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Portrait of an OT artist: Using Mindfulness to find Life Balance

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Portrait of an OT artist: Using Mindfulness to find Life Balance

Abstract

Lynn Davies, a Canadian-based occupational therapist, understands the skill set and practice required to employ a balanced work/play/leisure routine, even for an occupational therapist. Occupational therapists can easily foster this balanced routine for clients; however, they may fall short of adopting this balanced routine in their own lives. Lynn uses art and mindfulness strategies to strive for a meaningful routine. Balancing her work as a therapist and her engagement in art is an ever-evolving orchestra, as she has a passion for both.

Keywords

occupational therapy, occupation, balanced routine, mindfulness

Credentials Display

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An underlying theme throughout my conversation with Lynn Davies, a Canadian-based occupational therapist, was the concept of a balanced routine. Mastering a work/play/leisure routine employs skill and practice, even for an occupational therapist. Occupational therapists can easily foster this balanced routine for clients; however, occupational therapists may fall short of adopting this balanced routine in their own lives. Lynn uses art and mindfulness strategies to strive for a meaningful routine. Balancing her work as a therapist as well as her engagement in art is an ever-evolving orchestra, as she has a passion for both.

Lynn has always been interested in art. She attended a high school with an emphasis on art, specifically on creativity versus technique. She would often participate in life drawing and sculpture. Around this time, Lynn viewed fashioning artwork as a creative process. She developed a passion for and interest in creating art; however, she was aware of the challenges that working as a full time artist would entail. Lynn's mother introduced her to occupational therapy. Upon further inquiry, she was drawn to the art that is engrained in the field. She attended the University of Toronto to pursue her bachelor's degree in occupational therapy. She developed an appreciation for the science that drives the field as well as its artistic foundations. She graduated from the University of Toronto in 1996.

At the time that Lynn graduated, there were limited occupational therapy jobs in Toronto; therefore, she found work in the United States. Three of the four years that she lived in the US were spent in Austin, Texas. Living in Austin reignited

Lynn's creative side. She began oil painting, and although she never took formal classes, the process of self-directed learning enthralled her.

Lynn was drawn to figurative artwork, which describes any artwork related to the real world, especially human figures (Tate, 2015). She enjoyed drawing both still life pictures and portraits. Her time became increasingly devoted to this hobby and she eventually created enough pieces to be featured in a gallery. Consequently, she decided to pursue an artistic career and become a full time artist.

After leaving her job as an occupational therapist, Lynn was required to return to Canada, where she continued her artwork. She worked primarily as a portrait artist for approximately four years. During this time, she transformed her hobby into traditional work. Unfortunately, the unstable income and the stress of making a living that came with a career as an artist interfered with Lynn's enjoyment of her profession. As a result, she resumed her career as a full time occupational therapist and periodically engaged in oil painting as a hobby.

Around the same time that Lynn took her two maternity leaves, each of which were a year long, she realized that she is allergic to oil paints. She had a chronic cough and did not want to expose her children to the oil paint, and so she began venturing for new modalities to create her artwork.

Through a colleague, Lynn learned how to use Photoshop to draw. She shifted her focus from traditional practices to an innovative approach to artwork. She would physically draw her artwork using a Stylus pen on a tablet given to her by her

husband. This new method did not involve exposure to paint fumes and required minimal clean up. She has now taken formal online classes and has been enjoying the use of this technique for the past 4 years.

Lynn approaches her oil painting by using digital media to create artwork in a similar manner to traditional painting. Painting with a Stylus pen and tablet feels similar to painting on a canvas. She begins by composing a line-drawing using different color combinations. She puts in big global forms and shapes and slowly fills them in with more detail. With digital media she can easily erase and rearrange objects on the screen, unlike with traditional oil painting, which limits the amount of rearranging that can occur. When creating her artwork, Lynn considers the lighting and the individual brush strokes. Using digital media allows Lynn more freedom in comparison to traditional oil painting.

Lynn has always been interested in drawing people. In particular, drawing eyes and hands has always been easy for Lynn. She has attended many live model sessions, and her background in anatomy has proven to be useful in her art endeavors; understanding the musculoskeletal system and landmarks are useful when drawing portraits.

Lynn currently works full time at the E. W. Bickle Centre for Complex Continuing Care, which is a branch of the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute affiliated with the University Health Network. She has been working there for 7 years. As an occupational therapist, she strives to make the most functional gains in an environment where she

In both her professional and personal life, Lynn has an appreciation for the importance of occupations. According to the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, occupation is “groups of activities and tasks of everyday life, named, organized and given value and meaning by individuals and a culture. Occupation is everything people do to occupy themselves, including looking after themselves (self-care), enjoying life (leisure), and contributing to the social and economic fabric of their communities (productivity)” (Law, Steinwinder, & Leclair, 1998, p. 83).

Lynn strives to find a balanced routine between her occupations. A balanced routine contributes to an individual’s sense of well being (Hocking, 2014), but for many people achieving a balanced routine has become increasingly difficult due to higher workloads and decreased access to leisure tasks (Hocking, 2014), which also holds true for Lynn. She finds it natural to encourage others to engage in a routine filled with meaningful occupations, but she finds it difficult to create a balanced routine for herself. Lynn continuously pursues strategies that will allow her to have these dual roles simultaneously in her life.

Lynn has been interested in mindfulness in order to strive for a balanced routine. Mindfulness can be defined as “a moment-to-moment awareness of one’s experience without judgment” (Davis & Hayes, 2011, p. 198). Harris (2009) states “mindfulness means paying attention with flexibility, openness, and curiosity” (p. 8). It entails being aware of the present moment with a non-judgmental stance, even if the present moment may arouse uncomfortable feelings or thoughts (Russ,

2009). This may be an easy concept to understand, but it can be difficult to implement. Stressors of the past and the anxiety of the future often eclipse the present moment, and it takes extraordinary effort to redirect one's attention to the present moment with a non-judgmental stance.

Mindfulness has the potential to produce positive emotional and physical effects, such as improved emotional regulation, improved ability to communicate one's emotions, and increased immune functioning (Davis & Hayes, 2011). These concepts may help an individual implement a more balanced routine. Davidson et al. (2003) conducted a randomized control study that examined the effects of mindfulness on one's physical health. They found that a program based on mindfulness meditation provided positive effects on brain and immune function. In addition, a randomized control trial conducted by Gregg et al. (2007) sought to identify if a mindfulness approach would improve the health of individuals with diabetes. The study found a mindfulness approach, along with patient education, was more effective in producing self-management skills and improving blood glucose levels when compared to providing patient education alone.

Lynn is currently taking an 8-week course on mindfulness-based stress reduction developed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn

<http://www.mindfullivingprograms.com/whatMBSR.php>

The way we think and feel can affect our physical health, and Lynn wants to pursue how she can decrease stress while participating in a balanced routine. No matter how chaotic or stressful one's

life may be, a simple redirection to the present moment can have a powerful, everlasting impact for those who can take this giant leap forward.

Cover Photo

The cover photo is titled "Chloe." Lynn created the portrait with traditional oil paints when she worked full time as an artist. Lynn included personal details in the portrait in order to make it more meaningful. These details include a puzzle, a globe (since she enjoys traveling), and old pictures of her mom. One of her favorite toys was a Geisha doll, and so Lynn included a drawing of the doll as well. Chloe's name is also hidden in the sash she is wearing. As an artist and an occupational therapist, Lynn strives to create meaning for her clients as well as for herself.

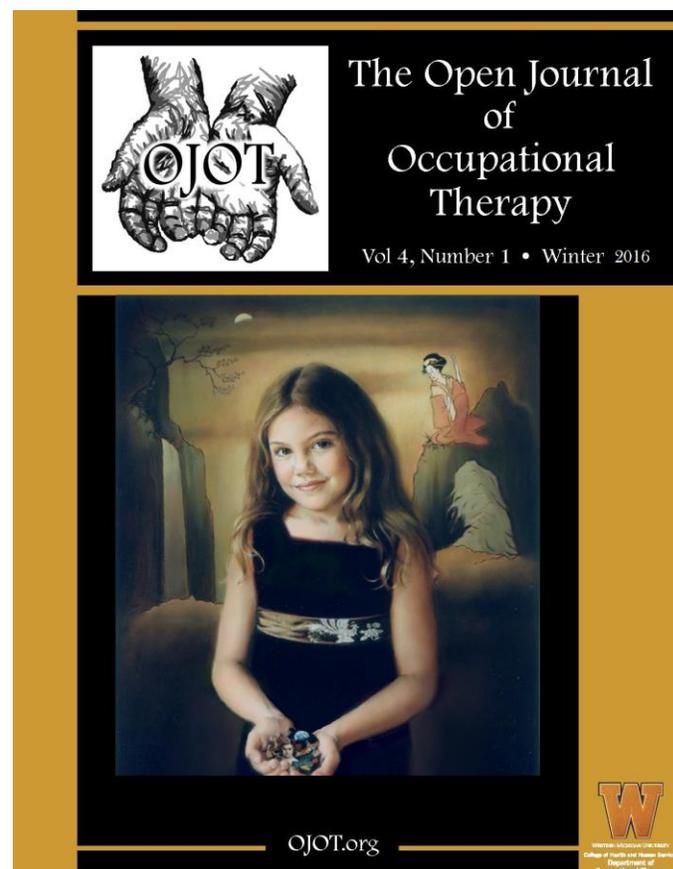


Figure 1. Cover photo OJOT Vol 4, No 1

For more of Lynn’s work please visit:

<http://www.studiodiva.ca/p/about.html>

http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/ojot_occupationandartist/

For more information on mindfulness please visit:

<http://www.moritaschool.com/>

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