

# EXPLORING THE ROLE OF EMBODIMENT IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

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# SUMMARY

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- Embodiment: exploring the term
- Embodiment and occupational therapy
- Mind-Body Approaches: Somatics
- Knowledge Transfer: Arts and Health Domains
- Implications for Occupational Therapy: practice; identity; research.

# RESEARCHER: OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY LENS

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- Background in specialist mental health services
- Mindfulness practitioner (mind-body approach)
- Role in Liverpool's 2008 European Capital of Culture
- Research with dancers: Masters and current Doctoral study: Transitions, Translation and Transformation: mind-body experience in contemporary, somatic, creative and improvised dance (Submission date: late 2019/early 2020)
- Academic – 'late developer'

# EMBODIMENT

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- Natural and objective critiqued body from 1950's onwards (Fox, 1999)
- The body is a physical entity: organs, tissue, bones, fluids: the body is an object, a material entity (Draper, 2014)
- The body is a subjective and lived body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962): **Self** is inseparable from the body (Gadow, 1980)

# EMBODIMENT AND OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

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- Embodied nature of carrying out occupations has received little attention (Baillard, Carroll and Dallman, 2018, p. 225; Hocking 2000, p. 62)
- Influence of western science and medicine
- Lack of critical thinking: Education in health care disciplines (Block et al., 2016): Roles within governmental agencies such as NHS



# EMBODIMENT: THE DANCE ARTIST

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. . . the heightened sense of what one is doing, . . . tuned in to that awareness, using the sense of touch, and then one's kinetic sense, listening and looking . . . that's . . . where embodied practice [is found] (DA3)

I've got that real sense of when you're working with people, you're working from your physicality ... what's happening to you. And I don't know, and this is kind of an unanswerable question . . . where is the bodywork and where is the thinking work? And is it possible to separate them . . . (DA6)



# EMBODIMENT: SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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In a sociological understanding of body, the impact of society and culture on embodied action must be taken account of (Shilling, 2008, p. 2)

This suggests that the body acts as an 'open' system so that envisioned boundaries existing between mind and body, and between mind, body and the social domain are conceived of as tending towards the more fluid, permeable and connected rather than rigid, boundaried and containing (Blackman, 2012, p 8)



# MIND-BODY APPROACHES

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- Mind-body practices integrate emotional, social, spiritual, behavioural elements (Kwok, et al., 2016).
- There is a continuum of mind-body practice along which some are more mind based and others more movement based
- **Examples:** Breathing exercises, Mindfulness, Progressive Relaxation, Somatic Practices (e.g. Pilates Method, Alexander Technique) Tai Chi, Yoga,



# SOMATICS

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- Thomas Hanna, 1970s (Hanna, 1988)
- Integration of body and mind in order to enhance human function through mindful movement: includes practices focused on posture, movement and sensory awareness (International Somatic Movement and Education Association, 2018)
- **Somatic Dance Practice:** These somatic practices have an emphasis on tuning in to inner experience and how this experience aligns with a sense of physicality and movement (Burnidge, 2012, p.37).

# SOMATIC AND CREATIVE DANCE: EXAMPLE: CONTACT IMPROVISATION

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- Emerged in the US in 1970s
- Contact, sensitivity and relaxation with less reliance on visual shape of movement and conscious intention (Houston, 2009):  
Co-operative, non-choreographed, improvised
- **Experience of movement more significant than look of movement**



Image removed of Contact Improvisation Dance session

URL link is included in references

# KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER: ARTS PRACTICE ASSEMBLAGE (RAW, 2014)

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- Six interacting elements: Arts and Health assemblage of practice
- Raw found that health and community professionals recognised their own practice within the assemblage (Raw, 2014, p. 16): suggesting that there are some significant and shared themes across disciplines and professional boundaries.

Raw's 6 interacting elements	Mapped to Doctoral study findings
Strong Personal Commitment	Passion for dance practice
Constant use of Intuition	Somatic and creative tacit knowledge
Relational Qualities and Practices	Focus on Contact with self, other and social/wider world context
Spatial Qualities and Practices	Space: inner, outer: space as material and immaterial
Principles and Values co-constructed with participants	Mind-body approaches Inclusive practice
Creativity to open up transformative potential	Creative, improvisatory practice



# What is the relevance for your occupational therapy practice and identity?

# IMPLICATIONS FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

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- Client Interventions
- Professional Identity
- Occupation focused Research

# CLIENT INTERVENTIONS: CLINICAL REASONING

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Clinical reasoning usually based on a cognitive science epistemology characterising human beings as information processing systems (Carr and Shotwell, 2008, p. 174-5)

Evidence of increased corporeal awareness:

- Embodied enactive clinical reasoning in physiotherapy (Oberg et al., 2015)
- Embodied and intersubjective approach to clinical reasoning in occupational therapy (Arntzen, 2018)

# PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY: FEELING OF BEING AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

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The feeling of being a social worker or ‘the body cognisant social worker’ (Cameron and McDermott, 2008)

A greater emphasis on the body and embodied knowledge within the social work profession may strengthen the reflexive capacity of practitioners (Mensinga,, 2011)



# OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY RESEARCH: CO-OCCUPATIONS

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Contributing to research in occupational therapy with a relational and more social focus: Integrate corporeal and somatic dimension into model of co-occupation

‘when people perform an occupation in a mutually responsive, inter-connected manner that requires aspects of **shared physicality, shared emotionality and shared intentionality.**’ (Pickens and Pizur-Barnekow, 2009, p. 151)





## To Conclude: A reflection

Healing through movement is one of the earliest expressions of the arts. In awakening imagination and creativity in the body, dance can restore a sense of self and connectedness. Movement relaxes and brings back a sense of rhythm and coherence. It offers a language where words fail, bridging the gap between sensation and meaning . . .

In our times there is an increased need for non-pharmacological, creative and holistic practices that help us re-connect and find meaning through our dis-ease. Dance more than any other art form in addressing the body directly, enables it and the subtle resources it holds to be a part of our healing (Collinson, 10.5.2017)



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Thank you for the continuing support and  
guidance from my Doctoral supervisors

Professor Jude Robinson  
Institute of Health and Wellbeing  
University of Glasgow

Dr Anne-Louise Humphreys  
School of Health Sciences  
University of Liverpool





# QUESTIONS

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Thank you for listening