

Tooth Fairy Myth: A Project for Child Oral Health Education

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Abstract

Early prevention in oral medicine is particularly relevant as well as health education programs. The present research fits to the situation-context of message communication on oral health education. Through a questionnaire based on Tooth Fairy Myth, fifty children (6 - 12 years), were asked to describe the appearance, characteristics, and actions regarding the Tooth Fairy. The resource to the symbolic, by the means of puppets-theatre, acts as an “imaginary - transmitter”, thus motivating the child to develop imagination, creativeness and enabling the improvement of the visual-motor perception. In the field of oral health promotion, the finger-puppet theatre movie appears as a child’s “imagination performer”, at the level of information given on oral health, namely in what concerns the oral routine of hygiene and the promotion of healthy eating behaviours.

Keywords: Oral Health Education; Children; Tooth Fairy Myth; Health Education Instruments

Introduction

Early prevention in oral medicine is particularly important as well as health education programs. The preventive oral medicine, in the sphere of paediatric dentist, uses methods of clinical prevention and personalised information on oral hygiene and on the importance of regular visits to the dentist [1]. The internalization of negative attitudes and pathogenic behaviours towards dental care is a process that, according to some research, seems to have its beginning in childhood [2,3], appearing of the utmost importance the role played by the transgenerational parental beliefs in the child’s adherence to the strategies of oral health promotion [4,5]. As for the paediatric dentist and the family, the teacher must be appointed as a fundamental partner in joint programs, so that the dynamics of promotion and early intervention in oral health may be encouraged. Thus, the practice of the paediatric dentist should also be supported on programs of health education, either in clinical setting contexts - clinical rooms with preventive orientation -, or in oral hygiene promotion in scholar contexts.

Objectives of the Study

The present research fits to the situation-context of message communication on oral health education. The goal of this empiric study is to present an instrument for oral health education, under the form of a “finger-puppet theatre”, having as an objective to increase the positive strategies of coping face to dental therapy and promotion of oral hygiene in childhood. It is of great importance that the dentist assumes the role of health educator, acting as an agent of health promotion and disease prevention, exceeding the simple role of «curative-executor» of the therapeutic act.

Materials and Methods

The portrayal of the finger-puppet characters and the working up of the tale is based on an exploratory study on the mental representation of Tooth Fairy, who assumes itself as the principal character of the story. Through a questionnaire based on Tooth Fairy Myth, fifty children (6 - 12 years), described the appearance, characteristics, and actions regarding the Tooth Fairy [6]. The resource to the symbolic, by the means of puppets-theatre, acts as an “imaginary - transmitter” [7], thus motivating the child to develop imagination, creativeness and enabling the improvement of the visual-motor perception.

Results

The “finger-puppet theatre” movie, lasting ten minutes and using the Portuguese language, is a tool that uses nine puppets. The characters are intermixed in the stage and express themselves through different voices, in seven scenes and three main sceneries (general, healthy mouth and mouth with cavities). The story is based on the figurative performance of a tale grounded on the Tooth Fairy Myth, and advises a preventive attitude towards tooth decay, during the exfoliation phase of deciduous teeth. The size of the puppet-characters and sceneries was thought in such a way as to fit in a paper box, as, in a real scenery, the deciduous teeth are kept in a small box.



Figure 1: *Gui.*



Figure 2: *Mother.*



Figure 3: Carie Mutans.



Figure 4: Tooth fairy.



Figure 5: Little tooth and toothy.

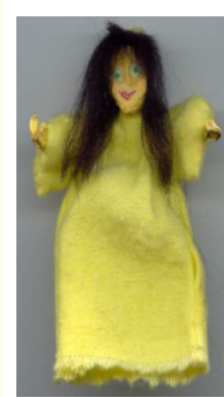


Figure 6: Good-oral-hygiene.



Figure 7: Toothbrush and toothpaste.

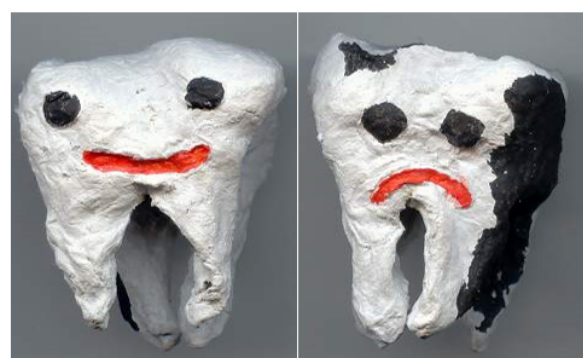


Figure 8: Global scenery.



Figure 9: Paper box.

Discussion and Conclusion

The symbolic thought is the human being's relational support with itself. Through the "symbolic aspect of playing", the child may practise the learning of strategies of confrontation of reality(ies), somehow intimidating and stressing, which he faces during treatments. The exhibition of the "finger-puppet theatre movie", in the clinical setting, promotes the relationship between the child and the paediatric dentist, being of privileged importance the role of the health care professionals, relatives and educators, as mediators of the therapeutic acts.

It is our aim, with this project of health education, to encourage the dentist to create spaces, leisure times and playing materials of relational-interactive nature, that may mediate the clinical setting and the good practices of health provided in dental care. In the field of oral health promotion, the finger-puppet theatre movie appears as a child's "imagination performer", at the level of information given on oral health, namely in what concerns the oral routine of hygiene and the promotion of healthy eating behaviours.

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