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Becoming an occupational therapist: Critically thinking about who we are and what we bring in contexts of diversity

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Introduction: Practice which acknowledges people as part of a broader collective embraces the African ethic of ubuntu (Ramugondo & Kronenberg, 2015) and requires further attention to the complexities of human relationships. This demands that occupational therapists acknowledge their positionality and intersectional identities in relation to the diverse groups of people that we work with (Galvaan & Peters, 2017).

Objectives: To describe occupational therapy students insights into forming relationships with and relating to diverse groups of people in academic and practice contexts where the need for the decoloniality of knowledge and the decoloniality of being (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015) has been highlighted.

Approach: An autobiographical self-study (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001) was conducted by two University of Cape Town final year occupational therapy students. Data was generated through two focus group discussions. Students reflected on their experiences of learning and living in a university context and the data was thematically analysed.

Results: The main theme describes how students were able to bring their 'selves and being' into relationships influencing their participation and contributions in different contexts. It illustrates how students' social identities, prior experiences and feelings of power impacted their practices, highlighting how diversity created opportunities for mutual learning.

Conclusion: Creating and contributing to 'brave spaces' (Scottbey Jones, 2017) where experience matters allowed learning to take place. While 'textbook knowledge' is often the more valued form of knowing, this paper shows that this alone is not sufficient to produce critical occupational therapists. It highlights the value that diversity adds.