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3   Using Collective Memory Work to Investigate the Lived Experience of Physiotherapists

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This paper explains how and why I plan to consider the identity of physiotherapy. My intention is to harness self-and group-reflection and the use of reason in a society of mixed values and opinions. I hope to generate mutual understandings of how individual physiotherapy professional identities are constructed, explicate some of the taken-for-granted notions within practice, and through this to enlighten and empower; that is, to generate the possibility of individual change through action based on an increased recognition of the existing relationships and praxis that individuals, and the profession, work within. The methodology will be collective memory work, based on a philosophical position of Habermasian communicative rationality.

Introduction

Physiotherapy is a socially constructed occupation that emerged in the years around the beginning of the 20th century (Nicholls and Cheek, 2006). This was in response to the medical profession claiming massage parlours were operating as brothels, and the potential for massage, as a remedial intervention, was becoming obscured by the nefarious practices of late Victorian (London) society (Barclay, 1994). The recent modernisation of healthcare and population changes have questioned the nature of all healthcare professions. In this context, claims are made about what physiotherapy is and its relative effectiveness. To date no formal studies have been published that consider the identity of the profession. Rather than try to define physiotherapy, the study will investigate the lived experience of physiotherapists and produce insights into the nature of physiotherapy as it is today.

Bendle (2002) has suggested the current age suffers a crisis of identity. He has usefully identified four problems:

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1. problematising self-knowledge[1]
2. valorising human potential
3. breakdown of hierarchies with a rise in social mobility
4. flexibility of self-definition.

With this quest for self-knowledge, self-determination and identity, lies the presence of the profession in society[2]. In common with most professions, physiotherapy wants a greater public profile (Freidson, 1994); see, for example, CSP, 2005.[3] These issues, self-knowledge, security, and profile, are interconnected. They come together to form the identity of the profession.

Theoretical Perspective

In asking physiotherapists what it means to be a physiotherapist I want to help them move beyond their immediate ability to phrase their thinking in words, and open up a space when they can look again at their experiences as they are today. This interplay of individual workplace behaviours and practices, personal life experiences of others' views of the profession, and the individual as professional revolve around and develop each other.

To inform my methodology, I have considered my own views on the nature of reality and how we construct knowledge. Critical Theory originated from what is now known as the Frankfurt School in the 1930s. This was an interdisciplinary collaboration that rejected the traditional idea of theory that

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[1]   1. In pre-modern times the self was regarded as transparent and unproblematic. The 20th century saw the self became a "vast inner continent, to be explored only with considerable difficulty".
    2. Prioritisation of self-realisation in *this* world, rather than waiting for the next.
    3. With a rise in individualism.
    4. The decline in predictable and constant social structures and processes requires greater fluidity in identity Bendle, M.F. (2002) The crisis of 'identity' in high modernity. *British Journal of Sociology,* 53**,** 1-18.

[2]   By society I mean both the public sphere – public debates, discussions and consultations that take place in general society: on television, radio, in parliament, on the internet, and in pubs and parks – and the professional sphere – formal consultations, submissions, descriptions and communications that different actors within the profession pursue on behalf of the profession.

[3]   This has been observed within occupational therapy as part of the 'folklore' of the profession Wilding, C. and Whiteford, G. (2007) Occupation and occupational therapy: Knowledge paradigms and everyday practice. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal,* 54**,** 185-193.

"corresponds to the activity of the scholar which takes place alongside all the other activities of a society but in no immediately clear connection with them. … it conveys not what theory means in human life but only what it means in the isolated place in which…it comes into existence" (Horkheimer, 1972, p197). Geuss (1981) defined it as "a reflective theory, which gives agents a kind of knowledge inherently productive of enlightenment and emancipation" (p2). Habermas's theoretical system aims to support the possibility of reason, emancipation and rational, though critical, communication (Bohman and Rehg, 2007). Habermas is postmetaphysical in his thinking (Habermas, 1992); he wants to consider social theory from beyond a philosophy of consciousness, that is, broadly, how a person relates to the world through knowledge and action, through a communication theory paradigm (Morris, 2004). Habermas recognises that with the move of societies from traditional to modern ways of life, systems differentiation, the values, norms, and actions of individuals can no longer be conceived in one unified manner (Habermas, 1991). He stresses the value of rationality and the use of reason embedded in the Enlightenment, but rather than see the progress of society since the eighteenth century as negative (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997), he believes that, through his theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984, Habermas, 1987a), the benefits of greater self-reflection and the use of reason in a society of mixed values and opinions can be harnessed (see Habermas, 1987b, Habermas, 1992, Habermas, 1993).

Rationality consists in knowledge acquired and used by speaking and acting subjects between themselves oriented to mutual understanding (Habermas, 1984, chapter 1:1). In strategic action, people want to achieve the individual goals that they bring to a given situation. In communicative action, they coordinate their action and pursue individual (or joint) goals on the basis of a shared understanding that the goals are inherently reasonable (Habermas, 1984).

Critical theory views empirical claims about the nature of reality as "situated, contingent and potentially fallible" (Mill et al., 2001, p113) and sees a virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values that are formed over time, however an absolute representation of objective reality cannot be achieved (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Habermas proposes a "pragmatic epistemological realism" (1999, chap. 8) based on his view of the "inescapability of language" (Bohman and Rehg, 2007). If a statement for which we claim truth is indeed true, this is because it "accurately refers to or represents existing objects, or actual states of affairs" though recognising that these descriptions depend on our "linguistic resources" (Bohman and Rehg, 2007).

Habermas assumes a plurality of forms of knowledge, acknowledging the value of three different knowledge interests: technical control, understanding,

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and emancipation (Habermas, 1978), taking the view that knowledge is not discovered but created. Dialogical, negotiated, agreement means it is always potentially wrong, and liable to change as modes of thinking evolve, and so is 'fallibalistic' (Habermas, 1999). Rejecting the foundationalist attempt to confirm or falsify theory through grounding knowledge in a-historical, *a priori* certainties (Mill et al., 2001, p114), Habermas believes that the pragmatic rationality of a theory lies in its potential effectiveness in solving problems (Habermas, 1999). He bases this on an "emancipatory form of knowledge through universal pragmatics" (Ashenden and Owen, 1999, p3). Universal pragmatics tries to identify and reconstruct the "universal conditions of possible mutual understanding" (Habermas, 1999, p21). Habermas thinks language can co-ordinate action in a cooperative way rather than through force or manipulation (Habermas, 1984). This assumes a distinction between consensual agreement and compliance, which Habermas uses in his idea of the pre-theoretical knowledge of competent speakers and actors (Habermas, 1984).

He argues "we understand a speech act when we know the kinds of reasons that a speaker could provide in order to convince a hearer that he is entitled in the given circumstances to claim validity for his utterance … when we know *what makes it acceptable*" (Habermas, 1999, p232). With this Habermas links the meaning of speech acts to the practice of 'reason giving': claims are open to criticism and justification (Habermas, 1999). A speech act is successful when the hearer presumes that the claims in the speech act could be supported by good reasons. If a hearer challenges the speaker then the communication changes from ordinary speech to "discourse"— a process of discussion in which the claims are tested for their rational justifiability as true, correct or authentic (Habermas, 1984).

The work of Habermas underpins the features of critical theory outlined in Table 1, overleaf. By introducing communicative action he provides a mechanism through which many of these features can be analysed, for example whether communication is systematically distorted and why this might be (Habermas, 1984). Critical theory has evolved from these conceptions. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) reconceptualise critical theory within ten domains, see Table 1. They suggest that critical theory is a map or guide to the social sphere, and that for research it does not help us see the world, rather it 'helps us devise questions and strategies for exploring it' (p281). It is this reworking that I have used to inform my view of critical theory, develop my philosophical perspective and to select the strategies for answering my question.

Table 1   Features of a Reconceptualised Critical Theory

1. Critical enlightenment
2. Critical emancipation
3. Rejection of economic determinism
4. Critique of technical rationality
5. Impact of desire
6. Hegemony
7. Ideology
8. Linguistic discourse
9. The relationships among culture, power and domination
10. The role of cultural pedagogy

Adapted from Kincheloe and McLaren (2000)

Study Aims

This study is an exploratory investigation of the personal experiences of physiotherapists of being a physiotherapist. There are few existing theories of physiotherapy as a whole and those that do exist fail to consider personal experiences. The opinions of what physiotherapy is, and could be, that have been published in the literature, have not introduced personal experience in a rigorous manner. Rather than survey or speak to physiotherapists (and / or others) about what they think physiotherapy is, and run the risk of reproducing a traditional theory of physiotherapy, the intention is to work closely with a small group of physiotherapists and to ask them to reflect on experiences of being a physiotherapist and how their personal professional identity has come to be, and to consider the implications of this.

My research question is what does it mean to be a physiotherapist? I wish to investigate the lived experience of physiotherapists, the consequences for them in their lives (both professional and personal) of being a physiotherapist, how they construct their physiotherapist identity, as an attempt to generate insights into the nature of physiotherapy as it is today.

The study aims to reveal:

1. Insights applicable to the personal professional development of participants, through

   (a) an articulation of the way the physiotherapy world is: how reality constrains practices in tangible ways

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(b) memories of how the culture of an organisation, its geographical setting, the professional culture in a particular geographical area lead to the formation of personal professional identities

(c) a heightened level of personal self-consciousness and greater self-understanding

2. Themes that resonate for the socialisation of the wider profession through

(a) a reconstruction of the self-formative process of the profession, with a view to its successful continuation

(b) real life solutions to problems of action coordination and social integration, for example, inter-professional working, client relationships, communication

3. A template for future research into the nature of other professions
4. Themes to challenge existing recruitment strategies into, and career choices within, the profession
5. Insights applicable to the global profession through the international dimension that the globalisation of healthcare brings.

Methodology and Methods

This qualitative research study will use collective memory work as its methodology. CMW investigates how 'persons become selves and the part persons play in that construction'. The underlying theory is that subjectively significant events, and the way they are remembered and constructed, play an important part in the construction of the self. Haug et al. (1987) contend that we 'learn how to accept, incorporate and become part of existing structures and so how we become part of society'. CMW aims to be productive in providing new ways of looking at how language is used in socialisation, and the uses we make of language, for example with metaphor, cliché. Haug comments 'In asking how experience is reproduced in memory, we find out where we compromised without realising it…. Rediscovering the responsibilities we regain new chances and different possibilities to act in the present and in the future' (Haug et al., 1987, p.42).

    This study will use the writing of a memory related to a physiotherapy experience, the creation of a text, the discussion of it, its reappraisal and collective theorising by a group of participants, and any subsequent actions, to 'facilitate an understanding of the hidden structures and tacit cultural dynamics that insidiously inscribe social meanings and values' (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000, p.288). In this way unspoken knowledge and the taken−for−granted

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notions of everyday professional life will be confronted and examined for the specific and unexamined underlying theories. This will allow working with those aspects of personality normally considered as prejudice, emotion and blind preference.

Potential participants will be recruited from a higher education institute, a NHS department of physiotherapy, and a special interest group for retired physiotherapists, the Retired Physiotherapists Association. This convenience sampling aims to increase the range of possible experiences through a wide distribution of personal memories over time, workplace location, and work role. Professional perspectives develop or evolve over time across groups and generations. It is important to note that many physiotherapists continue to play an active role within the profession at a strategic level. The inclusion of retired physiotherapists will add depth and richness to the data collection and analysis.

A letter will be sent to the head of department/chair of association requesting permission to recruit staff and members. With this permission the chief investigator will attend a departmental/Association southwest regional meeting to present the study protocol and to invite volunteers to participate. An advertisement will also be placed on the professional body's online discussion forum: www.interactivecsp.org.uk; Any member of the professional body can join this web site, register to specific networks of the site, and post items of content (for example, research recruitment advertising). The intention of this additional recruitment strategy is to increase the chances of successful recruitment by providing another format where potential participants see the proposed study, and possibly engage with it. Anyone interested will be given a verbal description of the study proposal and a Participant Information Sheet.

The aim will be to recruit several academics and/or lecturers, clinicians, and retired physiotherapists. The chief investigator will be positioned within this group. The intention is to enlist participants from one geographical area of England. The city of Bristol has been identified because it has a school of physiotherapy, a large teaching hospital, and a large independent practice population, all within close proximity of each other. There are significant numbers of members of the Retired Physiotherapists Association, relatively close to the workplace of the chief investigator. A pragmatic and purposive sampling procedure will be used until sufficient recruits are found.

The study is designed to establish the participants as *participants* within a group and to seek to create sufficient commitment to the group to support and sustain itself through mutual interest and self-benefits. The chief investigator, himself a physiotherapist, will be involved in the group: this seeks to overcome some of the power dynamics that could exist were the investigator to be an observer or facilitator of the group. The principles of study participation are

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participatory, inclusive and empowering; the study aims to foster a collaborative atmosphere in which everyone is valued equally.

The study will aim for ten physiotherapists to form this working group. CMW requires a significant time commitment from the participants and the recruitment process and research methods and processes will take account of this. To lessen the commitment in traveling time for participants, physiotherapists will be sought who are based in or around Bristol or who are prepared and able to travel to Bristol to participate in the discussion group meetings. They will be asked to meet as a group for about eight months.

The venue of future meetings will be agreed with the group at the first meeting, which will be held in a private room at the University of the West of England.

1.   *Theme Board Technique*

At the first group meeting, the participants will be asked a question ("what does it mean to you to be a physiotherapist?") and invited to engage in magazine photograph collage, or 'theme board technique'. Lloyd and Papas (1999) identify the value of art as being an alternative means of communication that allows individuals to ' … use the images as a bridge … ' (p.32) and this bridge supports the expression of personal meaning. The purpose of this technique is to introduce the participants to the research topic, to stimulate their creative thinking, and to support the development of the group dynamic.

The value of this technique is its "lack of threat" for those participants who may feel they lack artistic ability and would otherwise by reluctant to contribute with other art forms through embarrassment at what they might produce. The magazine pictures are already created and the participant has simply to select those images seen to be relevant and then assemble them as one collective picture collage. Williams proposes this helps to remove this anxiety about embarrassment (Williams, 2002). The technique used will follow that of Williams (2002):

1.   Participants are asked to flick through magazines and cut or tear out pictures and slogans that they feel can be used to represent issues for discussion, based on the question: 'what does it mean to you to be a physiotherapist?'
2.   The magazines used are a range of easily obtainable glossy 'waiting room' type magazines with the exclusion of specific health related publications. This is to generate the use of symbolic images rather than actual pictures of the issues being explored.

3. Each participant then assembles the images on a flip chart page.
4. When all participants have produced their collage the chief investigator will facilitate each participant in explaining to the group how they have represented their ideas through the selected symbols.
5. Other members of the group can question the points made, offer their own interpretations and consider the contributions of others in the group. This open expression of ideas through a pictorial representation allows a whole range of attitudes, beliefs and feelings to emerge and be explored, thus generating greater understanding of others' perceptions of the same situation.

The theme boards will be digitally photographed and used as part of the data for the study. The discussions about each theme board will be recorded and transcribed, to form further study data.

Next, following a facilitated discussion, participants will agree a topic to prompt the memory of an experience from their professional career. This will lead into Phase 2.

Phase 2

They will write a short, detailed story of this memory, according to a set of rules: write a memory, of a particular episode, action or event, in the third person, in as much detail as is possible, including even inconsequential or trivial detail (it may be helpful to think of a key image, sound, taste, smell, touch) and what you were thinking at the time and what happened, but without importing interpretation, explanation or biography (Haug et al., 1987).

The intention is that participants write a *description* of a particular event or episode rather than an *account*. The requirement for detailed description, including inconsequential details, avoids evaluation; Crawford et al. (1992) suggest that what may appear irrelevant can point to the 'hidden moral and normative aspects of our actions' (p46).

The chief investigator holds onto each memory text, and each discussion group meeting is recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions will be presented to participants at each subsequent meeting and participants asked to read and discuss these as a means of stimulating group reflections on the memory stories. The timeframe is important to facilitate vibrant group dynamics and so greater ownership, possible theorising, and self-reflection. The group will be asked to work though several trigger topics (as many as they choose) within a timeframe to be agreed by the group (for example, this could be over six to eight months).

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The participants meet again to read and discuss each other's memory. Schratz and Walker (1995) have made two key suggestions to assist this phase. First, participants ask questions of the text that must be answered with the words or phrases contained within the text, about the activities, feelings, interests and wishes of the author, feelings and interests of the others, language, blind spots, gaps, connections and contradictions. Second, group members ask questions about the text concerning its *construction*. These questions require answers that cannot be taken from the text directly and concern "the construction of the self and the construction of the others" (ibid, p35).

This process will be repeated three times with different topics and will generate the research data.

Analysis of data will occur during the process of data collection. There will be three forms of data:

1. Phase 1 collages
2. Phase 2 memory texts
3. Phase 2 transcriptions of the discussions of the memory texts

The research group reassembles and discusses each memory text. After the first reading of the texts, one is selected as a starting point and the first impressions of the group are taken (asking for instance, "what does the author say her problem is? Which theories does he seem to have?"). These impressions are written down so at the end they can be compared to the final understanding the group achieved. In light of these discussions the participants go away and amend their text. They meet again and try to draw out themes from their discussions of these memories. Crawford and her colleagues (1992) established some rules to support this phase:

1. Each participant expresses opinions and ideas about each memory in turn, and
2. Looks for similarities and differences between the memories and looks for continuous elements among memories whose relation to each other is not immediately apparent. Each participant should question particularly those aspects of the events that do not appear amenable to comparison. She or he should not however resort to autobiography
3. Each participant identifies clichés, generalisations, contradictions, cultural imperatives, metaphor … and
4. Discusses theories, popular conceptions, sayings and images about the topic
5. Each participant examines what is not written in the memories (but what might be expected to be), and

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6. Revisits, re-examines and rewrites their own memory text in light of the discussion.

This collective reflection aims to reveal the processes involved in the making of the common understandings of the actions in the memory.

The groups meet to consider whether there are themes emerging from their discussions. Depending on the number of times, nature of the group, and interest of the group participants, related literature, ideas, theories and other materials may be introduced to these discussions as a means for theorising the themes and drawing conclusions from their work. The participants will agree what, if any, themes and general conclusions emerge from these discussions.

The benefit of this is to permit involvement as a participant and so over time works to create a more genuine 'co researcher' ethos; ownership of the study may be improved with strengthened quality and direction of the group, and as discussions become more profound so the possibility of greater theorisation of the discussions. The end result will be a set of themes that have emerged from the group, through discussion (involving self− and group reflection of specific memories) on the broad topic of what it means to be a physiotherapist. The group's conclusions will form the basis of the research findings.

Conclusion

This study is an exploratory investigation of the personal experiences of physiotherapists of being a physiotherapist. Rather than survey or speak to physiotherapists (and/or others) about what they think physiotherapy is, and run the risk of reproducing a traditional theory of physiotherapy, the intention is to work closely with a small group of physiotherapists and to ask them to reflect on experiences of being a physiotherapist and how their personal professional identity has come to be, and to consider the implications of this. I want to investigate how physiotherapists construct their identity as a means for helping to understand what physiotherapy is today.

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