Kronenberg, 1999). The seven stages of the Occupational Performance Process Model were used as a guiding framework to design and implement the program.

Narrative theory based on the research of Mattingly (cited in Hasselkus & Rosa, 1997) suggests that individuals give meaning to their lives through stories and written narratives based on their experiences. Narratives are used in occupational therapy to help provide the individual with a perspective on their life. Narratives give individuals a context to regain meaning and to define their lives in order to make sense of their experiences. Individuals suffering from trauma benefit from expressing traumatic experiences in a process of normalizing them (Ainscough, 1998; Fraenkel & Tallant, 1987; Reekmans & Keilhofner, 1998). This process allows for repressed feelings and emotions to surface, allowing the individual to deal with them at a cognitive level, to express them and give meaning to their suffering.

Cognitive development in children is limited to concrete thoughts. They are unable to see things abstractly. Hence, abstract concepts such as feelings of fear, anxiety, hatred or despair are difficult for children to understand

TABLE 1
Topics in theoretical training sessions

1. What is Mental Health

Mental Health Promotion
Mental Health Conditions
Emotions
Depression
Anxiety
Phobias

2. Principles of Occupational Therapy

Holistic view of the individual
Occupation as a therapeutic medium
How to develop a Mental Health Workshop
through Occupational Therapy

3. Model of Human Occupation

4. Logotherapy

5. Secondary Trauma

Emotional well being
Fatigue

6. The Child

Childhood Depression
Self Esteem in the child
Play
Use of Displacement techniques
Art
Narratives
Puppetry
Clay
Drama
Theatre
Collage
Mime

7. Behaviour Management Techniques with Children

or talk about. Directly expressing and dealing with such feelings is difficult or virtually impossible. Therefore, indirect methods of expression need to be utilized to help children express feeling and emotions. Expressive activities such as art, clay and narratives act as a secondary medium through which children can communicate their thoughts, emotions, feelings and desires. For example, a child who cannot describe the fear experienced from viewing a massacre can draw what he or she saw and express his or her fear through their drawing. The drawing can later be used as a vehicle for non-verbally communicating and exploring feelings or meanings associated with the drawing and those experienced while creating the drawing (Ainscough, 1998). Visual images and concrete objects provide a medium for children to project their emotions so that they are able to discuss and process them externally.

Play is the most essential and meaningful occupation of children and their own language. Play (Morrison,

Metzger & Pratt, 1996) was used to design the workshops. Therapeutic activities based on the theoretical bases outlined above were woven into various types of play activities to meet the goals of the intervention. The objective of the use of play in the intervention was to provide support, promote insight, and facilitate catharsis, positive experiences and success in activities.

Description of the intervention

The program was intended to serve primary school-aged children (6-14 years) in the city of Gjakova. The objective was to select and train local community members to conduct occupational therapy workshops with the children.

The role of the Mental Health Promoter was to:

- Conduct occupational therapy workshops using expressive techniques to facilitate emotional expression of traumatic experiences at a preventative level
- Detect children with complex or specific symptoms and refer to a specialist.

Primary and secondary school teachers were selected as candidates for mental health promoters for a number of reasons:

1. Since the schools in Gjakova were open, teachers had regular contact with children, which facilitated contact with a large group of children.
2. Teachers were familiar with the children and already had an established rapport that was formed by a trusting relationship, thereby facilitating a strong therapeutic alliance.
3. Teachers were trained to communicate and work with children.
4. Teachers had a natural affiliation toward children and had a high level of motivation to work with children.

The program consisted of three phases:

1. Theoretical training.
2. Practical training.
3. Additional training on specific topics.

After the three phases, it was expected that the Mental Health Promoter would develop the occupational therapy workshops with children with a minimal amount of supervision.

Theoretical training:

The objective of these sessions was to provide the teachers with knowledge on basic concepts in mental health (see table 1). In this section, the first two authors provided training. There were 12 training sessions with teachers; each session was two hours long. The first hour was didactic, dedicated to theory while the second hour was a practical session that involved learning to use activity with

TABLE 2
List of Projective Techniques and Activities

Individual drawing	
• Colour pencil	• Markers
• Pastel	• Tempera
• Water colour	
Collective drawing	
Finger Painting	
Collage	
Puppets	
Origami	
Stories	
• Balloons	• Little toys
Theatre	
Mime	
Guided fantasy	
Construction	
• Clay	• Kits
• Toys	• Plasticine
Narratives	
Bibliotherapy	
Themes	
• Message to the world	
• Future of Gjakova	
• Message to the Serbians	

a therapeutic purpose. The practical session involved experimenting with the various projective techniques (see table 2) in order that the teachers would later be able to apply the techniques with their students.

As all of the teachers were also suffering from post-war trauma, it was essential to address the mental health needs of the teachers during the training. In order for teachers to address issues on trauma with children effectively, teachers had to be stable and deal with their own emotional well-being. Complementing the theoretical sessions with the practical sessions allowed the teachers to use the techniques to facilitate their own emotional expression. During the practical sessions, teachers spoke about their own fears, losses and experiences of the war. Some sessions were extremely powerful and emotional, where teachers expressed all that they had witnessed during the three months. The power of the group also facilitated expression of traumatic feelings that teachers had not had the opportunity to process and deal with previously.

Practical training:

Following the two-week theoretical training phase, teachers were ready to conduct occupational therapy workshops with children, with the supervision of the first two authors. The objective of the practical training was to enable teachers to conduct occupational workshops independently.

Workshops were held three times a week for two hours each. Each session consisted of two components: (1) fun

activities such as sports, games, and songs, and (2) projective activities for emotional expression. Complementing fun activities with projective activities provided the children with positive experiences that motivated them to return to the sessions. It was important to find a balance between providing support to the children and facilitating their emotional expression. It is important to note that fun activities based on play theory (Morrison et al., 1996) were also considered therapeutic and were not separated from the therapeutic process. Fun activities helped children to channel negative emotions in a constructive manner. For example, emotions such as anger or aggression that were discussed during a session may be expressed while playing soccer after the session. The fun activities were the best moments to observe the non-verbal behaviour of the children providing the authors and the mental health workers with important behavioural information about the children. Observing play behaviour was one of the factors that allowed us to identify children who needed individual attention.

The sessions consisted of one specific projective technique per session. The children were not given a choice of activities for two reasons. First, the teachers worked with large groups of 25 or 30 children each, and in each session there were at least 3 or 4 groups of children. Secondly, the authors had to provide all the materials for the activity. Therefore, it was not possible to bring more than one set of materials at a time.

Each session followed a structured process. The sessions began with an indoor or outdoor game and was followed by an activity such as painting with a free theme. They gave their creation a title, or a theme, and a description of what they had created, why they chose it, and what they had felt while creating their product. Finally, teachers gave children an opportunity to present their work to the rest of the group and thus initiate discussions about various issues. The sessions usually ended with singing or sports activities.

Initial sessions were focused on helping the children to identify different feelings and making them aware of the importance of expressing their feelings. Emotion questions such as "What is a feeling?" "Have you ever seen one?" "What colours do they have?" were asked to explore the concept of emotions, as feelings are an abstract reality for children. Therefore, the first step was to teach the children what feelings were and to name them. The initial games often identified different emotions. One common game played was similar to charades where the teacher wrote out actions or emotions on pieces of paper for the children to act out. Each child then picked one and acted out what was on the paper while the rest of the group tried to guess the correct emotion. This exercise allowed the children to

visualize and label emotions to practice verbally identifying the emotions they were viewing. It served to later associate and verbalize images expressed in their drawings with emotions that they had experienced. Puppets and plush toys were used to help children visualize different feelings. For example, a clown puppet was used to identify happiness, a demon for hate, and a witch for fear.

Successful sessions focused on teaching the children to realize why it is important to share feelings and to facilitate discussions about difficult emotions. The use of the puppets was crucial for this purpose. We created stories with the puppets. For example, if the demon is inside the heart of a child and the clown came and knocked at the door of the heart... what would happen? Would the demon allow the clown to enter? These stories were one method of initiating discussions with the children. Children were left to try to resolve the conflict themselves. Initially, they resolved the situation by throwing out the demon from the heart. Then it was time to discuss with the children different ways of ventilating difficult feelings as sadness, hate, or anger. In the discussions, we concentrated on making links between feelings and emotions identified in the drawings or puppets with the personal feelings and experiences of the children.

During the session, it was emphasized repeatedly and in various ways that what the children were experiencing was normal in extreme circumstances. For example, if a child reported losing a cousin, a discussion was facilitated with the rest of the class about death, and children were asked if there was anyone else who had also lost a family member. By normalizing reactions that the children were reporting and by drawing similarities between individual experiences, each child felt reassured that he or she was not the only one with feelings of sadness, fear and loss.

It was interesting to see the reaction of the children who were less traumatized understanding their partners and starting to actively support them. It is likely that children who do not understand the traumatic feelings of their peers can easily label them as being insane. It was therefore essential not to stigmatize or isolate children with deeper feelings of trauma from the rest of the group. Instead, we chose to generalize the experiences and to normalize them so that children with harsher traumatic experiences would not feel isolated, while children with less trauma would become more aware of others experiences, and show empathy for their peers.

Additional training:

Performers from the NGO Clowns without Borders and the first author conducted the extra training workshops. Four different groups of performers with varied talents participated in this phase of the program. The role of the clowns

was to transfer specific techniques and skills in which they specialized. The role of the occupational therapist in the extra workshop was to discuss with the teachers the development of the training sessions and to incorporate the activities from the training into the sessions with the children based on therapeutic goals. The four different groups of clowns gave the following workshops: Tai chi, body expression, games and breathing and warm-up exercises. Apart from the workshops, the clowns also performed entertainment shows for the children in the schools and for the general community.

From the additional training, the teachers completed more than 72 hours of training over the course of three months. In total, 65 schoolteachers from the primary school system, 5 teachers from the secondary school system, and 30 medical students participated in the training. More than 500 children attended the program in five different schools. The degree of supervision gradually decreased as the number of practical sessions increased. Now it is expected that the teachers are able to take new groups of children and to run the program more independently. The program was taken over by another occupational therapist, Steve Johns, and continued for three more months.

The outcome of intervention: Children's reactions, art and stories

Use of play and expressive occupational workshops demonstrates the power of occupation and the value of occupational therapy intervention in helping children to successfully express and process traumatic emotions. The primary reaction of the younger children was the need to express immediate images of objects from visual memory such as burning houses, tanks, soldiers, UCK signs, and the flag of Kosovo. Upon being given materials, papers, and paints or coloured pencils, the children immediately began drawing images of burning houses, tanks, cadavers, and barren lands. They were mainly images of events that they had witnessed.

The children brought into the sessions daily events that they witnessed. For example, the day after the eclipse some children made drawings of it. When the tension between Serbians and Albanian increased in the city of Mitrovitza, this also appeared in the drawings the next day. The process of expressing deeper feelings and emotions came from communicating and discussing drawings, and using the plush toys and puppets.

The older children (12-14 yrs) expressed what they had seen symbolically through images that represented thoughts, feelings, persons, and identities. For example, while younger children painted men in uniforms holding

guns to indicate Serbian soldiers, the older children drew a cross with the four 'C's which is a symbol that represents the Serbians. Similarly, during puppet workshops, the younger children acted out conflict between Albanians and Serbian in general. However, older children created complicated stories, talking about political leaders such as Milosevic, Clinton, Rugova and Albright. The older children also wrote powerful narratives and poems to express their feelings.

The evolution of the children in their drawings, performances, and free play was from darker themes to more positive thoughts. In the beginning, all of the drawings were focused on war themes. Puppet shows demonstrated Serbian attacks and invasions. Toward the end of the program new themes appeared such as spring and the Future of Gjakova (see Appendix 1).

The cultural aspect was included in the intervention in the form of Kosovarian poems and songs that were used to begin the sessions. The children expressed themselves passionately when singing their songs or reciting their poems. All the songs referred to the massacres that took place in their beloved Kosovo. This was an appropriate way of expressing their pain. The occupational workshops afforded the children with the opportunity to come together and form an informal support group where they were able to express their pain and sentiments.

It is important to recognize that activities were essential in facilitating the expression of war experiences and working towards preventing future consequences of trauma in children. However, other factors such as support from the community and from the family, natural coping abilities, availability of proper care in health, and education also play an important role in promoting the psychological well-being of the children after the war.

We promote resilience, the children were able to give a new meaning to the traumatic event, moving from victims to survivors. Through the training of the teachers and the understanding of their families and peers we create structures at the family and the society level to look after them.

The impact on children's spirituality

Through engagement in occupations the children were able to look and find meaning in their experiences and give new meaning to their daily lives. This took place in a spontaneous way; as it was not suggested by the workshop leaders, it pointed to the spiritual potential of the children. The struggle to make sense of the massacres was a recurrent theme in their drawings. They associated with the meaning of the freedom of their beloved Kosova, the suffering of all the people who gave them their country and that through the sacrifice of their loved ones, others survived. One child

wrote anonymously: "We can see how dearly paid was our freedom, but when we imagine than now we can breath freely, we maybe will confront with this because the death bodies now are angels of peace."

The children were able to listen to themselves and to be listened to, to connect with their own feelings (for example, sadness, fear, happiness). In the sessions, human values such as solidarity or love were recovered. Special attention was placed on working with the feelings of hate and revenge, transforming them into human values. One theme suggested was a letter to the Serb soldier who did the atrocities, starting a discussion about hate and how to canalize it. As it is difficult for children who have lived through a war trauma to move from the present to a possible future, we asked them to draw about the future of Gjakova, helping them to develop hope for the future. They connected with others, as group support was one of the most important therapeutic elements of the intervention.

During the program, the children explored different art expressions. We did not explore religion in the program, as it was a sensitive issue. We could not develop occupations in nature due to the mines, but themes related to nature were a constant theme in the drawings. In images of nature, the children found visions to express hope, visions of the future, and especially sadness. Thirteen year old Drenusha wrote: "I draw spring in village. Village is empty because Serbian banished people from the village. Everything is sad. There are not many flowers. The river is in silence because there is no child to swim in it".

Pigeons symbolizing peace and butterflies often appeared. The same butterflies that children had carved in the concentration camps during the Second World War, appeared in the drawings of Kosovo. Butterflies are the symbol of a liberated soul. In the discussion with the children they talked about angels and paradise. An anonymous writer said: "It is said that people can have a last desire before dying. I know my friend before being shot by Serbians was able to see a light, the light of freedom, and that now he is an angel of peace."

Discussion

We believe that occupational therapy has an important role to help overcome children's suffering of the consequences of war. If we want to help these children to express their feelings related to traumatic events we must use their own natural language of play. It is well known that prevention has more benefits than rehabilitation. The children felt free to express even the most traumatic events while participating in activities, surrounded by their friends. They projected the feelings from their hearts to the paper or through performance. Through play, the children were able to build a vocabulary to be able to identify and name

different emotions. Children understood what feelings were and they were able to differentiate between them.

Most importantly, the children learned the importance of expressing feelings and constructive ways of doing this. They understood that they were showing a normal reaction to extreme circumstances and that they were not crazy. One of the most therapeutic aspects of the intervention was the way children with less traumatic events supported their classmates who had witnessed or experienced events that were more traumatic. Therapists must be careful not to stigmatize children and people by labeling them with terms such as PTSD. Instead, it is essential to highlight the resources of the people, although they might be hidden, and to transform them into abilities, as occupational therapy is about becoming (Wilcock, 1999).

If we consider that spirituality is the true essence of the human being, we must understand how it is affected by the war experience; one focus of our intervention will be to recover their spiritual wellbeing. We believe occupational therapy can facilitate this process by listening to the child, and giving the child an opportunity for someone to listen to them. Through meaningful occupations the child can connect with his/her own feelings and values, with others and with a larger creation. Occupational therapy can be a space where children can find meaning in their daily lives. Working in a community dimension we can move towards inclusiveness, the community dimension of spirituality.

Conclusion: Occupational therapy and becoming

As occupational therapists we focus on the people we work with, but many times we forget about ourselves. We talk about the spiritual development of clients, but forget about the development of occupational therapy as a profession. Our question is what is occupational therapy going to become? This is an important question with the beginning of the new millennium. On one hand, we face economic pressure forcing occupational therapy to become business-like, but we also have humanism, which inspired the creators of occupational therapy to form the basis of our principles.

The authors strongly believe that occupational therapy is about social justice (Townsend, 1993) and inclusion. Our mission is to fight against occupational apartheid (Kronenberg, 1999) of human beings who do not have the resources to pay our services and to fight for every person to have the right to engage in meaningful occupation. Occupational therapy has to make the effort to reach out to them, or to renounce our principles, and to recognize that we are an economically oriented discipline.

The Spirit of Survivors – Occupational Therapists Without Borders is a concrete example of professional

commitment to social justice. It is a non-profit (inter) network of proactive occupational therapists working to overcome occupational apartheid, and towards occupational justice for all. OTION, the Occupational Therapy International Outreach Network is another example of the possibilities of occupational therapy in this field. General strategies for the profession that could be developed include:

- To modify the university curricula to include work with all excluded populations, such as street children or refugees. This must be accompanied with a research task.
- To look for strategies to transfer occupational therapy knowledge to developing countries. At the present time, access to knowledge depends on economic possibilities.
- To seek funding to serve populations with no resources. The different occupational therapy associations could give a percentage of their benefits to finance these projects. We can also seek funding through international institutions such as the United Nations, or through Non-Government Organizations.

These are just some examples, but the most important point is to take care of our spiritual growth as human beings, to go further than knowledge and to develop wisdom.

There is no economic value that can replace the experience of walking with the children, growing with them, discovering the wisdom that is in their words and receiving so much affection from people who have suffered so much. Once again, the people have taught us about life, about love and meaning.

People of Orfalese, the beauty is the life,
when the life shows her sacred and essential face.
But you are the life and you are the veil
The beauty is the eternity looking herself in a mirror
But you are the eternity and you are the mirror
Because
What is to die if not to stand up naked?
What is to stop breathing, if not to let the breath free
to be able to fly and expand free, to look for God?
Only when you will drink on the silence river you will
sing truly,
Only when the Earth will ask for your bodies, you will
truly dance

Khalil Gibran (1985)

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This article is dedicated to the memory of the angels of Gjakova, and especially to our soul, Nina, and my father, who both died one year later and I believe are now playing together.

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1971-2000

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APPENDIX 1

Session highlights

A dearly paid victory

Heavy steps full of pain walk down our streets. A pain that could not be paid, even with freedom. I feel in myself loss even though we have won. I remember when we march in a single file until Albania, I left everything that belonged to me: father in jail, soldier in war and with myself I carried only pain and tears on my eyes. But hope started to develop and to go through my heart before I become a refugee in my own country-Albania. Freedom came so fast and now we live on peace but my past vanished into the darkness. Serbian killed everything that was mine.

My photos of child wiped out, and the things I am missing the most now are my poems and novels. All that I remember are some verses that I dedicated to my father while he was in jail:

"in prison I left you my dad
I left your look as an innocent pigeon
given all this I must leave you
without saying goodbye to you
and with tears on my eyes
and pain in my heart
I walk through the road of sadness"

while I was walking the street I saw old men without hope for life, orphan children and houses on fire and I think "how much they paid for this freedom"

"can they be happy?"

and what to say to a mother who lost her son
a comforting word or to tell her to be proud of her brave son,
we can see how dearly paid was our freedom
but when we imagine than now we can breath freely
we maybe will confront with this because the death bodies
now are angels of peace.

Gjylizare Morina

The expression of the traumatic events...

I draw this because I saw the killing. *Ramadan, 8 yrs*

I draw what I saw during the war 8 years

I saw some burning houses, one man without hand and the police wound him on the heart. This event happened in the station of Gjakova. *Anita, 9yrs*

The expression of deeper feelings-...

I have drawn the war in Kosovo. How Serb ocupator killed people and burnt houses. They killed children, pregnant women and they made us leave. A river become of blood. My cousin was killed with 3 other girls in the basement. This is what I wanted to say about the war in Kosovo. *Fjolla, 12 yrs*

In this picture I presented crimes done by the Serbian. Killings and massacres, burning houses, shops and mosques destroyed. For this I was so worried, and in my heart is one big hole. *Arta*

Sadness for the hostages...

Theme: lonely women and children.

In this picture we can see some lonely women with their children keeping in their hands. They are crying for the fate of their family, because father of these children is hostage. Tears of this mother are falling over child's face. *Gentiana, 7yrs*

Although we won and the freedom is with us, we are sad because of prisoners. We are protesting for that, but until now we have had no success. *Edira, 11 years*

Sadness for the ones who are missing...

In this theme I present Kosova shot, because Serbs have killed many innocent people, children and adults. This happened also to us, Serbians killed a friend from our class. Dorina Vejsa, for that I wrote a poem called: "My friend Dorina."

My friend Dorina
I remember happy days with you
Every our face was happy,
Now every our face is sad.

Oh, that black serbian didn't spare you as a child,
They didn't spare your sisters and brothers,
but burnt you alive in the houses.

In my school
Teaching is started
Your empty place
It is searching for you
We cover with flowers
We cover with tears
For the blossom
That we can never forget.

Dielleza, 11yr

Fear of dying...

In this drawing I presented war which happened in Kosova. Killing, burning, massacres, massive killings, Serbs bombarding, while they burnt Albanian houses. I felt very sad, I was afraid, because when they killed Albanian, I started to cry. At 5 in the morning we went out our basement, I had fear in my heart because I thought it was coming our turn to die. *Kaltrina, 12 yrs*

When the war was, I was only waiting when the Serbs will enter and then they will kill us and later burn us. I always thought that would happen tomorrow, or maybe that they were going to kill one of my parents. But we were lucky.

Andia, 10 yrs

War in my city

They massacred the neighbours and after few minutes they put inside and kill 22 people, children, women, men and old men, and old women. They went in our house and they locked the door. They took some of the people that were hidden in the basement, but they did not see us. We went out, and after we went with our children to Albania and now NATO come to Kosovo and all children from Kosova are happy. *Durim, 12 yrs*

Feelings of hate...

I tried to draw in this picture Serbians without spirit. I do not think that in the world anybody will survive after seen how criminal they are: children without head, they killed babies in the mother's body, and force sister to drink their blood. Killing parents besides the children, rape daughters behind parents, those are not part of human. This massacre was so terrible. Serbian took the sons of my aunt and now we do not know anything from them. The hate in our heart was so big. There are not Serbians because I have so many bad words to say to them. *Orjeta, 13 years*

The search for meaning...

I wanted to present my country. I draw some destroyed houses. I draw a tree without leaves to express Kosova without her children that are death or in jail. The heart of kosova cries even

APPENDIX 1 CONTINUED

Session highlights

that freedom is between us. A mother of one Albanian soldier crying says: If I could find the body of my death son... I would feel as if he is alive, and maybe he would say to me "mother we get what we wanted: freedom." *Saranda, 11 yrs.*

Pride for their country...

Kosova
Bless on you
Even that your are burnt
Even that you are destroyed
You, Kosovo
You was so brave
You did not let Serbs
To open more graves
Ardiana, 11 yrs

Hope for future...

In my drawing I draw one day in freedom. Children are happy and they are playing in the yard. Birds are singing happy songs in open sky. The river strain quiet. Everything is right without enemy. *Dardana, 13yrs*

Message to the world: to be always in peace. *Marigoma, 8yrs*

And finally the happiness...**Happy freedom Kosova**

In July 12th when NATO arrived in Gjakova the war ended. The terrible things that happened to us finally finished. I draw bunny houses and also happiness of Albanian when they saw NATO. For us that day is independence day. *Vjosa, 11 yrs*

Finally freedom came in my country, after a lot of massacres that happen to Albanian people done by Serbs. So in beautiful Kosova the flowers again will grow up, and now children will have lot of fun, and they will be full of happiness, they will play and sing in free Gjakova. *Rajmonda, 11 yrs*

I draw children and flowers and big sun because sun is happy for us because we are free now. *Benita, 9 yrs*

Peace in the soul...

During this drawing I had special feelings, I imagine myself in that house were I could be relaxed and forget all the troubles I had received from Serbians. I think and ask myself: "could I play free without fear?????" and the answer is finally Yes. *Orjeta, 13 yrs.*

I draw the beauty of future spring I was relaxed because the colours of the spring makes the spirit relaxed. *Durhata, 10 yrs*



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