EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - How Does Participation in Drama Shape the Extracurricular Lives of Young People?

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Terms to Know

Occupation: a “thing you do” that holds meaning and purpose; biking, painting, and making lunch are all examples
Occupational Repertoire: a set of occupations that a person participates in at a given time
Occupational Timeline: a visual depiction of a person’s occupational repertoire over time
Occupational Development: a change in occupational behaviours over time; this is a process that arises from a growing person interacting with their environment

Background Information

Young people’s participation in extracurricular activities shapes their patterns of occupations, development and identity. Reasons for participation in extracurricular activities, including drama, are diverse. There is limited research regarding how young people involved in drama select and refine their occupational repertoires.

Why is our research important?

Our research question was: “What characterizes the occupational repertoires and trajectories of children and youth who have participated in extracurricular theatre programs?”

By exploring the occupational repertoires of young people involved in drama we aimed to uncover:
- why they begin, continue, develop, or shift their involvement in drama and other extracurricular activities;
- the contextual elements that shape young people’s involvement in drama and other occupations;
- how involvement in new activities can impact occupational repertoires;
- And how past and present repertoires shape a person’s lifelong occupational trajectories.

What did we do to answer our research question?

We met for over an hour each with 3 drama students, age 10, 14, and 19, who had participated in theatre for a period of up to 7 years. With each participant, we constructed an occupational timeline that mapped a participant’s occupations across their life. This timeline served as a crucial point of reference during our interviews with participants, where we asked them questions about the occupations that made up their occupational repertoires.

What did we find?

We found four archetypes of occupation that characterize young people’s extracurricular involvement. These archetypes speak to the activity that a person participates in, and not the person themselves. This means that a single individual can be experiencing multiple archetypes at the same time from different occupations.

1. Something to Do: These occupations are taken on during times in which an individual is experiencing a limited or an unfulfilling occupational repertoire. Often these are initiated through personal exploration or, alternatively, by a caregiver directing participation. This archetype was divided into two subtypes:

   i. Trial: These serve as opportunities for exploring interests and making decisions about pursuing certain extracurricular activities. Usually initiation is externally driven. Often this is an activity that a child is “put in” by a parent or caregiver.

   “[Paraphrased] I tried tee ball after my brother did baseball but I didn’t like it so my mom said, ‘let’s try something else.'”

   ii. Side: The occupation is not valued on its own merit. Rather, it is what it affords that supports engagement. For example, a child plays golf in order to spend time with her parents even though she does not enjoy golf itself.

   “I don’t really like golf... my family plays though and it’s a way for us all to spend time together.”
2. **Goal-directed:** These are selected and pursued primarily for their outcomes of participation. This archetype was also divided into two subtypes:

**i. Useful Skill**: These provide opportunities for development and master of personal, familial, cultural and/or societal valued skills.

> "Well neither of my parents swim, and I guess they wanted us to swim, so they put us into classes and I would have fits... and I told her I didn't want to it... she said 'you have to learn, it is a skill you need to have.'"

**ii. Means to an End**: These are performed to gain access to something else, such as another occupation, skill development or social connections.

> "I kind of continued with voice because I wanted to get into [a performing arts] school, and they would like to see if you can sing. So it's like okay, I'll do it so I can get it."

3. **Fork in the Road**: Occupations that fall within this archetype are hallmark by a crucial juncture whereby the course of a person's occupational pursuits and trajectory is changed.

> "So that's the funny thing, but that's [performing in dance] what kind of led me to theatre, is the fact that I was like 'Oh! That's what I like. I like doing that.' So that was a big part of why I wanted to go into theatre. [Performing] was the part of dance that I did like, so I was like okay, maybe I should go into theatre, so I could be finding that more."

4. **Essential to Self**: These occupations are ones without which a person cannot imagine their lives. They contribute to identity in a meaningful way, guide decisions and shape the future. These occupations are found at the intersection of a person's values, skill level, environment and sense of self. They are crucial to maintaining a healthy and rich occupational repertoire. Again, this archetype was divided into subtypes:

**i. Essential to Identity**: These have a personal meaning that is often hard to define and are generally seen as an extension of the self. Participating in these occupations constructs, develops or reinforces identity. They are usually pursued as a passion and are something for which a person is willing to make sacrifices.

> "I mean I think that because I can't imagine not doing it right now, it's hard to be able to articulate, how it fits with me, just because it feels like it is me."

**ii. Essential to Balance**: These are occupations that offer respite from the demands imposed by other occupations present within a person's repertoire.

> "Maybe it's because I'm so socially involved in drama, and because I'm barely socially involved in swimming... they kind of piece together to balance out, kind of like a scale."

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**What does this tell us?**

- It is important to consider a person's whole repertoire. A single occupation can have a ripple effect on a person's entire repertoire, and in turn the trajectories of their occupations as seen particularly in the pursuit of Essential to Self occupations.

- Exploration and trialing within an occupation is used as a means to establish a meaningful fit. Through exploration, a person finds crucial elements of an occupation that fit with their identity, skill, and values, that are worthy of pursuit.

- There is a need for balance amongst a person's occupations. Opportunities for balance within a repertoire promote enjoyable participation and limits burnout, especially when a person focuses a lot of time and effort into a single occupation.

- We can suggest that in drama it is important to allow opportunities for exploration to allow young people to find meaningful connections with their craft. In doing so, a degree of balance can be struck in a way that can limit dropout while promoting development of each child's unique interests, skills and identity.
References


