

Title: Embodied Methodologies: The Body as Research Instrument

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Overview: This series of three videos introduces an embodied epistemology through the moving body. Video 1 discusses the discipline of somatic practices, leading to expanding views on knowledge and perception as based mostly in cognition, to a more integrated view that includes the entire body as potential site of knowing. The second video offers a concrete movement task to explore this through a pair of spatial concepts. Moving with lines and angles versus circles and spirals serves as an example to derive insights through movement. The final video translates this concept to the academic research cycle, including practical suggestions of how to let your own research benefit from /be supported by increased bodily awareness and a movement-approach.

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Further Resources: www.somatictoolkit.coventry.ac.uk [check url]

Sandra Reeve: Move into Life

Helen Poynor: Walk of Life

Eline Kieft: 1:1 facilitation of embodied research

Video 1 Somatic Introduction and Knowing with the Body

[Introduction]

SLIDE 1 Title Slide

Hi, my name is Eline Kieft, and my background is in anthropology and dance. Before I studied medical anthropology, I trained to become a professional dancer from a very young age. In a way, I have always made sense of the world through my body and through movement. During my PhD I studied the effects of dance on health and wellbeing. I noticed that my body was instrumental in making sense of what research participants were telling me. I brought the data with me into the studio in the phase of analysis. And when I was writing, I was searching for words through my moving body, to express details and nuances as I clearly as I could.

I currently work at the Centre for Dance Research, at Coventry University, and my fascination with embodied learning and embodied research continued. With a grant from the NCRM I had the opportunity to lead a project to design a Somatics Toolkit for Ethnographers.

This online learning resource follows on from that project, to introduce the possibilities for applying the deep wisdom of the body-in-movement to any phase of the research cycle, as well as to draw on the body for mental and emotional support. 'Embodied research' invites all aspects of the researcher into the work.

SLIDE 2 Overview of Three videos

This resource includes three videos that explore how we can consciously apply our body as research tool and 'site of knowing', and what role can movement play to increase this.

1. This first video briefly introduces the discipline of somatic practices, leading up to a wider view on knowledge and perception than one only based in cognition. Instead, the entire body can be considered as a way to get to know things.
2. The second video provides a practice opportunity for you to try out moving with lines and angles versus circles and spirals, and serves as an example to derive insights through movement.
3. The final video further adapts this concept of the body as instrument to the academic research cycle, including practical suggestions of how you can include bodily awareness and a movement approach in your own research.

Before we continue, let me acknowledge that it is somewhat strange to be talking to you without actually seeing you, your body posture and the space you are in. Please make yourself comfortable. Take a few deep breaths. Lean back into your chair. Soften your eyes. Give yourself the opportunity to relax as much as you can while learning new content. We all have a multitude of different learning styles. These videos will include audio, visual, as well as movement explorations. You can also read the script if you click on the "subtitles & closed caption button" at the bottom of your screen.

At first glance, it seems very obvious what we mean by a body. But theoretically it is not that straightforward. Our cultural positioning, our life experience, our degree of awareness of the world around us, are all factors that influence our body. Perhaps we could say our body is a process. It is always changing and morphing. Somatic practices offer a way to familiarise ourselves more intimately with our physicality.

The body is still quite a 'marginal' topic within academia. Over the last a few decades, research *about* the body has become more common, but *with* the body is still quite a novelty.

Many of today's educational systems emphasise brain cognition over physical, bodily intelligence. Reading, writing and computing skills are most favoured. We mainly learn through books, audio-visual or virtual media. Whatever the medium, our body does not usually play an active role in learning, exploring, and discovering. On the contrary, it is usually required to sit still except in physical education in which students can blow off some steam.

However, the role of body in pedagogy and learning should not be underestimated and could be much better utilised. How can we widen our conceptual epistemological roadmap – to include learning through and with the body as an alternative route to learning and research? I believe that any topic can be explored through the body in conscious movement, so that includes anything related to research.

SLIDE 3 Benefits of Body as Research Tool

Why would it be useful to include the body more consciously into learning and research?

- First of all, knowledge is not only created through cognition. The body is like a library, archive, or site of knowledge. We orient ourselves in space through the physical, kinaesthetic, orientation of our body. Our body holds memories of our experience. Our senses alert us to things around us. Through increased body awareness, a structured exploration of the senses, and fine-tuning our perception and interpretation, we can access a much deeper, visceral understanding of research data. This leads to richer outputs.
- Physical engagement also provides different, creative, avenues into the research process and helps with getting unstuck, refresh, and find our flow again, for example with literature review or writers' block. This informs the research, and supports the researcher in a different way.
- It can provide emotional support during stressful aspects of the research. When you feel you are drowning in your data or struggling with personally challenging responses to the material, movement is an excellent way to explore and release such experiences.

How would we go about this? First, let's have a closer look at somatics.

SLIDE 4 Development of Somatics

Somatics is a bit of an unusual word. It comes from the Greek word soma, which means body. The legacy of early somatic pioneers has influenced many disciplines and systems of inquiry. You may have heard of Alexander technique, Laban or Mensendieck, Authentic Movement, or Body-Mind Centering.

The origins of somatic practices as we know them today can be traced back to the end of the 19th century. Both from an urge to break free from strict views on the body, but also often in response to illness and disabilities, people started to investigate the way the body functions and is experienced from within. This included interests from phenomenological and existential philosophy, as well as from the expressionist movement, which contrasted with the strict rules of classical ballet.

In the mid 1980s commonalities between various approaches started to be recognised, and nowadays, their core principles are widely applied as part of healthcare, performing arts and in commercial settings. However, there has not yet been a comprehensive attempt to integrate somatics into a scholarly research methodology, nor to track the benefits that can come from such integration.

SLIDE 5 Characteristics of somatic practice

Lets look at the characteristics of somatic practices. Most of them, as you see here, include an awareness of breath and the senses and focus on conscious relaxation. They promote a connection between inner and outer self in the world, and emphasise that we are active beings with a sense of agency. Practices often work consciously with memory, images and the imagination.

They tend to offer a way to explore different points of view and transitions between those. Very simply put – if you are standing, you have a different view, than when you're sitting. What does our position, our environment, our speed afford us to experience, to observe?

They also investigate habitual movements and introduce new movement possibilities. Much like 'Gestalt psychology' for example, our perceptions will be different when we slump or straighten our shoulders. Try that now, and see how it affects you.

SLIDE 6 Related concepts

Here you see some similar and related concepts such as "felt sense" (Gendlin, 1978), "somatic mind" (Fleckenstein, 1999), "somatosensory awareness" (Fraleigh, 2000), "bodily intelligence" (Grau, 1995), "somatic markers" (Damasio, 1999), and somaesthetics (Shusterman, 1999).

SLIDE 7 Other Embodied Scholarship

- The field of somatics is closely linked to a newer field of Embodied Cognition (Chemero, 2009, Clark, 2016, Shapiro, 2011), with a similar historical trajectory and traced back to similar scholars.
- Anthropology saw the sensory turn in the 1990s, and recognises that sensory experiences are culturally constituted, and also inform knowledge creation
- Autoethnography specifically recognises the literacy of the body and has the capacity to embrace paradoxes such as body/mind, personal/scholarly, individual/social, evocative/analytical, without making the research less rigorous or theoretical
- Dance studies looks at artistic explorations of corporeality, with the body both as object and subject, and also as a form of social and political performance.

- Sensual Scholarship (Stoller, 1997) and Embodied E/Inquiry (Snowber, 2016) (Todres 2007) look at translating theory into the moving body – of these Celeste Snowber's is the most concrete and visceral.

What can we do to explore the potential of the body as site for knowing throughout the entire research cycle?

SLIDE 8 Explicit or Tacit Knowledge

Lets have a very quick look at 'knowledge'. Our educational system strongly emphasises explicit knowledge. We have to learn and repeat facts, use mathematical formula, and understand the structure of language. Tacit knowledge gets much less attention in formal education, even though it makes up a larger portion of our life and daily decision-making. It is intuitive, rooted in context, experience & values. This makes it hard to communicate, because it resides in the knower. It is hard to talk about physical experiences, because there are many levels of translation from the experience to the written word. This is the distinction between know that, versus know how.

SLIDE 9 Multiple Intelligences

There are different ways to looking at intelligence as well. Howard Gardner introduced the notion of seven different types of intelligences (Gardner, 1983). They include Logico-Mathematical; Linguistic; Musical; Spatial; Bodily-Kinaesthetic; Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Intelligences. Whereas the first two could potentially (although debatable) be located in the brain only, all the others involve more of the body.

SLIDE 10 Embodied Perception

Another way of classifying embodied intelligence is according to where our perception is focused. This is classification is used by (Shusterman, 2008) for example, and also appears in neuroscientific research. You will see overlap with Gardner's multiple intelligences. Going from the external to the internal, exteroception refers to anything that we perceive around us. This includes what we hear, what we see. Proprioception includes perception of bodily movement and orientation in the space. Finally, interoception is our perception of internal physical and emotional states, interior-perception.

[Completion]

So far I have introduced some territory of corporeality and embodied knowledge. Intelligence is not only based in cognition, or rather there are multiple aspects of our being that supply our cognition with data. These often go unacknowledged. The second video offers a concrete movement exploration of knowing with and through your own body. I will talk you through moving with two spatial concepts of lines and angles, compared to circles and curves. You can do this at home, if you have a space of two square meters to move freely. If you prefer to skip the movement practice now, the third and final video addresses the concrete application of the body as instrument for the research cycle.

Thank you for your time, and Remember your Body.

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