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# **Beads of Becoming: Ritual and Reflection in Mapping the Lived Body through a Drama Therapeutic Projective Task**

## **Nonkululeko Vilakazi**

This paper examines a drama and movement therapy intervention designed to facilitate young clients' re-engagement with embodied experience when psychological barriers limit their somatic awareness. The therapist-researcher's experiential insight underpins the intervention: a commitment to supporting clients in returning to themselves transformed, rather than merely restored, through the development of a projective task.

The task represents each participant as a sketched human outline conceptualised as an 'empty shell', initially filled with grey beads. Across successive therapy sessions, clients progressively replace selected grey beads with coloured beads, each substitution accompanied by a brief self-report identifying the cognitive, affective, or behavioural shift that the colour change symbolises. This iterative visual record functions as both a metaphor and a mechanism of therapeutic change. The progressive transformation from grey to colour provides a concrete representation of developing insight and emotional integration, while the ritualised act of bead replacement invites the noticing of subtle bodily sensations and emergent somatic presence. In this way, the task serves as a transitional process through which clients may safely bridge the gap between verbal reflection and embodied engagement.

The intervention is conceptualised within the framework of the hero's and heroine's journey, tracing internal and external quests toward an integrated self. Weekly narrative accounts of the bead changes form a qualitative dataset capturing the evolving relationship between symbolic expression and embodied awareness. Grounded in clinical practice within drama and movement therapy, this study argues that ritualised, sensory-symbolic tasks can effectively mediate the return to self for clients initially resistant to embodied work. Returning



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to self is thus theorised not as a discrete therapeutic endpoint but as an ongoing, dynamic re-inhabitation of the body and subjectivity, where neither the traveller (client) nor the self encountered remains identical to the one who first departed.

### **Biography**

**Nonkululeko Vilakazi** is an HPCSA, HCPC, and British Association of Dramatherapy-registered Drama and Movement Psychotherapist. Nonkululeko is particularly interested in African-informed and cross-cultural approaches to psychotherapy to ensure cultural diversity and inclusion within mental health services. With relevant experience in both the South African and British contexts, Nonkululeko designed a module on African perspectives of Drama and Movement Therapy.

Nonkululeko's research interests are in multicultural bereavement rituals and their psychoanalytical significance in grief-informed drama movement therapy, as well as trauma-informed drama movement therapy, with a particular focus on ethnographic and hermeneutic phenomenology studies on pain and rage. Apart from her roles as a therapist in private practice, a Dance in Education and Master's Drama Therapy lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand, Ms. Vilakazi is a founding member of iNkululeko Ye Africa (iNYA) Therapies, a not-for-profit arts psychotherapy and psychosocial organisation which offers school-based mental health interventions and supports communities in underserved areas.

### **Recent publications and conference presentations**

Nonkululeko Vilakazi, (July 2025). **Decolonising Somatic Therapies: Reframing Pain, Movement, and Embodied Healing in African Therapeutic Contexts**

*University of Pretoria, Mapping Somatic Knowledge Ecologies Conference – Johannesburg, South Africa*

Nonkululeko Vilakazi: Conference presentation and publication (May 2025) (article in review)

**Embodying Rage: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Case Study of Dance Movement Therapy with an 18-Year-Old Client in Post-Apartheid South Africa**, *University of the*



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*Witwatersrand, The Body Is Present: Rethinking the Afterlives of Violence and Legacies of Oppression Conference – Johannesburg, South Africa*

Nonkululeko Vilakazi: Conference presentation and publication (March 2024) (article in layout review) **Perceptions of Transformation: Videography in Multimodal Arts and Expressive Arts Therapy**, *The Open Window University Research Institute, in partnership with UNISA Press, iMPAC 2024 conference and symposium – Lusaka, Zambia*