



TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN  
COLÁISTE NA TRÍONÓIDE

THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF DUBLIN

# Reflections on Two Years of Occupational Therapy in a Prison Setting

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Stockholm, ENOTHE 2010

# How we came to work in the prison

**Service-Learning course**

**Group Theories course**

**Peer Education**

Emerging areas of practice.



# The community partner



- Est. 1999
- Closed 'open' prison
- Part of bigger Victorian prison complex
- Capacity 105 (overcrowding issues)
- Educational centre



# Group interventions with women in prison

- Women in prison often display dependence on structure, interpersonal distrust, hyper vigilance, alienation, social withdrawal, decreased sense of self worth and stress related reactions.
- Recommendations for comprehensive and holistic approaches that place the women within the context of their relationship with others and the environment

(Ferszt et al. 2009)



# Group interventions with women in prison

- Programmes should attempt to address
  - Self-esteem
  - Abuse history
  - Life skills training
  - Coping skills
- Our beginnings – Self Advocacy
- Needs identified by prison staff – drama, problem solving, independent living skills



# The characteristics of human occupation in the women's prison (Townsend & Polatajko, 2007).

Who



What



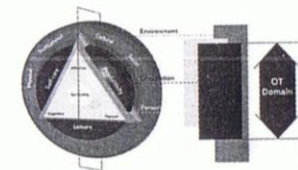
When



Where



How



Why

- Meaning
- Fulfillment
- Social connectedness
- Contribute rest

- Relaxation
- Challenge
- Achievement
- Success
- Satisfaction

- Purpose
- Self-expression
- Sustenance
- Relief of boredom
- Joy

# The WHO of occupation

- Personal backgrounds
  - Literacy, varied socioeconomic classes, varied cultures, varied roles
- Type of problems they're living with
  - Drug addiction, abuse, kids & family
  - Guilt, court appearances
  - Bullying, sleeping, anxiety, depression, too many people around, anger, no control



# The **WHEN** of occupation

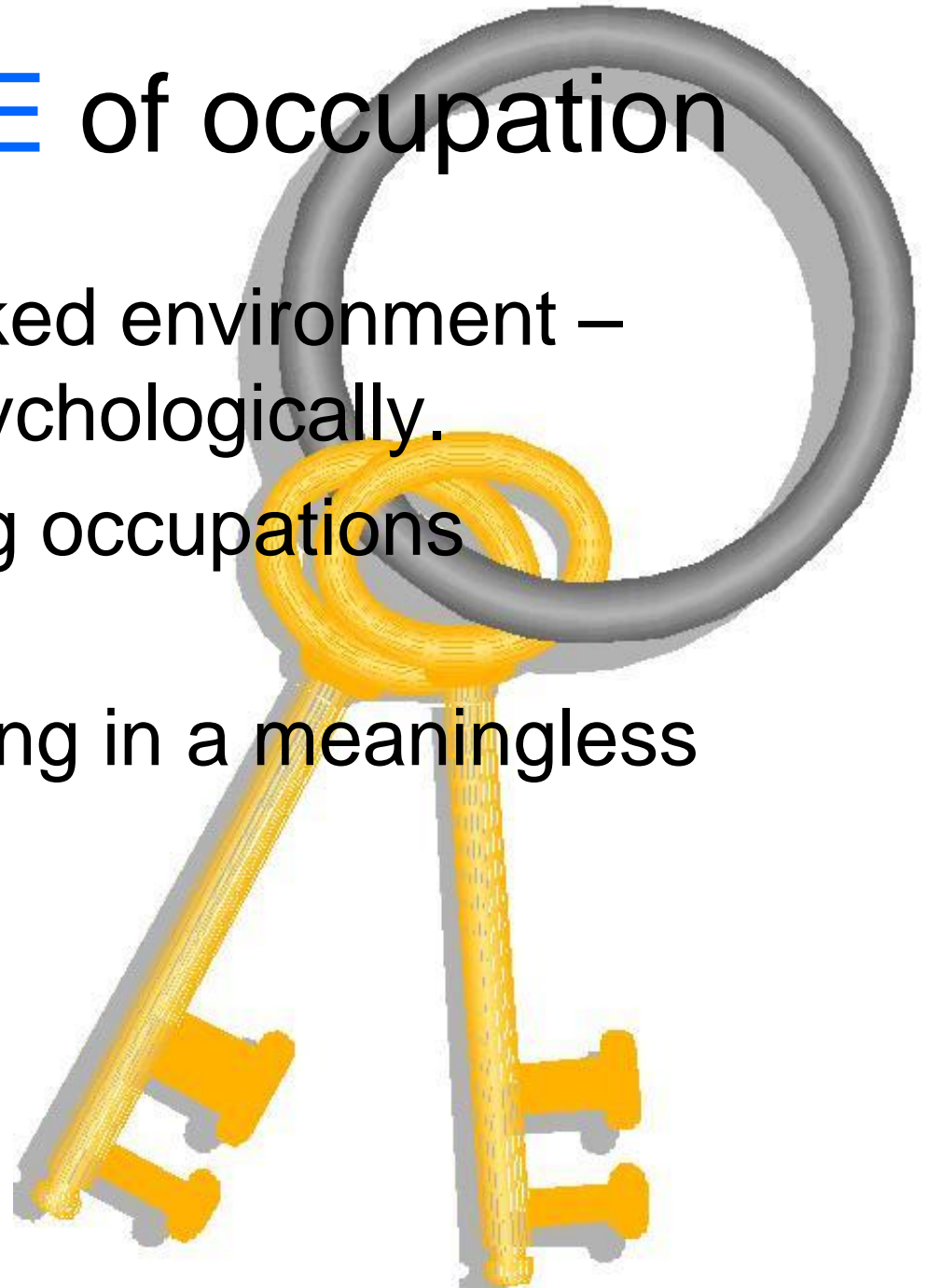
- **Before prison**
  - Established roles & routines that then change
- **Life in prison**
  - Routine of the institution
  - Little autonomy re scheduling
  - Time use – busy/ very immediate/ chaotic/ running late
- **Life after prison**
  - Only meaningful near release





# The **WHERE** of occupation

- Constraints of locked environment – practicalities & psychologically.
- Difficulty in making occupations contextually real.
- How to find meaning in a meaningless place?



# Pulling the WHO & WHERE together: **Factors impacting on women's occupational engagement**

- **Personal level**

- Not taking responsibility, peer pressure, lacking control over daily routine & personal choices, ...

- **Environmental level**

- Phone calls & visits, change of governance, over-crowding, overdoses, suicides, paranoia & gossiping, bullying, racism, ...



# The **WHAT** of occupation

- Hanging out in houses – smoking, watching TV, socialising
- School – leisure & exams.
- Personal development courses.
- Self-care & grooming.
- Instrumental Activities of Daily Living.



# The **HOW** of occupation

- How the women came to be these occupational beings...
- Occupational loss.
- Occupational replacement.
- Shift – focus on self.
- Having supports within environment (belonging) influences engagement.



# The **WHY** of occupational engagement

- Skills for now or after prison.
- As a distraction; fill the day.
- Build up prisoner profile for Temporary Release.
- Through engagement process new motivators develop – e.g. connectedness, self-development, commitment.
- Occupation gains a reputation.





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This is to certify that:

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Successfully completed a Problem Solving Course

Signature

Date

Signature

Date

DISCIPLINE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY, TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

# The **WHAT** of occupation Projects to Date

## STUDENT-LED

- Self-Advocacy
- Independent Living
- Drama

## STAFF-LED

- Drama
- Problem Solving
- Drama





TRINITY COLLEGE  
DUBLIN

DHA  
LAMH  
THEATRE



Discipline of Occupational Therapy

Dhá Lámh Theatre Company

Dóchas Centre, Mountjoy Prison

You are cordially invited to the screening of  
**'The Puppet Play of Don Cristobal'**  
by Federico Garcia Lorca

**3.00pm**  
**Sunday, 12th September, 2010**  
**Phibsborough Tower**

Performed by the women in the Dóchas Centre for Phizzfest  
- Phibsborough Community Arts Festival





# Feedback on Drama Group – women’s perspective

## Why they engaged:

- Got into it by accident
- Good way to pass the time

## Their experience:

- Better than expected. Great fun.
- This was something I could do well
- “Best thing I’ve done since coming in”
- Got to know each other – each took on roles

## Skill development:

- How to work together, respect, confidence, patience
- More comfortable to express feelings
- Desire to learn more skills



# Students' feedback on their group experience

## Struggles:

- An unknown entity.
- Balancing differences in culture & interests.
- Selecting appropriate activities.

## Learning:

- Importance of & difficulties in planning (being able to deviate from plan).
- Therapeutic use of selves (use of environment; understanding & managing group dynamics).
- Increased confidence in facilitating groups.

*“Feel so lucky to have gotten in there.”*



# Prison staff & others' feedback

- See a big change in the women.
  - See a side to them that didn't know before – 'shining' and 'in the community'.
- Symbiotic relationship.

