



Wellbeing from Within: Creative Movement Explorations

By Vicky Evans

Wellbeing from Within: Creative Movement Explorations was a participatory, creative movement and mark-making series of somatic movement workshops for adults held in Monmouthshire in the winter of 2022. Exploring aspects of Five Element theory through reflective movement experiences and choreographic opportunities, participants were able to explore ways to improve their mental and physical wellbeing. The project was researched, designed, facilitated and evaluated for my final project as part of my MA Arts Practice (Arts Health and Wellbeing) at the University of South Wales, which I was undertaking alongside my third year of training at the Bristol School of Shiatsu.

The Challenge

Keen to bring together my two passions: creative dance and Shiatsu, I set out to explore similarities in these fields of practice, asking how, by using simple choreographic approaches, participants could learn to create embodied, movement sequences. Aligning my project with *5 Ways to Wellbeing* (NHS, 2019) ensured participants could also connect with others, be physically active, take notice of themselves, give themselves time, and try out new approaches. Qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods featured in the inquiry, evaluating impact on participant wellbeing.



“Connecting with new people, learning new skills, noticing little changes in my physicality, being active in a completely different way and sharing this whole experience with some lovely people has made such a positive impact on my physical and mental wellbeing.”

Participant A

The Approach

Six participants took part in five, free, 2-hour workshops. There were opportunities to explore breathwork, stretching, mark-making, and somatic movement through guided improvisations. Weekly, a different theme underpinned all activities: breathing (Metal), feeling grounded (Earth), celebrating and connecting (Fire), finding flow (Water), and growing (Wood).



Vicky is currently in her third year of training at Bristol School of Shiatsu and has also just completed her MA in Arts Practice (Arts, Health and Wellbeing) at the University of South Wales: exploring creative and somatic movement in the form of arts-based, practical wellbeing interventions. Previously a secondary school dance teacher (and more recently a primary teacher) Vicky is returning to creative and therapeutic bodywork where she hopes to offer grassroots Shiatsu classes alongside her Shiatsu practice in the Wye Valley, Monmouthshire.



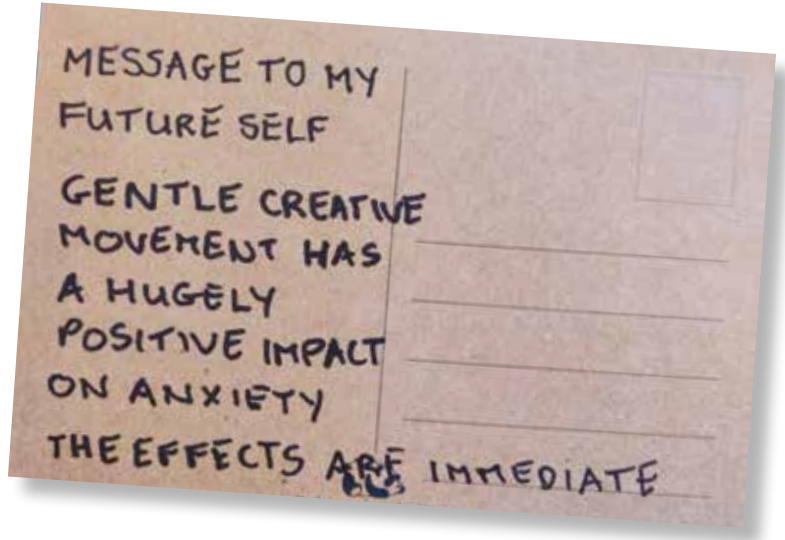
Each participant created embodied movement phrases of their own which became longer and more confidently shared as time went on. A culture of sharing also developed, where thoughts, images, drawings and movement phrases were exchanged amongst the group. As the project was designed with practical and theoretical research in mind, I was further developing my line of inquiry through my MA course which was concerned with examining how developing a movement mantra* could support participants to support and nurture their own wellbeing. A range of qualitative and quantitative data was captured, allowing a thorough evaluation of activities and impacts to be recorded (such as the *Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Health Wellbeing Scale* (WEMWBS)) before and after the project. There were also reflective arts evaluation approaches, such as writing a 'postcard to your future self' about your learnings.

**“It was a safe space where we could try things without feeling judged.”
“A lovely opportunity to explore an avenue that was completely new for me.”**

Participant B

“Having some time to myself to just be in the moment.”

Participant C



The Impact

Data from the WEMWBS questionnaire results, showed that five out of six participant's mental wellbeing was improved. One participant's mental wellbeing remained the same. Three participants (whose mental health was recorded at a low score initially) showed the greatest improvement, gaining on average 21.6 points. The average increase for the group was 11.5 points. Analysing how 'confidence' changed during the duration of the project showed that there were personal increases, week on week, for 83% of participants.

The Five Ways to Wellbeing questionnaire concluded overwhelmingly that the project sat well within the NHS guidelines.

“Everyone was so friendly and we got to know each other over the 5 weeks. It was good to meet new people, chat about what we were doing during the session and also find out that we all had other things in common.”

Participant D

“I would have never considered that I would enjoy being creative through dance but the way it was presented enabled me to understand the connection between movement and feelings.”

Participant A

***Movement mantra: “A personalised, creative, sensory and physical response in the form of a movement sequence which can be used as a creative, expressive tool.”**

Evans, V. 2022

Weekly postcards written to their future self or a loved one reflected personal gains:

“How we have grown together as a group over just 5 weeks! Sharing openly our movement. I would recommend my best friend to do this course.”

Participant C

“Your body can help to heal your mind. Remember the importance of movement and breath.”

Participant D

Lessons Learned

Careful planning ensured all activities were adaptable and varied, and time was spent in creating a shared, supportive environment so that participants could share their thoughts, feelings and movements. Bringing together a group of non-dancers to explore somatic movement (including a grassroots approach to Shiatsu through movement) proved inspiring, and more

people experienced creative movement and choreography. Attendance was high at 80% during a pandemic, and participants created longer movement sequences each week.

Legacy

I set out to develop a series of workshops uniting body energy practices with creative tools to support personal wellbeing, and created a short film sharing the project which can be seen on my YouTube channel *Moving Sense Making Sense* called ‘Wellness from Within: Creative Movement Explorations’.

Sharing principles of choreography using a thematic approach to exploratory, embodied movement can be beneficial to the emotional, physical and mental wellbeing of those involved.

Creating a movement mantra was at the heart of this study and confirmed my belief that sharing principles of choreography using a thematic approach to exploratory, embodied movement can be beneficial to the emotional, physical and mental wellbeing of those involved. I hope to repeat and extend this grassroots Shiatsu approach and seek partnerships with organisations and/or funding opportunities to enable my provision of this work in the gorgeous Wye Valley in Monmouthshire, where I also plan to establish my Shiatsu practice upon graduation.

Links

- Wellbeing from Within: Creative Movement Explorations https://youtu.be/1nPpVmq1_WY
- Linktree Vicky Evans https://linktr.ee/Vicky_Evans

CPD Question

Have you ever encouraged clients to explore creative movement and/or mark making as part of your wellbeing and Shiatsu inquiry with them? If so, how has this supported them and to what extent do you feel this has been beneficial?

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