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**'It's like hope in a dark room': a phenomenological study of  
Occupational Therapy Students' experiences of participating in  
Students as Co-Researcher Projects with asylum seekers and  
refugees**

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

York St John University

School of Education, Language and Psychology

December 2022

I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

*FKHowlett*

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## **Abstract**

This study adopted an interpretivist phenomenological design to determine the value and meaning of participating in a Students as Co-Researcher's project with asylum seekers and refugees. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with eighteen participants who had taken part in one of three projects as pre-registration occupational therapy students. Data were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Key findings were that students valued working together as part of a supportive team. Enabling meaningful occupation provided a means to work with asylum seekers and refugees using purposeful creative activities. Developing a sense of cultural awareness aided the students' understanding of the importance of connectivity and collectivism in different cultures. The projects had a significant impact on the students' professional identity and current role.

Recommendations are to encourage occupational therapy pre-registration students to engage in Students as Co-Researchers' projects to develop their research skills and contribute to the evidence base for occupational therapy, occupational science, and social justice. Working alongside other health and social care professions in the research projects would provide valuable interprofessional learning, offer greater diversity of thought and broader interpretation of findings.

Despite growing numbers of asylum seekers and refugees in the United Kingdom and around the world, there are few occupational therapy posts in this area of practice. Posts that are available tend to be in the third sector, are not occupational therapy specific and are poorly paid. Occupational therapists should collaborate with asylum seekers and refugees to act as advocates in the design and delivery of services and to develop and influence policy at a local, national, and international level. Staff need to be trained to develop cultural humility in their practice and to develop a range of culturally appropriate assessments. Occupational therapy has a clear role in this developing area of practice.

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## 1.Introduction

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2021) 100 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide because of persecution, conflict, and violence, 83% of whom were hosted in low-and middle-income countries. 1 in 78 people on earth have been forced to flee. The ongoing Ukrainian crisis has heightened the problem with more than 7 million Ukrainians displaced within their country and more than 6 million registered refugee movements from Ukraine (UNHCR, 2022). A refugee is a person who is: someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. An asylum seeker is someone whose request for asylum has yet to be processed (UNHCR, 2021). Over the past decade, there has been an increasing number of asylum seekers coming to Europe including a 190% increase in applications to the UK. In the year ending June 2022, there were 63,089 people seeking asylum in the UK and 15,684 people were offered protection, in the form of asylum, humanitarian protection and resettlement (HM Government, 2022).

Increasing globalisation and changes in migration and immigration patterns have led researchers to develop a growing body of evidence which identifies the occupational implications and needs of people who have been displaced through war and political unrest (Whiteford, 2005; World Federation Occupational Therapists (WFOT), 2014). The trauma and circumstances surrounding forced migration and the prolonged state of occupational deprivation have a negative impact on health, wellbeing, and meaningful occupation (Wilcock and Hocking 2015; Morville and Jessen-Winge 2019; Hart, 2021). Therefore, there is a need for occupational therapy students and practitioners to develop a greater awareness and consideration of culture and its context to achieve person-centred practice with

increasing numbers of people who are marginalised and seeking asylum and refugee status (Bourke-Taylor and Hudson 2005).

## **1.1 Background to the study**

Occupational therapy was originally founded on the paradigm of occupation (Kielhofner, 2008). This occupational perspective was focussed on the health of individuals in the context of the culture of activities of daily life (Kielhofner and Burke 1980). Occupational therapists help to respect, protect, and fulfil people's occupational needs and rights to enable health and wellbeing. The occupational therapy profession contributes to people's health and wellbeing by enabling displaced people to participate in valued occupations that help to bridge a gap between their former life and their current situation (WFOT, 2014). This involves engaging students, practitioners, volunteers, educators, and researchers in the importance of understanding culture and context. Occupational strengths are respected by valuing previous life roles, developing, or participating in existing occupations or adapting to new occupations. According to Yerxa (1991) finding meaning, having an active role in society and a cultural connectedness are all possible through engaging in occupations.

Occupational therapists improve the lives of individuals, groups, and communities through supporting people to do the things they want and need to do (Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT), 2019). Health Education England's (HEE) Research and innovation strategy (HEE, 2017) aimed to develop a flexible workforce that can respond to changing needs of service delivery by encouraging all staff to embrace research and innovation and create a culture in which research is valued. The Health and Care Professions Council Standards of Proficiency: Occupational Therapy (HCPC, 2023), the Career Development Framework, (RCOT, 2021a) and Learning Standards for Pre-Registration Education (RCOT, 2019) state that occupational therapists should draw on knowledge from research to inform

practice, understand the value of research and research methodologies, and assess, develop, and evaluate evidence-based practice.

Migration disrupts peoples' established occupations, and challenges their identity, sense of competence, and impacts on their health and wellbeing (Gupta and Sullivan, 2013). People who endure forced migration, often do so abruptly because of an event, including trauma or disaster (Taylor et al, 2020). They rarely take their belongings with them and have little hope for when they will be able to return to their homes. People who are forced to migrate have a lack of control over their lives, and they face much anguish (Huot, Kelly and Park, 2016; Taylor et al, 2020). Disruptions or restrictions to occupations can result in isolation and inability to engage with new environments, and inadequate social support is common (Whiteford, 2005). The experience of seeking asylum is often a convoluted process with limited or no access to work, poor physical and mental health, diminishing energy and loss of functioning and wasted human capability (Burchett and Matheson, 2010). However, engagement in daily meaningful occupations has potential to maintain health, wellbeing, and coping skills, even in extreme situations (Smith, 2015). When occupational therapists enable successful participation in everyday occupations and re-introduce life roles, people can go some way to moving beyond the negative effects of displacement allowing individuals to negotiate ways of doing, being, belonging and becoming in their new context (Gupta and Sullivan, 2013).

This study supports a vision of cultural awareness in response to globalisation within the occupational therapy profession. A key aim of the occupational therapy curriculum is to increase awareness of globalisation, migration and culture and strengthen the quality and diversity of occupational therapy practice (Blankvoort et al, 2019). Processes of globalisation connect people from differing backgrounds to bring together culturally diverse societies. However, what is missing from the current literature, particularly in the United Kingdom is an appreciation of how occupational therapy students develop meaning and a compassionate ethos to inform their practice with people from diverse cultures. Enabling students to explore

this will help to inform the occupational therapy curriculum and, it is hoped, the future of the profession.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**

McCormack, Baltruks and Cooke (2019) advised that research, whatever its form and practice area, provides the evidence base required to make meaningful assessments about the quality, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of interventions and support provided in health and social care. Learning about research is therefore relevant to every health care professional. McCormack, Baltruks and Cooke (2019) suggested that educators in academia and clinical practice have a responsibility to provide and facilitate a culture of inquiry, continuing person-centred practice and evidence informed practice. This is in alignment with the United Kingdom Occupational Therapy Research Foundation's (UKOTRF) aims to meet the research priorities of the profession, developing occupational therapy research leaders, and building research capacity (Sainty,2013). They advocated that students should consider, investigate, and conduct a piece of research or a project related to a specific area of practice or theory. There is growing recognition of the value of working in partnership with students as collaborators in research as the investigations and analytic processes in which they can become embroiled can help to develop and enhance the students' research and enquiry skills (Walkington, 2015). Seeing students as co-constructors of knowledge should be actively included in the design and delivery of occupational therapy programmes and subsequent design and delivery of services (Palmer et al, 2015).

In the final year of their Pre-Registration Occupational Therapy Degree Programmes students are required to conduct an ethically sound, well-managed project with the supervision of an experienced member of the academic team. Healey and Jenkins (2009) maintained that all undergraduate students in higher education settings should experience

learning through and about research. Students as researchers is a pedagogic approach to supporting students to further their knowledge and understanding whilst contributing to the evidence base of their future profession (Walkington, 2015). This study explores the value and meaning of participating in students as co researchers research project with asylum seekers and refugees and considers the impact on professional identity and future employment.

### **1.3 Rationale for the study**

My own interest in working with asylum seekers and refugees stems from a seminar I attended led by a leader of a Drop-in Centre for asylum seekers and refugees in the North East of England. It was an emotive, yet humbling experience which included the narratives from a group of people who were going through the asylum process. This coincided with me reading a study by Smith (2015). She explored the meaning of occupation to people who seek asylum in the United Kingdom and found practical and emotional support was valuable in orientating and managing complex and unfamiliar practices of everyday life in a different country. This inspired a colleague and I to undertake the first in a series of 'Students as Co Researcher's projects' (SCoRe project) with a focus on asylum seekers and refugees with final year BHSc Hons Occupational Therapy students. The project was part of the Contributing to the Evidence Module in which the students write a 5000-word journal article based on their research. This asylum seeker and refugee focussed research subsequently became an established strand with a further five SCoRe projects undertaken in association with it.

The initial SCoRe project focussed on the value and meaning of a drop-in centre for asylum seekers and refugees in the North East of England. The project highlighted the importance of having a place to go to meet and engage with others, to help others in similar situations

(part of collectivist culture), to learn English and to learn about other cultures. The findings emphasised the importance of meaningful occupation especially for women and children - whose needs were frequently unmet (Spring et al, 2019).

The second project explored the value and meaning of women participating in client centred, client led activity groups for asylum seekers and refugees. The third project explored sustainability in craft-based activity groups for asylum seeking and refugee women. Anecdotally, feedback from the students was that the experience of engaging in this research had deepened their knowledge and understanding of cross-cultural working and enhanced the importance of understanding cultural differences in their work. They also considered the significance of using a compassionate approach in their future work with asylum seekers and refugees and those more vulnerable members of society. To date 40 students have chosen to take part in the SCoRe projects with asylum seekers and refugees. Students engaged in the SCoRe projects needed to employ culturally sensitive and empathetic approaches when working with asylum seekers and refugees and have some understanding and consideration of the issues and problems they face (Spring et al, 2019).

This study therefore seeks to consider the value and meaning of being involved in a Students as Co-Researchers' project with asylum seekers and refugees and explores the potential impact of the experience on their future practice and identity as occupational therapists.

## 2. Literature review

The purpose of the literature review is to contextualise and give an overview of the subject area, distinguish what has already been done from what needs to be done, and provide an opportunity to demonstrate how the research contributes to existing literature. This will establish a body of knowledge on which to gain a new perspective and relate the research findings to practice (Hart, 2018; Boote and Beile, 2005). A literature review provides evidence for the rationale and research question. It supplies a methodological frame of reference which guides selection of data collection and provides the opportunity to demonstrate how this research contributes to existing literature (Aveyard, Payne, and Preston, 2021).

This literature review will take what Hart (2018) described as a narrative or traditional scholastic format which aims to identify sources relative to the objective of the review. The sources can be primary research, existing theories, and models as well as their interpretations. Key features of this approach are a focus on an increasing knowledge of topics which in this case were: students as co researchers, working with asylum seekers and refugees, decolonisation of the curriculum and professional identity. There is also the need to read widely tracing recent progress and developments in the professional field of occupational therapy to try to make sense of the current complex evidence, assumptions, and policy guidance within the profession.

Before the literature is discussed in detail, I will give an overview of how the literature was located. Several methods were used to search existing literature. Literature was identified through searches of electronic databases including AMED, Medline, CINAHL, Psych Info, Soc Index and British Education Index. Hand searches of textbooks, journal indexes and cited authors identified further references. Several on line resources were reviewed to gain a wider perspective of policy guidance and information bulletins for occupational therapists working with asylum seekers and refugees. These included UK Government and health care

websites, alongside professional organisations including: The Royal College of Occupational Therapists, World Federation of Occupational Therapists, Health and Care Professions Council and Health Education England (merged with NHS England as of 3 April 2023).

The search strategy adopted was: (refugees OR "asylum seekers" OR migrants) AND (occupation\* OR "occupational therap\*") AND ((student\*) OR ("students as co-researchers" OR research OR culture OR decolonisation OR curriculum OR "professional identity"))).

The parameters of the literature search included peer reviewed articles mostly from 2000 onwards that were written in English. It was necessary to go back to 2000 to explore how the occupational science base has developed and the debate on decolonisation of the occupational therapy curriculum has progressed. The increase in global migration and the growing momentum of occupational therapy practice working alongside refugees and asylum seekers led to an ever-increasing amount of research articles on the subject across the international professional occupational therapy community. It was also necessary to consider the limited literature on students as co researchers.

Journals identified through the searches were initially screened for content through reading abstracts. Articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded. Those articles that met the inclusion criteria were critically appraised using the McMaster critical appraisal tool for qualitative studies (Law et al, 1998). Articles were then read and re read and relevant concepts, arguments and evidence were synthesised into topic areas. This provided a body of evidence on which to base findings on and highlight any gaps in the existing literature (Aveyard, Payne, and Preston, 2021).

## **2.1 Meaningful occupation**

Occupational therapists are well placed to meet the occupational needs of asylum seekers and refugees given their focus on facilitating health and well-being. They do this through

their knowledge of human occupation, supporting and maintaining meaningful occupation, whilst ensuring occupational justice (Trimboli and Taylor, 2016). Occupations are the everyday things people need to do, want to do, and are expected to do as individuals, in families and with communities to occupy time and bring meaning and purpose to daily life (World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2016).

Engaging in meaningful and dignified daily occupations can support life and give a positive sense of identity, increase self-esteem and self-worth, improve social status, and provide fulfilment through productivity. These are seen as essential for good health, coping skills and wellbeing (Hasselkus, 2011; Law, 2002). Occupations that people choose to engage in are important in meeting their own social and cultural values and those of their communities. Every person participates in occupations differently depending on their familial and social context, traditions, and values, and these may change over time (Morville, 2014).

Participation in work and leisure occupations is important in maintaining health and wellbeing as well as promoting feelings of belonging and a sense of community through social interaction and connections (Whiteford, 2004).

Engaging in meaningful occupations is essential to one's health and wellbeing (CAOT, 2007). According to Yerxa (1991) finding meaning, having an active role to play in society and having a sense of cultural connectedness are all possible through engagement in occupations. There is the potential for occupational therapists to have greater input to enhance lives of asylum seekers and refugees helping them to adapt their occupations, develop routines, increasing community and practical support and creating opportunities for economic self-sufficiency (Ingvarsson, Egilson and Skaptadottir, 2016)

Meaningful occupations that foster connections and purpose help people to feel valued. As experts in occupational engagement, occupational therapists have the skills to adapt occupations to each circumstance, considering individual's needs and trauma. This ensures that asylum seekers and refugees are encouraged to engage in occupations that hold

meaning for them. Focusing on daily occupations can provide much needed respite from everyday problems and symptoms (Whiteford, 2005).

## **2.2 Adapting to a new life**

As a result of pre and post migration trauma, asylum seekers and refugees are a vulnerable group in society. Bishop and Purcell (2013) and Huot, Kelly and Park (2016) highlighted the plight of refugees who often leave their own country abruptly to escape war, persecution, sexual abuse, trauma, or human rights abuses. The recent war in Ukraine in which refugees left with few resources and little sense of when they might return, was an example of this. Resettling and starting afresh in a new country involves significant upheaval and adaptation to new cultures and language and there is often a lack of adequate food, shelter, healthcare, and education (Trimboli and Halliwell, 2018). The resettlement process varies from country to country but often involves strict vetting, protracted legal processes and passive waiting until a decision is made on status (Smith, 2015; Siddiqui et al, 2019). It often means loss of familiar roles and the need for adaptation to different social and environmental demands whilst at the same time attempting to retain some cultural traditions (Tribe, 2002).

The period between applying for refugee status and a decision being made is stressful (Tribe, 2002). This can take anything up to 5 years, often more. Asylum seekers may not be able to make plans and are frequently perceived as being in limbo. They are often terrified of being returned to their country of origin. In such prolonged situations people may become deskilled, living in small, cramped conditions with few resources.

Limited access to community and health care services also impacts on occupational engagement. (Gupta and Sullivan, 2013; Mirza et al 2012). Gupta and Sullivan examined how language and a lack of finances restricted refugees' ability to obtain and utilise a driver's licence. Travelling on public transport was often prohibitively expensive and this restricted access to places of worship, shopping, and schooling and access to health services. Access

to health care services was also complex due to difficulties understanding language and could be further impeded by some doctors' reluctance to accept them as patients (Gupta and Sullivan, 2013).

Current legislative restrictions in the UK generally prevent people working when they are seeking asylum and they become reliant on funding from the National Asylum support service which equates to £45.00 each week (correct in December 2022). If their claim for asylum is rejected, they can quickly become impoverished, lose housing and financial support, and may need emergency support from charities. When a person gains refugee status they can then begin to build a new life and are entitled to access the same opportunities as British Citizens. However, life for a refugee is hard and living with uncertainty is common. It is exacerbated by the generally low socio-economic position of refugees with little opportunity for occupational engagement. Those who are permitted to work are often underemployed in low paid jobs (Smith, 2015; Huot, Kelly and Park, 2016).

Inability to find employment that is meaningful is significant especially as many asylum seekers and refugees are highly skilled. Employment can reinforce identity and creativity (Whiteford, 2004). Gupta and Sullivan (2013) recognised the hardships immigrants face when searching and trying to acquire employment because even when they are eligible for employment, they may not be successful in obtaining the job they are qualified to do because of a perceived discrepancy between the qualifications in different countries. There is often a mismatch of abilities to the demands of the new job. Despite the restrictions on paid employment there are no such limitations on asylum seekers taking unpaid, voluntary work in the third sector and many choose to do so. Voluntary work can provide structure to days, create opportunities for community integration, increase language skills and build self-confidence (Morville and Erlandson, 2013). Wilcock (1998) suggested that meaningful occupation not only aids the development and maintenance of necessary skills but also plays a central role in the healthy survival of individuals. Lack of engagement in meaningful

occupation can have an adverse impact on health, and with the individual losing their sense of purpose and developing a fear of the future (Whiteford, 2004).

Gupta and Sullivan (2013) maintained that when people migrate, they leave their home environment and often take up residence in settings that have vastly different physical, economic, social, and cultural attributes than those they previously experienced. They must then reconstruct their daily lives. The stress and cultural shift that is required triggers the process of adaptation to the host country. Whiteford (2005) described two important coping mechanisms: the emergence of hope in the form of a different future and helping others as a form of collectivism and as an occupational strategy. Engaging in opportunities for joining, sharing and cultural expression and meeting others in communities of interest becomes important.

In its position statement on Occupational Therapy and Human Rights, the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (2019) stated that people have the right to participate in meaningful occupations that contribute to their well-being. Occupational therapists are concerned with human rights and occupational justice for all. Occupational justice is the fulfilment of the right for all people to engage in the occupations they need to survive, define as meaningful and that contribute to their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of communities (Whalley Hammell and Iwama, 2012).

Occupational deprivation is a state of prolonged preclusion from opportunities to participate in activities or occupations that hold personal, social, or cultural meaning due to factors which stand outside the control of the individual (Whiteford, 2000 p.201). When participation in meaningful occupations is disrupted, the risk of occupational deprivation is high.

Occupational deprivation and imbalance and the imposed exclusion from work is seen to be dehumanising, forcing some people into despair (Smith, 2015).

For asylum seekers and refugees, the constant worry, financial insecurity and forced inactivity impacts on mental health and wellbeing, and can lead to depression, isolation,

anger, and frustration (Vostanis, 2014; Thornton and Spalding, 2018). Participation in meaningful occupation promotes wellbeing and helps them to cope with trauma experienced in their country of origin (Spring et al, 2019; Burchett and Matheson, 2010). Asylum seekers and refugees are forced into a daily battle of maintaining occupational balance whilst meeting societal expectations, amid their physical and cultural restrictions. Having too much time, a lack of routine and structure, enforced leisure, a difficult past, a lack of control in their lives, and an uncertain future is difficult to balance (Gupta and Sullivan, 2013). Limited opportunities to engage in social occupations can contribute to loneliness and isolation which can in turn impact on health and well-being and self-esteem (Ingvarsson, Egilson and Skaptadottir, 2016; Hartley, Fleay and Tye, 2017).

Hart (2021) and Burchett and Matheson (2010) found that Immigrants who lacked meaningful occupation and who were restricted from working had difficulties with social isolation and integration. This could increase socioeconomic disadvantage, was often detrimental to health and well-being and could impact on adjusting to a new life.

Occupational disruption is therefore significant, and can exacerbate the trauma, dysfunction and deprivation associated with the experience of seeking asylum (Steindl, Winding and Runge, 2008; Whiteford, 2005).

New patterns of occupational engagement in a different country may reveal new roles or result in the loss of familiar occupations. Unfamiliar physical and social environments require different living skills and asylum seekers, and refugees may need help to adjust to these new roles and environments to reshape identity, build hope, develop skills, and start to integrate into the new community (Suleman and Whiteford, 2013).

Berry's theory of acculturation (2008) demonstrated that maintaining exclusive relationships with people from the same ethnic background can initially lower the strain of changing cultural contexts. Long term cultural isolation, whether from the host country (separation) or from their ethnic heritage (assimilation) can result in feelings of depression and isolation.

Having both a strong ethnic identity and a strong national identity (integration) aids adaptation (Hernandez, 2009). Asylum seekers and refugees adjust to their changing contexts when faced with new opportunities and negotiate new identities to reconstruct their lives. Cultural attitudes, expectations, motivations, and skills all impact on the acculturation process. Linking skills, knowledge and familiar occupations from people's home and host cultures can connect refugees' pasts with their new lives (Blair, 2000; Thornton and Spalding, 2018; Baek Choi and Thomas, 2009). Due to legal and financial restrictions some may be unable to continue valued occupations, this can lead to occupational deprivation and loss of occupational identity.

Mayne, Lowrie and Wilson (2016) and Whiteford (2005) suggested that the experience of being an asylum seeker or refugee is known to profoundly affect an individual's occupational wellbeing and can impact on occupational roles and identities (Gupta and Sullivan, 2013). Occupational wellbeing is defined as the satisfying engagement in activities that structure daily life by meeting the needs of self and others, facilitating a connection with the world, and bringing purpose and stability to a person, group, or community (Wilcock and Hocking, 2015). Occupational wellbeing is seen as an integral determinant of health; therefore, engaging in meaningful occupation is considered a fundamental human right and a matter of justice (WFOT 2019; Hammell, 2015). Occupational justice is achieved when the socio-political context enables opportunities and resources to participate fully in chosen occupations (Wilcock and Townsend, 2000 p.85).

The process of immigration can often lead to occupational disruption, deprivation or alienation which can all impact on all areas of a person's life (Gupta and Sullivan, 2013; Burchett and Matheson, 2010). Familiar life skills and occupations may be no longer valued in the new country and previously known occupations need to be adjusted or abandoned (Huot, Kelly and Park 2016; Morville and Erlandsson, 2017).

Having good supportive networks have been found to be one of the most important prerequisites for coping among refugees in the resettlement phase. Refugees' need for social support can be met with shared occupations, experiences, and interests where they can bond with other people (Bishop and Purcell, 2013; Wilcock and Hocking, 2015, p.212).

People develop a sense of belonging when they feel safe, can be themselves and do not need to worry about unsuccessful performance in occupations. The extreme form of occupational deprivation, the profound impact of trauma and dislocation and the inability to engage in the most basic of survival occupations can cause personal and social chaos (Hammell, 2008; Ingvarsson, Egilson and Skaptadottir, 2016). There are therefore two important coping strategies: the emergence of hope in the form of a possible different future and the occupation of helping others as both a pragmatic and occupational strategy (Whiteford, 2005 pp.85-86). Opportunities for joining together, sharing, and cultural expression through a range of activities that brings people into contact with others is therefore important (Winlaw, 2017).

### **2.3 How occupational therapy can help**

Occupational therapists have a crucial role to play in making a meaningful difference to members of the immigrant population (Trimboli and Taylor 2016). They can make a unique contribution empowering asylum seekers and refugees through skill development, meaningful occupations, engagement, and community integration. They can also advise on adapting to the socio cultural and practical demands of moving to a new country.

Resettlement in a new country can initially be a relief for those fleeing war and persecution. This can quickly be replaced with confusion and fear as asylum seekers and refugees attempt to navigate a new country with new rules, whilst separated from family and friends and dealing with the effects of trauma (Townsend and Wilcock, 2010). Spending too much

time underoccupied, having a difficult past and a future without direction is often difficult for asylum seekers and refugees to cope with, occupations they can engage in often lack meaning and add to feelings of worthlessness and consequently impact on their self-esteem and well-being (Ingvarrsson, Egilson and Skaptadottir, 2016). This can make the process of resettlement challenging.

Reduced participation in meaningful occupations and isolation are a major problem for asylum seekers and refugees. Occupational disruption is significant for those who exist in environments that severely restrict participation (Steindl, Winding and Runge, 2008; Whiteford, 2005). Carswell, Blackburn, and Barker, (2011) and Burchett and Matheson, (2010) found that migrants who were restricted from working had difficulties with social isolation and integration, highlighting the importance of meaningful occupations when adjusting to a new life. The World Federation of Occupational Therapists (2019) practice resource: Resource for displaced persons, emphasised the ways in which occupational therapists are suited to support refugees with education and health promotion, routine building, developing social networks, and re-establishing engagement through life skills.

Occupational therapists are experts in occupational engagement (Wilcock, 1993; Townsend and Polatajko, 2007; Black et al, 2019). They have the skills to adapt occupational skills to each person whilst considering culture and previous trauma. This approach ensures that people engage in occupations that are meaningful to them and they acquire new skills to help with the transition to a new life (Suleman and Whiteford 2013). Occupational therapists can work alongside asylum seekers and refugees to help bridge a former life to their current situation (Thornton and Spalding, 2018). These may include re-establishing daily routines and previous roles which may have been lost such as: cooking in the home, learning how to use public transport, driving assessments, job searching, signposting to education, managing money, advocacy, and spirituality. This may involve learning new coping skills as well as planning for the future and goal setting, accessing community mental health services, trauma counselling and interventions to reduce dependency and re-establish independence.

There may also be the opportunity for more creative interventions such as gardening and arts and crafts. This can lead to increased community engagement and social connections, increased confidence, and act as the foundations of occupational engagement and health and wellbeing (Suleman and Whiteford, 2013; Thornton and Spalding, 2018).

The WFOT position statement on Human Displacement (WFOT, 2014) suggested that occupational therapists commit to developing their individual and professional skills. This is to enable occupational therapy practitioners, researchers, educators, students, and professional bodies to engage with the occupational causes and consequences of displacement.

Several studies noted that during the initial period of transition, adaptation to new sights, sounds, customs, people, practices, and routines are important (Suleman and Whiteford, 2013; Sulaiman-Hill and Thompson, 2011). Some occupations were often prioritised more than others initially; low wage employment may be prioritised more than language classes or home making more than physical and mental health appointments (Riggs et al, 2012). These occupational choices were often made to reflect strong familial and cultural values as well as well as the need to keep busy (Hart, 2021; Smith, 2015; Burchett and Matheson, 2010; Spring et al, 2019).

Developing a sense of connection to others and the community through engagement in occupations is important. Participating in occupations can help with social cohesion, cooperation, reciprocity, and social interaction and helps to connect people from different countries, backgrounds, and languages on personal and community levels (Rebeiro, 2001; Thornton and Spalding, 2018). Bishop and Purcell (2013), and Davies (2008) proposed horticulture as an occupation that provides meaning for people and provides an important link between the familiar cultivation of fruit and vegetables in their homeland and in the UK. Davies (2008) highlighted the case of a refugee who attended a day service enabling him to participate in gardening, walking groups and volunteering opportunities. The activity reduced

the intensity of his intrusive thoughts as well as helping him to sleep better (Winlaw, 2017). Smith (2015) highlighted the importance of keeping busy with purpose and suggested that any occupation was better than no occupation. The asylum seekers and refugees prized helping others above all else in altruistic occupations (Smith, 2015).

The importance of having something to do and a habitual routine have been identified as a real need for asylum seekers and refugees (Whiteford, 2005; Spring et al 2019). Potential interventions include enhancing community and practical support and creating opportunities for self-sufficiency. Activities that were viewed positively by asylum seekers and refugees were: helping elderly and sick, children attending school, volunteering, and playing sports. Culturally meaningful occupations such as music, singing dancing, cooking, and sharing traditional food helped to create a sense of community and coherence were also popular (Strijk et al, 2011). There is the potential for occupational therapists to have greater input to enhance people's lives, to make a real difference and help to remediate the negative impact of trauma (Mayne, Lowrie and Wilson, 2016). When occupational therapists enable successful participation in everyday occupation, life roles can become re-established and people can become part of the community, they can begin to move beyond the negative effects of displacement.

There is also a need for occupational therapists to understand the importance of the cultural context of refugees to ensure practice meets the needs of a diverse population. Education about cultural diversity, the occupational needs of asylum seekers and refugees and how to address these would benefit practitioners and students. This would go some way to tackle some of the biggest challenges of the global community and would also honour its historical commitment to social justice (Trimboli and Taylor, 2016).

## 2.4 Culture

Culture has been defined in many ways. It is often described as multi-dimensional and impacts on a person's choices, beliefs, values, and attitudes (Awaad 2003). A person's culture can include their gender, religion and socio-economic status, sexual orientation, age, experience as well as life experience. Bonder, Martin, and Miracle (2004) and Murden et al (2008) proposed that culture influences a person's actions and is formed through people connecting with others and interacting with the environment. This allows people to recognise and share knowledge, attitudes, values, languages, and beliefs. As a result, culture is considered dynamic, constantly developing, and changing as a person encounters new experiences and interacts with new situations (Watson et al, 2006; Ekelman et al, 2003).

Within academia, there is recognition that a focus on culture within occupational therapy is necessary for practice (Ring et al, 2008; Horton, 2009; WFOT, 2014). However, the extent to which this is implemented within curricula is questioned and what constitutes cultural competency in newly qualified occupational therapy practitioners is varied (Rodger et al, 2009). Working with a student to develop cultural sensitivity can be a challenging process as all students are individuals and bring with them their own values and beliefs (Leask, 2015).

The current occupational therapy literature related to educating students about cultural constructs and facilitating a level of engagement in culture acknowledges the importance of doing so and advocates more education and exposure to multiple cultures (Muñoz 2007; Murden et al. 2008; Whiteford and Townsend 2011). Costa (2009), Fitzgerald (2004) and Iwama, (2003) advocated a wider critique of occupational therapy concepts from diverse perspectives and a subsequent developing ethos of compassion and relationship building when working with people from a range of backgrounds (Hooper, 2008).

Compassion, it can be argued, is a core value and an observable behaviour in our professional practice (Thomas and Menage, 2016). Engaging service users' day to day,

using person-centred practice to understand what occupations are meaningful to the person and using empathy all contribute to a compassionate approach. It is important to take the same compassionate approach when working with asylum seekers and refugees when conducting research (Spring et al 2018; Liamputtong 2010). It is important that there is some understanding of diverse cultural differences and experiences, as well as cultural commonalities. Knowledge of people from different cultures can equip occupational therapists and researchers with a lens to interpret and understand people's difference.

Beagan, (2015) and Iwama (2003) described occupational therapy in the Western world as being the dominant culture of the profession. Western ideas about occupational therapy practice and education were transferred throughout the world without determining the importance of this for the local cultural context (Mahoney and Kiraly- Alvarez, 2019). Culture relates to shared ideas, beliefs, systems of concepts and meanings, values, knowledge and ways of customs and language that arise over time with a particular group (Hammell, 2009). People differ from each other, and it is their connection with imbalances in occupational opportunities and engagement, health and well-being and everyday life chances that determine which social and cultural differences matter at a specific date and time (Beagan, 2015). Culture provides a way of being in the world that is familiar and feels normal for those within it and is constantly changing.

Occupational therapists have acknowledged the need for awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences (Odawara, 2005). Occupational identity 'is a composite sense of who one is and wishes to become as an occupational being generated from one's history of occupational participation' (Kielhofner, 2008 p.106). To provide culturally sensitive and occupation focussed interventions occupational therapists must be aware of how learned values and customs affect people's health, beliefs, and practices (Park et al, 2005). Culture does not relate solely to ethnicity; cultural differences arise in connection with all interrelating aspects of diversity. In every encounter between the therapist and client, both are immersed in their own cultural contexts, which may differ due to gender, class, and ethnicity. Tervalon

and Murray-Garcia (1998) advocated that health care providers should be flexible when working with migrants and avoid complacency and stereotyping to assess the cultural narratives of each new client and admit when they lack knowledge about a specific culture or person's belief systems.

There is much research that focusses on cultural competence (Agner, 2020; Beagan, 2015; Murden et al, 2008). Cultural competence is defined as having knowledge that is specific to each culture, and the ability to balance between adherence to cultural norms and introduction to new frames of reference (Awaad, 2003). Agner (2020) argued that the occupational therapy profession should shift from an emphasis on cultural competence which implies that culture is a finite construct to be understood, to a practice of cultural humility. Cultural humility is about learning to work with people with diverse cultural backgrounds and a recognition and acknowledgment of differences in culture, power relationships and how they affect health care (Tervalon and Murray-Garcia 1998). Cultural humility recognises gaps in knowledge and creates an expectation for the differentiation between cultures. Whereas cultural competence emphasises the importance of knowing about different cultures, cultural humility allows for cultural differences and sees this as the norm (Fisher-Borne, Cain and Martin 2015). The ideal scenario would be to approach client interactions in a way that acknowledges, notices, responds to difference and differing viewpoints on health, family roles and expectations of those roles in life. Cultural humility requires continual self-reflection as well as recognition of how one's own biases are aligned with dominant cultural narratives and reactions and relationships with others (Charles, Holley, and Kondrat, 2017). An occupational therapist may not agree with the decisions a client makes but cultural humility recognises that both client and therapist's views are embedded, and they are working within subcultures that shape their views. Cultural humility therefore provides a more critical and effective approach to working with clients from diverse backgrounds.

The academic and practice debate in occupational therapy and occupational science has moved on from purely considering the 'individual' to the 'collective' due to the social nature of occupation and the contextualised nature of peoples' lives (Malfitano, Molineux and Whiteford, 2021; Mahoney and Kiraly-Alvarez, 2019). Consideration of occupational injustices have influenced the development of more critical forms of occupational therapy practice and strengthened the political responsiveness of the occupational therapy profession (Whalley Hammell, 2018).

There is a gap in the literature regarding occupational therapy practice relating to groups, communities, populations and engagement at a collective level and the knowledge and skills required to practice in this way (Hyett, Kenny, and Dickson-Swift, 2018). According to Malfitano, Whiteford and Molineux (2021) Western society links individualism to economic models and to the organisation of social structures. Increasing neoliberalism and systems of governance have increased social inequalities which highlight the marginalisation of vulnerable groups in different groups and communities. Until recently, there was little debate within occupational therapy and occupational science about collectives, collectivism, and collective action (Iwama, 2005). This is how people are connected within a social group, their feelings and belonging to that group. There is now a growing consensus in the literature about people not existing in isolation, rather, they are connected around and within a social group. This creates a shared identity and an outlet to express their wishes (Iwama, 2005; Huot and Laliberte Rudman, 2020; Whalley Hammell, 2015).

Ramugondo (2015) and Hocking and Townsend (2020) suggested that occupational therapists and occupational scientists have begun to challenge the individualistic focus to the study of occupation. They acknowledged the socio-cultural aspects of occupation but also intimated that the consistent view was to consider individuals rather than a collective (Ramugondo, 2015 p.488). Ramugondo (2015; 2018) discussed the African ethic and philosophy of Ubuntu through which to understand collective occupation. Ubuntu is difficult to translate but in simple terms means that everyone forms part of a link or a chain (Ewuoso

and Hall, 2019, p. 96). The consideration of Ubuntu raised consciousness and the responsibility of both community and individuals to allow meaningful existence for all (Hocking 2020). Ubuntu is a communal way of doing everyday occupations in everyday life that native communities adopt to resist injustices or maintain their daily occupations (Kronenberg, 2018, p.30). Self-determination and collective self-reliance can be lived locally and felt globally for all (Ramugondo, 2018, p.37). An interdependent community is one in which individuals can only discover who they are through others, whilst recognising the distinctive identity of individuals (Breed and Semanya, 2015).

Occupational therapists in the Global North have traditionally focused on the ableist, white, Western, urban, middle-class norms and values which dominate theories and inform practice (Gerlach, 2015; Hammell 2011; Whalley Hammell, 2015). This goes against the views of those occupational therapists in the Global South who denounce the Western and Eurocentric perspectives that can be seen as being oppressive in diverse socio economic, political, colonial, and cultural contexts (Yazdani, 2017; Whalley Hammell, 2021). The Global North/Western perspectives in education and practice consistently promote independence over dependence in occupations which relate to self-care, productivity, and leisure (Kantartzis, 2017; Gerlach et al 2018; Whalley Hammell, 2021).

Although the Participatory Occupational Justice Framework (Whiteford and Townsend, 2011) attempted to provide a structure on which to base social and economic factors and enablement of participation it does not overtly consider the barriers to occupational engagement of communities and populations. The Participatory Occupational Justice Framework (Whiteford and Townsend, 2011), the Kawa Model (Iwama, 2003) and the ideology behind them gave a voice to those who may be marginalised from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, what is missing from the current literature is an understanding of how occupational therapy students make meaning of their cross-cultural learning experiences and how this translates to their professional identity development and future employment. This will be the focus of this research.

## 2.5 Occupational therapy curriculum

There is a paucity of occupational therapists specifically working with asylum seekers and refugees currently. A reason for this may include Government policy, lack of funding, lack of awareness of what services are on offer, lack of access to services and cultural barriers to accepting support. Given that numbers of asylum seekers and refugees is increasing and there is a clear role for occupational therapists, Trimboli and Halliwell (2018) recommended that this should be part of the occupational therapy curriculum. In their study, the authors found that most of the participants had worked with asylum seekers and refugees for 3 years or less which indicated it is a relatively new area of practice within the occupational therapy profession. Clarke (2012) and Clarke et al (2015) suggested that role emerging professional practice placements with asylum seekers and refugees allows occupational therapists to take an occupation focussed approach to health and well-being and act as advocates in facilitating occupational justice (Trimboli and Halliwell, 2018). This allows the students to expand their cultural beliefs, gain an increased exposure to; cultural issues and influences, cultural knowledge, understanding, awareness and competence (Whiteford, 2005).

An interesting point to note from Trimboli and Halliwell's (2018) survey was that over half the sample were working with asylum seekers and refugees as volunteers and 82% were part time. Many were not in occupational therapy specific roles, nor were they used to their full capacity as occupational therapists. Many occupational therapists described not having a specific occupational lens to their work which highlights the need for this focus in occupational therapy programmes. The occupational therapy profession is still developing and determining its role with asylum seekers and refugees with an emphasis on health and well-being and how it relates to advocacy, occupational deprivation, and occupational justice (Blankvoort et al, 2019).

Given the current political climate, the increasing numbers of displaced people throughout the world and many asylum seekers and refugees not having their occupational needs met,

occupational therapists have been identified as having a key role in helping to address the needs of asylum seekers and refugees (Smith, 2017; Trimboli, 2019). Occupational therapists need to have experience with and be educated about people from cultures that differ from their own to prepare and deliver effective interventions to a wide variety of people from a diverse range of backgrounds (Smith, Cornella, and Williams, 2014). They can use their skills in business, marketing, research, and leadership to create business cases to commission new services so that the needs of asylum seekers and refugees can be met. Occupational therapy programmes need to educate and equip students to work in this developing field of practice, to engage in research and to lobby for political awareness and funding to develop the role of the occupational therapist in this area (Trimboli and Halliwell, 2018 p.112). Education on forced migration will enable future practitioners to have a well-informed understanding of the role of occupational therapy with asylum seekers and refugees.

## **2.6 Decolonising the curriculum**

Decolonisation of teaching within occupational therapy programmes is more than presenting new concepts or examples of doing, being and connecting to learners. It should involve decolonising knowledge which challenges the dominance of Western ways of knowing about occupation (Gibson, 2020). Decolonisation seeks to question the beliefs of Western, middle class, white heterosexual, able bodied students, and practitioners' ways of understanding about occupation that fits the curriculum (Gibson and Farias, 2020). For example, much of the occupational science literature is based on research and theory produced by English-speaking researchers from the Global North (Simaan, 2020). Research and education focus on the individual and the need for independence and the ability to carry out occupations that produce income (Kantartzis, 2017). The assumption that everyone experiences occupation universally no matter where they live in the world needs to be contested. The aim is to have

a society which respects everyone's occupational rights and provides equity of occupational opportunity for all. It is increasingly common in occupational science literature to discuss occupational justice which focusses on the influence of societal and political influences which impact on people's daily lives (Wilcock and Townsend, 2009). This is the right of every individual to be able to meet basic needs and have equal opportunities to reach their potential to enable engagement in diverse meaningful occupation (Wilcock and Townsend, 2009, p.193).

Decolonisation of the curriculum involves the prioritisation of research, theories and concepts that arise from the Global South/Eastern communities (Ramugondo, 2018) and should not be tokenistic (Tuck and Yang, 2012). The curriculum should contain research and learning activities which challenge lecturers, students and communities' consciousness and circumstances (Simaan, 2020).

Occupational therapy students' training should include an analysis and critique of the inequalities and systemic injustices that are prevalent for many in relation to their health and occupation. For the Occupational Therapy profession to seek to demonstrate anti oppressive practice it needs to decolonise its theories and models and embrace people's diversity and wisdom (Whalley Hammell, 2018). Decolonisation is a lifelong process which is both individual and collective and involves listening and hearing peoples' histories, cultural practices, and life narratives (Sherwood and Edwards, 2006). Using appropriate inclusive language is important to ensure cultural safety, being sensitive to difference, legitimising differences and exploring power imbalances.

Occupational therapists working with asylum seekers and refugees have a responsibility to be culturally informed and to assist the individual in adapting to their new country by taking into consideration the migrants' meaningful occupations. Asylum seekers and refugees have specific occupational needs which need to be met to ensure quality of life and may include learning a new language, new ways of social interaction, new routines, and new social and

occupational roles. Students should be encouraged to recognise and respect diverse cultural differences, beliefs, values, and lifestyles. According to Smith, Cornella, and Williams (2014), culture is an important part of who we are and as an occupational being it shapes what you do, how you do it, and why you do it.

## **2.7 Application of theoretical models underpinning practice**

The above review supports the early conceptualisations of what is needed in occupational therapy curricula in relation to working with people from a diverse range of backgrounds including asylum seekers and refugees. The following theoretical perspectives can be used to guide occupational therapy and occupational science: the Participatory Occupational Justice Framework (Whiteford and Townsend, 2011), the Capabilities Approach to Occupational Justice (Sen, 2009), and the Kawa Model (Iwama, 2003). These will now be discussed.

The purpose of the Participatory Occupational Justice Framework (Whiteford and Townsend, 2011) is to facilitate social inclusion by raising awareness of occupational injustices. Social inclusion ensures that people have the resources, capabilities, and opportunities to fully participate in life. Occupational injustices have been defined by Wilcox and Townsend (2009, p.193) as the right of every individual to meet basic needs and for every individual to have equal opportunities and life chances to reach their potential in engagement in meaningful and diverse occupation because people have different needs and capacities, within the social and ethical standards of a community. The concept of occupational justice has contributed to heightened awareness of differences that are faced by many individuals by being deprived of opportunities to participate in meaningful occupations (Townsend and Wilcock 2004, Durocher, Gibson and Rappolt, 2014). The basic premise behind the Participatory Occupational Justice Framework is that all individuals are occupational beings and participation in meaningful occupations leads to positive health, wellbeing, and social

inclusion (Benjamin-Thomas and Laliberte Rudman 2018). Therefore, engagement in resettlement life skills, is dependent on the transferability of existing skills, occupations, and meanings.

The Occupational Justice Framework was developed to guide research and practice towards injustices relating to occupation. It was hoped that this would enable people to succeed in and do what they want and need to do, whilst considering what is meaningful to them, their families, and communities (Stadynk, Townsend and Wilcock 2010). The Occupational Justice Framework offers an occupational perspective on justice or injustice in occupations we take for granted each day.

People should have meaning, choice and balance in the occupations they need and choose to do. There are four main suggested areas of occupational injustice: occupational alienation, occupational deprivation, occupational imbalance, and occupational marginalisation. Occupational alienation refers to periods of disconnectedness, isolation, and lack of a sense of identity (Townsend and Wilcock, 2004). Occupational deprivation has been defined as a prolonged restriction from participating in necessary or meaningful activities which are outside of the individuals' control (Durocher, Gibson and Rappolt 2014). Occupational imbalance refers to excessive time spent occupied in one area of life at the expense of others. Occupational marginalisation relates to people who are excluded from participating in occupations of their choice and are often relegated to those occupations with little meaning or value to them. They have little control in the occupations that may be available to them (Stadynk, Townsend and Wilcock 2010). Using this framework, the occupational therapist would suggest that many asylum seekers and refugees face numerous exclusions from daily occupations which the rest of society would consider as the norm, including work, leisure, and productivity in their everyday lives.

The Occupational Justice Framework also guides the research carried out in the SCoRe projects. The SCoRe projects undertaken to date have concentrated on reducing some of

the injustices asylum seekers and refugees face and have considered the value and meaning of participating in occupation focussed leisure, craft, and gardening groups.

The Capabilities Approach (Sen, 2009) is an evolving philosophical concept which is relevant to occupational justice work and links with some of the occupational science principles (Whalley Hammell, 2022). Sen (2009) advocated a way of understanding human wellbeing from a justice or human rights perspective. There is increasing debate in the field of social justice, occupational therapy, and occupational science, around the links between health, physical, mental, and social wellbeing; and the physical, environmental, economic, social, political, religious, and cultural aspects of people's lives (Whalley Hammell, 2022; Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 2009; Venkatapuram, 2011).

Bailliard (2016) proposed that the debate on social justice has now begun to focus on how people function, what they value doing and being, and can do in the real world (Nussbaum, 2000; Whalley Hammell, 2022; Huot and Laliberte Rudman, 2010). This resonated with the core concepts of occupation: doing, being, and becoming (Wilcock, 1998). Sen (2009) sought to explore the opportunities that are available to people to use their abilities and consider the alternatives and choices people can make. In the context of working with asylum seekers and refugees it would be useful to consider appraising peoples' abilities to do and be what they have reason to value doing and being (WFOT, 2019). The capabilities approach provides a means of identifying and highlighting inequalities amongst people's capabilities and provides a chance to equalise opportunities and choices to achieve wellbeing and occupational rights (Whalley Hammell, 2022, p10).

As mentioned earlier, the Kawa Model (Iwama, 2003) uses the metaphor of a river to explore interconnections between life and the flow of a river. Aspects of the environment and life circumstances like the structure of the river, riverbed, river walls and driftwood can impede or affect the flow of the river. Occupational therapy aims to enable people to have a more regular life flow, whether this is relevant to the individual, institution, organisation,

community, or society. The Kawa model is an example of how cultural views of reality and wellbeing combined with theoretical material can be constructed into a socio-cultural context. As occupational therapists continue to develop their work with asylum seekers and refugees, the diversity of what is important and of value in daily life in relation to their states of wellbeing will continue to develop. The Kawa Model will help to broaden the culturally specific features of peoples' life experiences particularly when they fall outside Western social contexts. Enhancing the social relevance and real-world contexts of occupation focussed research and moving occupational therapy practice into social situations is an important area for development of the profession (Molineux and Whiteford, 2006 and 2011).

## **2.8 Professional identity**

The development of professional identity occurs over time when a member of the profession develops the attitudes, values and standards which support the occupational therapy practitioner role (Adams et al, 2006). Technical skills and interpersonal skills alone cannot ensure the development of professional identity. The use of professional judgement and reasoning, critical self-evaluation and self-directed learning are essential components in the development of professional identity (Paterson et al, 2002). Professional identity is seen as a dynamic and complex process which is shaped by sets of beliefs, attitudes and understanding about specific roles within the context of work and is concerned not only with how individuals perceive themselves, but also with how they are perceived and are influenced by others. It incorporates people's individuality and how they interact with one's social and cultural environment (Clegg, 2008, Whitcombe, 2013). Watson (2006, p.509) suggested that professional identity was a way of 'doing and being' in practice. Professional identity is therefore a way of being and provides a lens through which to see, evaluate, and

learn to make sense of practice. A healthcare professional should have a strong sense of professional identity.

The role of universities is to teach theoretical and formal knowledge whilst at the same time preparing the students for the world of work. It is at university that the students lay the foundations for an occupational identity (Ikiugu and Rossa, 2003). Professional identity development has been highlighted in the literature relating to communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Identity is constructed through active participation in social communities. It is about being in the world, but increasingly it must be about multiplicity of worlds or communities and therefore development of professional identity is complex. The challenge for university education and occupational therapy education, is to balance teaching of knowledge with participation in practice whilst at the same time creating meaning for the student (Wenger, 1998).

Trede, Macklin, and Bridges (2012) conducted a systematic review of literature and found that there was a paucity of evidence on how the curriculum impacts on development of professional identity. This is important to note because it contributes to a successful transition from study to the workforce (Hooper, 2008). Identity theory suggests that social identities are formed by interacting with individuals and the social structures that contain them (Stets and Burke, 2005).

Identity is a developmental process that changes over time and between contexts. It follows that professional identity need not remain constant as through personal actions it is possible to reshape identities, to the way a profession is perceived over time. To gain identity as a mature community of practice, occupational therapists therefore need to perceive themselves, and to be perceived by others as having a clear self-identity and sense of self. Identity will and does respond to societal influences (Wilding and Whiteford, 2008). Molineux (2011, p.27) remarked, 'we can stand firm on shifting sands' meaning that if occupational therapists have a clear sense of self and identity, they will have a more stable base on which

to develop and grow (Molineux 2011). Occupational therapists' belief in occupation-focused practice will be reinforced and the profession's identity strengthened.

Developing a professional identity is a major component in the occupational therapy curriculum (Ikiugu and Rosso, 2003). Developing a knowledge of occupational therapy and valuing occupational therapy philosophy is important. The occupational therapy curriculum needs to develop a personal philosophy of practice. Reflections on occupational therapists' professional identity has been discussed at length. In 1962, Mary Reilly, a renowned American occupational therapist, believed that 'The wide and gaping chasm which exists between the complexity of illness and the commonplaceness of our treatment tools is, and always will be, both the pride and anguish of our profession' (Reilly, 1962 p5).

In the current economic climate, there is an expectation that higher education institutions will transform student occupational therapists into knowledgeable occupational therapy practitioners, equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to ensure they are employable (RCOT, 2019; HEE, 2017). Graduates need to be flexible, adaptable, and mobile in an everchanging employment sector within health and social care settings (Walder et al, 2022). Their identity and development of identity needs to become increasingly fluid as health and social care evolves. Development of professional identity is a protective factor that sustains professional resilience, and career longevity. Professional resilience requires a professional identity which is consistent, clear, and strong yet inclusive to embrace diversity. A critical time of challenge to professional identity is the transition from university to practice. As identified throughout this literature review there is a gradual increase in research on professional identity development in Occupational Therapy in Higher Education (De Weerd et al, 2006; Ennals et al, 2016).

This literature review highlighted some of the important and evolving evidence within the occupational therapy profession in relation to working with asylum seekers and refugees and their adaptation to a new life, the need for asylum seekers and refugees to engage in

meaningful occupations and how occupational therapy can help in facilitating these. The review also focussed on literature relating to decolonisation within the curriculum and a consideration of different cultures and models of practice explored within the curriculum to ensure students have the skills to work with asylum seekers and refugees. The review concluded with consideration of evidence relating to the development of professional identity.

This study will address the issues identified in the literature. There was a paucity of evidence of working with occupational therapy students as co researchers and specifically with the experience of participating in a SCoRe project with asylum seekers and refugees. This will be the focus of this research.

### **2.9 Research question:**

Does participating in a Students as Co-Researchers' project with asylum seekers and refugees' impact on professional identity and choice of employment?

### **2.10 Objectives:**

- To determine the value and meaning of student involvement as co researchers in a cross-cultural research project with asylum seekers and refugees.
- To critically explore the impact of the Students as Co-Researchers' project experience on future employment.
- To critically examine how participating in the Students as Co-Researchers' project with asylum seekers and refugees has impacted on the development of professional identity.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Overview

This phenomenological study draws on data from semi structured interviews to examine the research question, 'Does participating in a Students as Co-Researchers Project with asylum seekers and refugees, impact on professional identity and choice of employment?' The research question and objectives (See section 2.9) required an approach that considered the participants' lived experiences of participating in a SCoRe project. The SCoRe projects were designed to provide occupational therapy students with the opportunity to engage in participatory creative craft projects alongside their tutors and report on the impact these have for refugees and asylum seekers and themselves as professionals. The projects took place between 2016 and 2019. These were:

- 'The value and meaning of a drop-in centre in the North East of England', (2016-17),
- 'The value and meaning of participating in activity groups with asylum seekers and refugees', (2017-18),
- 'Exploring the sustainability of craft-based activity groups for asylum seeking and refugee women', (2019-20).

Each SCoRe project took place at the same drop-in centre and the participatory creative projects lasted between 4 and 6 weeks. There were upwards of 180 members using the centre each week from over 20 different countries, predominantly Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. Over time, the centre has become one that is run by refugees and asylum seekers for refugees and asylum seekers in collaboration with a group of British volunteers. The service provides a safe social space, a place to seek and gain practical advice and support with applying for asylum and accessing healthcare. The members come together to play table tennis, snooker, learn English, exchange clothes, and share food.

Members are encouraged to undertake productive voluntary roles, to aid community integration and promote occupational wellbeing (Spring et al, 2019).

This chapter considers the rationale for the phenomenological, qualitative interpretative design and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009) as the main methodology to determine the lived experience of being involved in one of three SCoRe projects working alongside refugees and asylum seekers. The epistemological, theoretical, and philosophical aspects of the research will be explored. Recruitment of participants and data collection will be discussed. Data were analysed using IPA, themes elicited, and inferences were made and linked to evidence from occupational therapy research and practice (Please see Chapter 4, Findings and Chapter 6, Discussion). Approaches to ensure trustworthiness in the research process will be examined. The chapter will end with a reflexive account of my positionality within the projects.

## **3.2 Philosophical considerations**

### **3.2.1 Interpretivist paradigm**

Paradigms are the values and beliefs about the world that guide the research process and can be seen as the lens through which the research process is viewed (Finlay, 2006; Clarke, 2009). Exploring subjective experience positions this research within the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism is based on the view that reality is socially constructed and given meaning by individuals (Bryman, 2016). Reality is subjective and observations of reality are continually realised and interpreted by individuals. Each person may interpret reality differently dependent on a range of factors including gender, values beliefs, and context (Crotty, 2005). Research conducted within an interpretivist paradigm therefore leads researchers to look for complexity and meaning and to capture personal significance attributed to experiences (Liamputtong, 2009; Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

### 3.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with the theory of knowledge, and questions what we know, and how we know things (Finlay, 2006). An interpretivist perspective is centred on an epistemology which is situated on the view that all knowledge is based on interactions between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within a social context (Crotty, 2005). The emphasis is on exploring multiple realities and how things occur and are experienced by participants (Finlay, 2006).

In relation to this study, the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of being involved in the SCoRe project. Meanings are created by the SCoRe participants whilst they are engaging with the asylum seekers and refugees in the creative sessions and further realised in their understanding and interpretation of the research process, through discussion, reflection and making sense of their experience with the researcher. These meanings can be fluid, contextualised and may or may not have been influenced by myself as the researcher. As I discussed the SCoRe projects with each participant, I brought my own preconceptions, understandings, assumptions, and experiences which then shaped my interpretations of the participants experiences. However, according to Gyollai (2020), in the theoretical framework of IPA, the role of preconceptions and prejudices is diminished, and priority is given to the participant's words. IPA is intended to analyse how individuals make sense of lived experience rather than to conduct an analysis based on the views and preconceived ideas of the researcher (Gyollai, 2020). IPA's epoché (bracketing) provides an opportunity to explore how and why worldly events are revealed. We as researchers, determine our role in which objects are revealed in the world and the relationships between ourselves and subjectivity and objectivity. Researchers access meaning of a participant's narrative by suppressing and silencing their own

preconceptions. Paley (2017) suggested that interpretation never arises from the participants own words but on the researcher's perspective of the outside looking in.

### **3.2.3 Ontological position**

Ontology concerns a person's perception of the nature of reality and their existence (being) in the world (Crotty, 2005; Finlay, 2006; Clarke, 2012). There are different ontological positions to consider when carrying out social research including realism – a real social world exists independent of our knowledge of it, and relativism – there are multiple realities which are dependent on individual experiences and interpretations (Crotty, 2005; Clarke, 2012). Crotty believed that constructivists are a combination of realists and relativists. Whilst engaging in human interactions meanings are constructed into reality. As interactions take place in a unique context the relativist nature of reality is acknowledged. Reality is a result of human perception, social experiences and shared understandings which is connected to context (Clarke, 2009). My ontological position aligns with what Finlay (2006, p.20) described as a middle ground, a 'critical realism' between realism and relativism.

In this research, the 'reality' is that participants in the SCoRe group will have individual experiences of 'reality' and how they participated in their own research process. They will have been influenced by their own culture and beliefs and interpreted that reality. To summarise, this research is positioned within a constructivist-interpretative paradigm and applies a critical realist ontology that recognises multiple meanings that can be fluid and change depending on context, and subjective interactions (Finlay, 2006; Clarke, 2012).

### 3.3 Phenomenology and Interpretative phenomenological analysis

The primary philosophical base of IPA is phenomenology (Cronin-Davis, Butler and Mayers, 2009, p. 333). Phenomenology is the way in which experiences are perceived and constitutes the lived world of an individual's experience of everyday occupations and how they make sense of their lives (Finlay, 2011; Wilding and Whiteford, 2005; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). To understand any given part a person needs to look to the whole, to understand the whole a person needs to look at its constituent parts (Smith, 2004).

Phenomenology is the philosophical movement mostly attributed to Husserl and developed in the 1900s and developed by Heidegger, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. Husserl and Heidegger were interested in understanding specific aspects of our human experience of the world. Husserl (1970) laid the foundations for transcendental phenomenology with Heidegger (1962) taking phenomenology towards a more hermeneutic existential approach with strong influences from Sartre (1956) and Merleau-Ponty (1962). Husserl developed phenomenology as the scientific study of things as they appear to be. This approach links to a more positivist paradigm. He values the importance of consciousness and lived experience. Husserl's philosophy helps researchers using IPA to focus on the process of reflection. In contrast, Heidegger is credited with a more existential phenomenology – a more interpretivist paradigm. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014, p.8) suggested that IPA integrates ideas from both traditions which results in methodology which is descriptive as it is concerned with how things appear because things speak for themselves, and interpretive as there is no such thing as uninterpreted phenomenon.

Husserl suggested that there is a distinction between subjects and objects within phenomenology. The subject is the person who thinks, acts, and perceives, whilst the object is the thing that can be perceived (Noon, 2018). Husserl transforms the distinction between 'subjects' and 'objects' into a correlation between what is experienced (the noema) and the way it is experienced (the noesis) (Noon, 2018). This correlation is known as 'intentionality'.

He suggested we need to 'bracket' or put to one side the taken for granted words, understandings, and assumptions to concentrate on our perception of that world to develop intentionality (Finlay, 2011). In terms of the proposed research study the 'noema' would be the participants taking part in the research project with asylum seekers and refugees. The 'noesis' would be how the participants interpreted the project and how it helped to develop cultural awareness and team working skills to take forward to enhance their employability. The correlation or intentionality would be the how the participants participated in the project, developed their learning, and took this forward into their future careers.

Husserl is concerned with processes such as perception, awareness, and consciousness. In contrast Heidegger is concerned with the ontological question of existence itself and the practical activities we do and through which the world becomes meaningful. Heidegger's work 'Being in time' (Heidegger (1962), cited by Gerner (2007, p.3), proposed that consciousness is not separate from human existence. He highlighted a distinction between the ontic and the ontological. Ontology is the philosophical study of being or (existence) (as discussed in section 3.2.3). The ontic, therefore refers to the particular facts about things that exist. The ontic can only be revealed by investigation. Therefore, using phenomenology is an ontological mode of research in which the researcher allows something of the phenomenon to be seen through the participant's stories of lived experiences. Rather than using an epistemology of seeking to understand how people come to know things in the world, phenomenology seeks to interpret the 'being' or ontology of everyday human existence. It is a questioning about what makes the phenomenon what it is and how it appears in everyday life. Therefore, in the proposed research the participants will be asked to consider how participation in the SCoRe project has impacted on their practice, beliefs, and ideologies and how these have been interpreted and understood.

For Heidegger, belonging in the world is taken to mean 'being there' and he refers to individual human existence as 'Dasein' (Heidegger (1962) cited by Gerner, (2007, p.3). Heidegger's view is therefore of understanding, rather than a description of the person in

context. Heidegger believes 'being' in the world involves practical engagement with the world and self-reflection he describes this as 'intersubjectivity' (Finlay, 2011). He suggested that human beings live in a world of objects, relationships, and language and that our being in the world is always proportionate and always in relation to something. Dreyfus (1991) considered 'Dasein' to be a mode of being which is always self-interpreting and always trying to make sense of being. Park Lala and Kinsella (2011) suggested that 'Dasein' manifests itself in everyday life through observing, learning, mimicking, and 'doing' in the world. They advocated that 'being' is not solely rooted in one's consciousness, but is interwoven with other people's, shared languages, cultures, customs, and practices. This concept relates to occupational science literature in which it is argued that occupation is a blend of 'Doing, being, belonging and becoming' (Wilcock, 2006). Humans need to engage in occupation by 'doing', they can find their sense of self 'being' and be part of a group sharing phenomena 'belonging' and they can then transform into the professionals they have the potential to become, by 'becoming' (Wilcock, 2006). These concepts will be discussed in depth in Chapter 5. Phenomenological research is important for occupational therapists and occupational scientists as it aims to elicit how taken for granted phenomena such as everyday occupations are lived and experienced (Wilding and Whiteford 2005).

### **3.3.1 Interpretative Phenomenological analysis**

IPA has its roots in psychology and recognises that the primary role of the researcher is to invite the participant to share what is happening in their world. The researcher then listens to what the participant is saying as they make sense of what is happening, and then interprets and makes sense of what the participant is saying (Smith, 2018 p1956). This is what makes IPA hermeneutic, and this then aligns with Heidegger's conceptualization of hermeneutic

phenomenology. Smith's focus is idiographic in that it seeks to understand how particular individuals' view specific life events.

Idiography is the study of the particular versus the general (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022). IPA's commitment to the particular can be considered in the sense of detail and the depth of analysis which is thorough and systematic. IPA considers how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process, or relationship) have been understood by people in a particular context (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022). The intentionality of idiography is to highlight and value each participant. Traditional phenomenological approaches highlight similarities across phenomena of interest across participants simultaneously, whereas IPA conducts single detailed analysis of each participant and then seeks to explore patterns between participants. Participants may experience the phenomenon of interest similarly but may interpret them differently (Miller, Chan, and Farmer, 2018). It is important that experience should be examined in the contextual way in which it occurs (Noon, 2018), which is why phenomenology has been chosen as the main methodological approach/philosophy for the proposed research. It is important to consider the 'value and meaning' of participating in a SCoRe project with asylum seekers and refugees.

IPA enables freedom to explore contextual influences and the relationship to life narratives (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). It is based on how individuals assign specific meaning to situations and highlights the diversity of meaning attached to lived experiences. IPA is both a methodology and research approach (Finlay, 2011). Finlay and Ballinger (2006) described IPA as a variant of phenomenology that aims to explore individuals' beliefs, perceptions, and experiences. This methodology contrasts with a more traditional scientific approach to research which attempts to find causal explanations of events or produce objective facts (Smith and Osborn 2008; Smith 2004). At the heart of IPA is the assumption that participants interpret their own experiences in a way that is understandable to themselves and then they

in turn try to convey their experiences in a way that the researcher understands - a dual hermeneutic (Rodham, Fox, and Doran, 2015).

This has relevance to occupational therapy as contextual influences of how people engage in everyday occupations are explored. Occupation (as stated in chapter 2.1) is defined as 'all that people need, want and are obliged to do' (Wilcock, 2006 p.91; WFOT, 2016).

Phenomenology enables researchers to investigate the 'delicate layering' of occupation – a key component in occupational therapy practice (Hasselkus, 2006 p.627).

Phenomenological research is therefore concerned with experiences and meanings, IPA acknowledges that the researcher is integral to the analytical process, making sense of events circumstances, communications, and experiences. It is appropriate for occupational therapists to use methodology which enables research participants to convey and make meaning of their story and for the researcher to listen and interpret their meanings. IPA is a qualitative research methodology that appears to be consistent with the values and principles of occupational therapy (Cronin-Davis, Butler and Mayers, 2009).

IPA enables the researcher to offer insights into how an individual makes sense of a phenomenon by applying a dual hermeneutic process: a participant makes sense of an experience or event in their personal and social world and the researcher then tries to decode that meaning and make sense of it (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022). This could be construed as a triple hermeneutic. A participant's description of an event must be seen in that person's own life context. Interpretation is therefore required to draw out the meanings which occur in the personal and social contexts of the participants, thereby getting as close as possible to the participant's view. The participant's lived experience is interpreted through the researcher's own lens (Finlay, 2008; Gadamer, 1989; Larkin, Watts, and Clifton, 2006). In relation to this study, each participant's interpretation of the reality of being part of the SCoRe project and the researcher's interpretation of that reality will be experienced differently. It is not possible to gain an understanding of the SCoRe projects in isolation,

having been part of the projects helped me to interpret and make meaning of their thoughts and experiences in the context of the specific SCoRe project with asylum seekers and refugees. I bracketed or put to one side my own views of how I felt the participants experienced working on the SCoRe projects and listened and made sense of the views of the participants' perceptions of taking part in the SCoRe projects.

Researchers make sense of data by drawing on their own interpretation of findings which arise out of their life experience and bring their own attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, and characteristics to bear on the research process (Finlay, 2011). According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, (2022 p.23), without phenomenology there would be nothing to interpret, without hermeneutics the phenomena would not be seen.

Symbolic interactionism and its influence on IPA should be considered here. (Mead,1934; Blumer, 1969; Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022). According to Smith and Osborn (2008) and Leeds-Hurwitz (2009) symbolic interactionism is where researchers focus on the meaning an individual gives to an event or occurrence in their world or environment, through their language and behaviour. It is these events that are central to and interpreted in IPA. This is done using a balance of the insider/participant (emic) and the outsider/researcher (etic) perspectives. The physical, cultural, and social worlds impact and constrains what we can be and do and our understanding and experiences are drawn from our relationships with others (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022 p.140). IPA considers people as cognitive, linguistic, and affective and physical beings (Cronin-Davis, Butler and Mayers, 2009, p.334).

It is therefore the individual's ideas, behaviours, thinking and emotions that change in relation to their perception of the world which is influenced by their environment and culture. These interpretations are bound by the participant's ability to articulate their thoughts and personal meanings and by the researcher to reflect and analyse these (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). IPA can be seen as an exploration into the cultural position of the person and there needs to be a level of cultural competence in the researcher to understand the participants'

points of reference. This is in line with occupational therapy theory, where individuals are seen as occupational beings who routinely engage in occupations that hold some meaning and contribute to health and well-being (Wilcock, 2006). In this study the students chose to engage in the SCoRe projects as they held some meaning for them in relation to their values and beliefs and their developing sense of professional identity. IPA enabled the students and researchers involved in the SCoRe projects to interact and interpret meanings so that they could be understood (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022).

Using IPA enables occupational therapists to develop deeper understandings of peoples' experiences, reflect on current practices and lead to changes in service provision (Clarke, 2009). Phenomenology provides the researcher with rich ideas about how to examine and comprehend the lived experience through first-hand accounts and through peoples' life world (Finlay, 2008; Dreyfus, 1991). Anecdotal evidence from the students working on the SCoRe projects suggested that engaging in cross-cultural research projects allowed for a deeper understanding of difference and culture which impacted on the students' beliefs. Semi-structured interviews and IPA was therefore required to draw out the meanings which occurred in the personal and social contexts of the participants. This enabled the researcher to get as close as possible to the participant's view (Gadamer 1989; Larkin, Watts, and Clifton 2006) and aligned to the person-centred ethos of occupational therapy (Cronin-Davis, Butler and Mayers, 2009).

From descriptive data, further interpretation and analysis enables the researcher to uncover a description of the 'essence' of the phenomenon as the participants' experiences are privileged (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022). In this research, the phenomenon of the lived experience of participating in the value and meaning of being involved in a SCoRe project with asylum seekers and refugees and the potential impact of this experience on professional identity and future practice was considered.

### **3.4 Consideration of other qualitative designs**

#### **3.4.1 Grounded theory**

IPA contrasts with grounded theory as a methodological approach. Willig (2022) argued that, in addition to IPA's theoretical underpinning, IPA differs from grounded theory in its suitability for understanding personal experiences as opposed to social processes. Grounded theory derives a general abstract theory of a process, action or interaction which is grounded in the views of participants (Clarke, 2012). It involves multiple stages of data collection and the refinement and consideration of the interrelationship of categories of information to generate broad theoretical interpretations (Clarke, 2012; Willig, 2022). Grounded theory as a methodological approach requires large amounts of data collection until data analysis becomes saturated (Creswell and Creswell 2018). IPA provides detailed accounts of individuals' experiences (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022). This research seeks to focus on the lived experiences of participating in a SCoRe project rather than generating theory which is why IPA was chosen as the research methodology rather than grounded theory.

#### **3.4.2 Ethnography**

Ethnographic research is derived from cultural sociology and social anthropology (Matera and Biscaldi, 2021). The researcher studies patterns of behaviour, language and actions of a cultural group and spends time immersed and making observations in the setting over a specific period. Although I was involved in each SCoRe project group as a research supervisor, my role was not to explore patterns of behaviour and language of the students whilst they were immersed in the project. My role was to help facilitate their learning and

complete their research project in part fulfilment of their BHS in Occupational Therapy programme. (BHS Occupational Therapy was the correct title for the cohorts of students undertaking the SCoRe projects included in this research. The programme has subsequently changed its title to BSc Occupational Therapy). The focus of this study is to consider the value and meaning of participating in the SCoRe research project as they reflected on their experiences having completed their studies and commenced employment. IPA was chosen for this study as the researcher was able to interpret the meanings of the lived experience of the students who all undertook a SCoRe project rather than making assumptions based on observations of behaviour, language, and actions of the students at the time SCoRe projects were being undertaken.

### **3.5 Critique of IPA**

It is important to consider some critique of IPA as a methodology. IPA is widely used within health psychology and is increasingly being used in occupational therapy (Cronin-Davis, Butler and Mayers, 2009; Finlay, 2011). Within IPA there is a central role for the researcher as they interpret and make sense of the experiences of the participants (Smith, 2004).

Phenomenologically informed qualitative research has different aims than phenomenological philosophy. Smith (2011) claimed that his approach to IPA is phenomenological because it seeks to examine experience according to its own terms rather than according to predefined categories of how to examine experience. Smith (2018) highlights the IPA methodological approach as having a positive contribution to the experience of health and illness as it explores the lived experience and can be used to influence how services are set up, delivered, and received.

There has been much recent critique and debate about Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's (2009) interpretation of IPA, namely by van Manen (2017) and Zahavi (2019). Zahavi (2019) stated

that Smith, Flowers, and Larkins' (2009) procedure for analysing data within IPA studies merely formalises the processes that many researchers use and can be found in many other disciplines and traditions besides phenomenology. van Manen, (2017, p776) claimed that phenomenology in its original sense is a philosophically based form of enquiry and is the study of the lived meaning of an experience. He advocates that the basic phenomenological question is the question of 'What is this lived experience like? He suggests that IPA as defined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) does not show sufficient understanding of phenomenology as advocated by Husserl. Zahavi, (2019) argued that this is untrue. van Manen (2018) insisted that IPA is not phenomenological and should therefore be described as interpretivist psychological analysis. He argued that the psychological and phenomenological perspectives are distinctly different, a view supported by Heidegger and Husserl's different stances. van Manen in turn critiques Zahavi for engaging in writing about phenomenology rather than practicing it. Georgi (2010) offered more critique and stated that Smith, Flowers, and Larkins' (2009) approach was not scientific by allowing researchers to modify the method if they think it is appropriate to the topic they are investigating. The debate between these authors continues. Interpretations of the lived experiences stemming from IPA need to be embedded in what the participants are saying with a range of direct quotes being used to substantiate findings.

Pringle et al (2011) suggested that the individual or idiographic nature of IPA which aims to give a complete and in-depth picture can also be seen as a weakness of the approach. This is because generalisations are not possible, as idiographic studies are subjective, instinctive, and impressionistic. Therefore, sifting through which variables are important makes generalisations difficult. Pringle et al, (2011) advocated that theoretical dialogue resulting from IPA studies can contextualise the contribution research makes to the wider literature and that IPA studies are more likely to have theoretical transferability than generalisability (Shenton, 2004). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that IPA is constrained by its

theoretical roots, yet it can add depth that thematic analysis may lack. Willig (2022) however proposed that IPA allows more room for freedom than other approaches.

Smith (2010) argued that good IPA requires the development of complex skills: interviewing, analysis, interpretation, writing, and researchers have different degrees of expertise at these. It is the proficiency of these skills which will influence the quality of the research carried out more than the dutiful following of procedures. As IPA evolves no doubt, the philosophical and intellectual debate will continue as it is stimulated by studying phenomena and personal existence (Halling, 2021). Finally, Finlay (2011, p.26) took a more positive stance, stating that phenomenology when it is done well transforms and inspires. The strength in IPA as a methodology lies in its ability to explore the richness of existence to what may appear to be ordinary mundane living. It is for this reason that IPA was chosen as the most relevant methodology to explore richness of the lived experience of participating in a SCoRe project.

### **3.6 Sampling**

The research has been conducted in accordance with the University's Research Ethics Policy (York St John University, 2021) and data managed in accordance with the University's Research Data Management Policy (York St John University, 2017). Following ethical approval (see Appendix 1) purposive sampling was used to recruit participants from the recent Students as Co-Researchers' projects. Purposive sampling is appropriate for interpretative phenomenological research, as it ensures that samples can offer insight into a phenomenon (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022). To be eligible for inclusion in the study, individuals needed to be recent students on the Bachelor of Health Sciences (BHSc) Occupational Therapy programme who had been in the SCoRe research group with asylum seekers and refugees in the years between 2016 and 2019. There were 30 students who

had been involved in the SCoRe research groups in this timeframe. It was hoped that some of them would consent to participate in the study.

The potential participants were initially contacted via the discussion forums set up for the SCoRe groups and asked if they were willing to participate in the research. Those who responded were asked to provide contact details to arrange the interviews. Those who responded to the e-mail and were willing to participate were then invited to attend either a face-to-face interview at the university, or a Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) or telephone interview. These options were offered as the students had completed their studies and had left the University and were already employed as occupational therapists throughout the United Kingdom and beyond. Face to face interviews posed difficulty in terms of cost and time for potential participants as there was no funding attached to this study to offer expenses to participants.

An unexpected and unwelcome issue within the timeframe for data collection was the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the country was under restricted movement conditions imposed by the Government and the University was closed, all interviews needed to be undertaken via the internet platform MS Teams, or via the telephone. The benefit of using MS Teams was that interviews could be recorded, and this could then be immediately available to the researcher after the interview. This helped with the accuracy of subsequent transcriptions.

Those who agreed to be interviewed were e-mailed a participant information Sheet (See Appendix 2) on the purpose of the study, and a consent form to complete, sign and return electronically before the interview (See Appendix 3). Consent forms stipulated that any participant could withdraw from the study without consequence. As the participants' research projects had already been marked and their programmes completed there was no intention of, or potential for, coercion between the researcher and the students (potential participants).

### 3.6.1 Sample group

In total, 18 SCoRe project participants responded to the request to participate via the discussion forums set up specifically for the SCoRe projects with asylum seekers and refugees. All had successfully completed their SCoRe projects and had qualified as occupational therapists. This was a large number for an IPA study (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), but following discussion with the supervision team it was deemed appropriate to interview all participants as they had volunteered to participate in the study. Participants were given a code to protect their anonymity (RCOT 2021b). Project 1 was given the code A; Project 2 was given code B and Project 3 was given code C. Then each participant was given a number which reflected the alphabetical order of the participants, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter denoted a letter relevant to the participants' name. Tables 1,2 and 3 (pages 49,50 and 51 respectively) provide an overview of participants, project group, and employment information.

Some participants were working as occupational therapists, others within youth work, and health and social care sectors using their occupational therapy skills but not specifically working as occupational therapists. 15 participants were working in the United Kingdom and 3 were working in the United States. There were 2 male participants, one working in the UK as an occupational therapist and one in the United States as a Community Support Worker with children with developmental disorders, both were White British. There were 16 female participants. 13 female participants worked as occupational therapists in England; 12 were White British and one was from an Asian British background. One female participant was an occupational therapist in Wales. Two female participants were living and working in the United States, one who was White British was working as an Assistant Camp Director with

children with developmental disorders, the other, who was White American was working in a care setting and was undertaking further studies.

### Project 1. The value and meaning of a drop-in centre for asylum seekers and refugees in the North East of England

*Table 1: Overview of Participant, demographic, and employment information*

| <b>Participants Pseudonym</b> | <b>Project 1</b> | <b>Demographic information</b>          | <b>Employment setting at time of interview</b>                                                       |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A1A                           | 2016/7           | White British female working in England | Band 6 Occupational Therapist Older People's Mental Health in patient service                        |
| A2J                           | 2016/7           | White British male working in US        | Recreation supervisor/community support worker with children with developmental disorders            |
| A3C                           | 2016/7           | White British female working in England | Specialist Children's Occupational Therapist Sensory Processing team                                 |
| A4K                           | 2016/7           | White British female working in England | Band 6 Occupational Therapist Regional Burns Unit                                                    |
| A5E                           | 2016/7           | White British female working in the US  | Recreation supervisor/ Assistant camp director children and adolescents with developmental disorders |
| A6Z                           | 2016/7           | Asian British female working in England | Band 6 Specialist Occupational Therapist National Neurology Hospital                                 |
| A7S                           | 2016/7           | White British female working in England | Senior Occupational Therapist Local authority/ Social services Housing adaptations                   |

**Project 2. The value and meaning of women participating in client centred, client led activity groups for asylum seeking and refugee women.**

| <b>Participants Pseudonym</b> | <b>Project 2</b> | <b>Demographic information</b>          | <b>Employment setting at time of interview</b>                                                                           |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B1D                           | 2017/8           | White British male working in England   | Band 5 Occupational Therapist Intermediate care team (facilitating hospital discharge and preventing hospital admission) |
| B2R                           | 2017/8           | White British female working in Wales   | Senior Occupational Therapist Social services Housing Adaptations Team                                                   |
| B3I                           | 2017/8           | White British female working in England | Specialist Occupational Therapist Children's special school                                                              |
| B4B                           | 2017/8           | White British female working in England | Band 6 Occupational Therapist Neurology and Stroke                                                                       |
| B5G                           | 2017/8           | White British female working in England | Band 6 Occupational Therapist Complex dementia service OT                                                                |
| B6H                           | 2017/8           | White British female working in England | Band 6 Occupational Therapist Rotation infectious diseases and COVID-19 wards                                            |

**Table 2: Overview of participant, demographic, and employment information**

**Project 3. The sustainability of craft-based activity groups for asylum seeking and refugee women.**

*Table 3: Overview of participant, demographic, and employment information*

| <b>Participants Pseudonym</b> | <b>Project 3</b> | <b>Demographic information</b>                                | <b>Employment setting at time of interview</b>                                     |
|-------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| C1A                           | 2018/9           | White British female working in England                       | Band 5 Occupational Therapist Medical COVID-19 wards/ major trauma wards           |
| C2A                           | 2018/9           | White British female working in England                       | Band 6 Occupational Therapist Community team for people with Learning disabilities |
| C3C                           | 2018/9           | White American female working in the United States of America | Social care. Additional study United States of America                             |
| C4K                           | 2018/9           | White British female working in England                       | Band 5 Occupational Therapist Hospital early supported discharge service           |
| C5S                           | 2018/9           | White British female working in the England                   | Band 6 Occupational Therapist rotational physical medicine                         |

## **3.7 Ethics**

### **3.7.1 Ethical approval**

This study received ethical approval from York St John University Cross-school Research ethics Committee for: Education, Humanities, religion and Philosophy, and languages and Linguistics. Approval code: RECedu00029 (See Appendix 1). There was no requirement to seek approval from the Local Research Ethics Committee as the research focus was on participants' university experiences rather than on their clinical work.

There are some basic ethical principles for research involving human beings according to Beauchamp and Childress (2009), research merit and integrity, non-maleficence, respect for human beings, justice, and beneficence. These will now be discussed in relation to this research.

### **3.7.2 Research merit and integrity**

Unless the proposed research has merit, and the researchers who conduct the research have integrity, the involvement of humans in the research cannot be ethically justifiable. This research has clear aims which are worthwhile and appropriate in terms of the design of interpretive phenomenology and IPA as a method of data analysis. For political and social reasons being involved in cross-cultural research is ethically challenging and needs to consider a more compassionate approach to the research process (Liamputtong, 2009).

### **3.7.3 Non-Maleficence (to do no harm) and respect for human beings**

The specific elements of this research that could cause harm to participants were confidentiality and autonomy. Participants were protected by ensuring their anonymity. The United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI 2020) attached significant importance to respect for human beings in research. Respect involves recognising the value of human autonomy - the capacity to determine one's own life and make one's own decisions. Informed consent is the major mechanism for putting into practice the principle of respect for autonomy. Two key components of informed consent are: adequate understanding and voluntariness. In this research the participants were informed of the purpose of the research and opted to participate in the research (See Appendix 2, Participant Information sheet and Appendix 3, consent form). Participants who had worked with asylum seekers and refugees as part of their SCoRe projects may have interviewed people who faced extreme distress, trauma and or hardship and in some cases, post-traumatic stress disorder. I was unable to determine how, or if the SCoRe project members and participants in this study had internalised what they saw and heard despite supervision and debriefs. This could have impacted on the data provided in the semi structured interviews. SCoRe participants were encouraged to give their own opinions and responses to questions during the interviews. If a participant had become distressed during the interview the interview would have been stopped and the participant would have been given the opportunity to have a debrief with the researcher.

The participants were assured that there was no obligation to participate. The ability to give informed consent was not compromised. The questions were not sensitive and did not cause the participants' distress. Voluntariness is the second component of informed consent. Voluntariness can be undermined if prospective participants perceive researchers to be in a position of power, even if they are not. In the instance of a lecturer, and a participant who is

an ex-student, there could be an issue of power and participants may have felt they had no option but to participate. The participants had already received their results and degree classification for their studies before they gave informed consent to participate in the study. The UKRI (2020) acknowledged that an unequal or dependent relationship does not always make consent invalid, but care needs to be taken to ensure a transparent and informed process through which participation can be negotiated. Attempts were made to minimise the potential power asymmetries derived from my position as former lecturer. Potential distress could have been caused if the participant failed the academic component of the SCoRe project and felt duty bound to participate in the study. However, this was mitigated against by the participants opting into the research after they had completed their studies, rather than opting out of the study and feeling pressure to engage with the study as they might if they were still enrolled on the Occupational Therapy programme.

Due to the government restrictions imposed on the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was another ethical issue to be considered here. Asking the participants to take part in an interview may have felt like an additional pressure during an already busy time for key workers. Interviews were conducted at a mutually convenient time, often in the evening. There was no coercion to engage in the research process.

Participants signed a consent form prior to the interview in which they were informed that their interview was to be audio recorded and the lead researcher and her supervisors would have access to the transcripts. The consent form (See Appendix 3) informed the participants that some anonymised excerpts from the transcripts may be used in future conference proceedings or in publications. Participants were invited to review and verify the accuracy of the transcription derived from the audio recording. They were advised that audio recordings would be erased following transcription and completion of the research. Transcriptions and recordings were stored in a secure password protected repository in line with the York St John University Research Data Management Policy, (2017).

These elements are managed through the University Research Ethics Policy (York St John University, 2021) to ensure that no participant is identified in the research and anonymity is guaranteed. All participants were given the right to withdraw from the research. Data has been stored in a secure online repository (One drive) for the period of the study then will be destroyed after its use as per Research Data Management Policy, (York St John University, 2017). Participants were asked to give honest responses and not responses that they felt the researcher wanted to hear. Participating in this research did not impact on the participants' studies as they had completed their Occupational Therapy programme and received their degree classifications prior to undertaking the research.

#### **3.7.4 Justice**

There were two aspects of justice that the researcher considered when designing and planning the research: distributive justice and procedural justice (due process and natural justice). The process of recruiting participants was objective and there was no exploitation of participants whilst conducting the research. This was particularly important to note as the participants may have chosen to participate because of loyalty to the researcher as a university tutor. There is also another consideration in terms of justice for the asylum seekers and refugees who were part of the SCoRe participants' project. In terms of their justice, they chose to participate in the creative groups, and in the interviews that the SCoRe participants undertook to better understand and improve the creative sessions for the asylum seekers and refugees. Again, there was no exploitation or coercion of their participants who were asylum seekers and refugees. I felt it worthy of note here.

### **3.7.5 Power**

It was important to consider the power relationships between myself and the SCoRe participants during this research. I was one of the lead researchers and a research supervisor for some of the participants during the SCoRe projects. I recruited the participants and carried out the interviews. This could be perceived as disproportionate in terms of power in an encounter between two unequal partners (Lowes and Paul, 2006). Conversely, participants could put themselves in a power position through their decision on how much information to reveal within the interview (Grenz, 2005). It was imperative that the power relationship was not abused when picking up cues from participant's responses, especially when asking probing questions in the interviews. It was necessary to be mindful of the perceptions of some of the roles involved in this research; 'ex- student' and 'ex-tutor/expert.' Yardley (2000) suggested the 'expert' role involves benefitting from the process of research to ensure research outputs. It is therefore possible to perceive power as multidimensional, implying that power is exercised in different ways and at different levels at the same time. It was important to recognise that the relationship between myself and the participants had moved on. The participants had all qualified as occupational therapists and for some it was 3 or 4 years since our last contact. Time was spent at the beginning of each interview finding out about the participants careers to date and putting them at ease.

### **3.7.6 Beneficence/ to do good**

Beneficence was considered in terms of the minimising risks and considering the potential benefits of research to participants and to the wider occupational therapy educational community. The researcher did not foresee any negative effects of conducting the research, nor any potential for harm. There was no intended psychological harm in participating in the

research unless the participant felt participating in the SCoRe projects was challenging on a personal and professional level. Indeed, there were many benefits to participating in the SCoRe project including a developing sense of cultural awareness, acting as an advocate for asylum seekers and refugees in the workplace and the value of learning as part of a wider team. These will be discussed further in Chapter 4 – findings. This research followed the University's Research Ethics Policy, (2021). The research was considered through this lens.

### **3.7.7 Bias**

Within qualitative research the researcher is a key figure who influences and constructs the collection, selection, and interpretation of the data and bias is inevitable (Finlay, 2002).

Morse and Mitcham (2002) described 'pink elephant' bias as the tendency for the researcher to see what is anticipated. I anticipated that the participants would be able to discuss the SCoRe project and consider the value and meaning it had on them in terms of their cultural awareness, professional identity, and future employment. The research may be perceived as value laden as I expected positive outcomes from the research. These features could be unfairly emphasised during data analysis.

Another source of bias is inherent in qualitative research and the purposive sample could be perceived as being biased, as only the students who had positive experiences of the project may have chosen to participate in the research. Within IPA the sample size is usually small (Smith, 2009). However, in this study there were a maximum of 30 participants which would have yielded a large amount of data which may have been cumbersome and unmanageable. The author could have been accused of selecting a small sample of these with potentially positive experiences of the SCoRe project. Therefore, following discussion with research

supervisors, all 18 who volunteered to participate in the research were interviewed. All participants were offered transcripts of the interviews to ensure transparency.

Another type of bias occurs in the research design. I was one of the original co-researchers within the SCoRe projects and all the participants knew me. Power and coercion needed to be considered (Copley Atkinson, 2005). It may have reduced bias if the interviewer was an independent researcher and not myself. As the research interviews took place in the pandemic during Government restrictions and as there was no funding attached to this study, this was not possible. I therefore conducted the research interviews. However, it could be argued that the data would be 'richer' and 'thicker' as the participants would feel able to give deeper, more insightful responses as trust had already been built up with the researcher (Fusch, Fusch and Ness, 2018). Participants could also opt in to the research there was no incentive given or received to participants to take part in the research. Participants were not specifically targeted to be in the research based on my assumptions of their performance on the original SCoRe projects.

Bias was mitigated against by having an interview protocol, member checking, use of a research diary, reflections on the interviews and discussion with my supervisory team. Transparency and reflection throughout the research process from the research design to the data collection and research write up was important and helped to minimise bias (Borowska-Beszta, 2017). Data and my interpretations of the data were discussed at length with my supervisory team to reduce and question any potential bias. As Galdas (2017, p.2) stated 'those carrying out qualitative research are an integral part of the research process and final product and separation from this is neither possible nor desirable'. What is important when considering bias is whether the researcher has been transparent and reflexive about the processes by which data has been collected, analysed, and presented. Please see (See section 3.16) for consideration of reflexivity in relation to this research.

### **3.8 Pilot interviews**

After ethical approval had been granted, pilot interviews took place with two students who were involved in the second SCoRe project. These students were not participants in this research. The pilot interviews demonstrated a need to be organised and to use prompts more to gain a deeper exploration of the responses. The interviews used skype as an online platform with digital voice recorder which proved cumbersome and picked up lots of background noise. When the actual interviews were carried out for the research Skype had been replaced by MS Teams as the preferred platform for the interviews as this could be easily recorded. As the interviews for the actual research were carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic all interviews were carried out on MS Teams from my home office. Headphones were also used on the Teams interviews to eradicate any background noise and to ensure confidentiality was maintained. Material from the pilot interviews was not used in the analysis for this study but did help to improve the interview technique and process.

### **3.9 Interview Schedule**

An interview schedule was used (See Appendix 3) and comprised eleven open-ended questions about the participants' experiences of participating in the students as co-researcher's project. There was contingency for probing questions. The interview schedule was adapted from a study by Smith, Cornella, and Williams (2014) as the study involved a similar population group. With participants' written and verbal consent, all interviews were audio-recorded for subsequent verbatim transcription and analysis.

### 3.10 Data collection through semi-structured interviews

Online semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The interviews all took place online at mutually convenient times. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Data was stored in accordance with the University's Research Data Management Policy (York St John University, 2017) in a password protected data repository. The purpose of the qualitative research interview was to explore the ways in which the participants experience and understand their lived daily world (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018, p.10). The structure of the semi-structured interview was close to an everyday conversation, but it was neither an everyday conversation nor a closed questionnaire (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Semi-structured interviews allowed me as the interviewer to engage in in depth conversations with participants and is consistent with the idiography of IPA. This allowed the researcher and participants to establish a rapport and encourage meaningful reflection and sharing. This meant the researcher was open to new and unexpected phenomenon rather than having ready formed categories to interpret. Interviews are traditionally conducted on an individual basis which is what happened in this study but were not conducted face to face in the same room for reasons already discussed (Novick, 2008; Qu and Dumay, 2011).

This discussion between interviewer and interviewee is often seen as necessary to establish rapport with interviewees to facilitate the gathering of rich in-depth data (Gillham, 2005; Hermanowicz, 2002; Shuy, 2003). During face-to-face interviews, interviewees' body language and cues from the physical environment can also add to researchers' understanding (Bryman, 2016; Gillham, 2005). This was possible using the online platforms of MS Teams as the interviewee was visible throughout the interview.

Online semi-structured interviews were the chosen method of data collection for this study. It would not have been feasible or practical to do the interviews face to face due to the COVID-

19 pandemic, the Government restrictions, and practical reasons (many of the participants lived either outside of the UK or a long way from where the researcher was based).

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) proposed that successful interviewing is a craft which is based on the practical skills and the personal judgments of the interviewer. Semi-structured interviews allowed a flexible approach to gathering data by focusing on individuals' lived experience, whilst at the same time trying to understand the context of that experience. Participants were given the opportunity to tell their stories, to speak freely and reflectively and to develop their ideas and express any concerns at length (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022). This contrasts with a narrative approach as discussed earlier (Chapter 3.4.5) in which the focus is on how the narrative is constructed and the tone and linguistic analysis is considered. Highly structured interviews, and questionnaires where participants tend to give minimal, bite sized personal information may need encouragement and guidance to engage in fuller deeper disclosure (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015).

In studies which use IPA, one-to-one interviews are easy to manage, allow rapport to be established and maintained, and give participants the opportunity and the space to think, speak and be heard (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022 p 54). They are well suited to in depth and personal discussions. Initial questions can be modified in the light of participants' responses, and further questions posed in the light of the responses. The interviewer is therefore able to manage the amount and depth of data collected and prompting detail of information as necessary.

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, (2022) suggest that due to the idiographic approach of IPA, interviews are seen as a more effective method of data collection than focus groups. Individual experiences and meanings could have been lost as participants may have been uncomfortable sharing personal insights about situations or scenarios in front of others. Their responses could have been diluted in focus groups. Focus groups were also discounted due to practical considerations in that many of the participants lived around the United Kingdom and some were living abroad. Asking all participants to come to one venue on the same day

would have been costly and posed logistical issues. As it transpired, this was not possible due to the restrictions imposed by the Government due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Structured interviews or e-mail interviews were not deemed to be appropriate for this study as they would present little opportunity for in depth consideration of the issues raised by the interviewer (Brinkman and Kvale, 2015).

There were some disadvantages of online semi-structured interviews; call quality – problems with sound and or video/quality could have had a negative effect on data quality and maintaining rapport (Seitz, 2016). Maintaining a good connection between myself as an interviewer and the interviewee was important to maintain the flow of the interview. Checking that the camera was well positioned and orientated so that there was a good facial image also impacted on the quality of the interview (King, Horrocks, and Brooks, 2019). There was also the issue of distractions of pets and children in the house which occasionally interrupted the interviews. The interviews were time consuming to administer. The interviews in this study took many hours and weeks to carry out, fitting in around the participants' busy workloads which had been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

I found that using semi-structured interviews to elicit rich data was different to interviews I had carried out previously. Skills were required to put participants at ease and use probing questions to ensure that responses were rich and in depth. It was important to offer well-crafted interviews. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015, p.192) sophisticated theoretical analysis based on interviews of dubious quality can turn out to be 'magnificent edifices built on sand' which was a useful analogy to consider.

### **3.11 Transcription**

There were 18 Interviews which took place. They were then recorded on MS Teams and transcribed verbatim. Each page and line were numbered for ease and space was left in the margins for comments. I completed 3 of the transcriptions but quickly realised how time consuming a process this was and enlisted the help of a colleague to transcribe the remaining 15 interviews (see Appendix 5 for example of transcript). I then checked each transcript against the digital recording for accuracy and made notes on my initial reactions/ thoughts on the data. Smith and Eatough (2006) suggested that it is helpful to keep notes during the transcription process and to revisit these during and after the analysis takes place which I did. These were read and re read during and after analysis. This was a time-consuming process but helped with the process of analysing and interpreting the complexity of the data. I kept a personal reflective account of each individual interview in keeping with interpretive phenomenological analysis as a methodology. It is recognised that reflection can provide insights that are not always afforded at the time of the interview (McKay, 2009). The reflections and notes were discussed in supervisory sessions which helped to consider and develop potential themes alongside the data (Finlay, 2011; Smith, 2015).

### **3.12 Data analysis**

In keeping with the principles of IPA and data analysis, pre-identified themes were not used to identify the data. I listened to the participants' stories and made sense of what they were saying and used my own interpretations and verbatim quotes to elucidate my interpretations. Thick detailed description of the context, using supervision and reflexivity throughout data analysis and the whole study enabled me to consider how and why I had arrived at my interpretations and added to its credibility.

IPA allows for interpretation of patterns in participants' experiences and consideration of ways in which they make meaning of the experiences in social and theoretical contexts (Larkin and Thompson 2011; Cronin-Davis, Butler and Mayers, 2009). IPA considers convergence and divergence in responses and shows patterns of connections and participants' unique contributions. This highlights how responses are similar and different between participants (Nizza, Farr and Smith, 2021 p.382). During the data analysis, I tried to make sense of the participants' reflections and both their interpretations of their meanings of the projects.

According to Finlay (2011) analysis can be divided in to two stages: firstly, to develop a descriptive account of the phenomena through the lens of the participants. It is important to note the exploratory comments, any emotional expressions, and any linguistic patterns such as pauses, metaphors or tone of voice. Notes were taken during the semi structured interviews and immediately after each interview. Initial ideas for themes and initial connections were documented. Any preconceptions I had such as the SCoRe project had a positive impact on professional identity and the SCoRe project was a positive learning experience were bracketed and were reflected upon to determine whether there were any biases or influences on the study. In the second phase, researchers move away from description to interpretation of their stories. This is where the double hermeneutic takes place, attempting to make sense of the participants making sense of their experiences (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022). The analysis is detailed and dynamic allowing for several changes with themes being added or changed as each participant's data is analysed.

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, (2022) and Noon (2018) offer a step-by-step guide for IPA researchers which was used and proved valuable in analysing the data, recording and note making. The verbatim interview transcripts were read and re-read; notes were made on the margins of the transcript including my own perceptions and interpretations of what was being said and what I thought was meaningful. This was followed by identifying and connecting recurring observations and interpretations – this involved focussing on different parts of the

transcript whilst analysing the notes and starting to form themes. I moved to the next interview and tried to bracket previous themes and interpreted each new transcript. This was followed by looking for patterns across the different interviews. I then connected the evolving themes together and began to look for similarities in the themes that could be merged.

Several subthemes were identified and added to as each transcript was considered. Quotes and an identifying number and letters were placed next to the emerging concepts and themes so they could be used in the findings. The final set of themes were refined until they best reflected the most meaningful aspects articulated by the participants. These were then connected with several useful quotes which could then be used in the findings section.

These were placed on a spreadsheet. Themes were then clustered together to form a hierarchy of importance and verbatim quotes were added to support the themes. Theme titles were developed that reflected the meanings of the concepts. Each transcript was revisited to check whether any concepts or themes had been missed. Themes were explored in relation to one another and to determine any relationships between themes.

Finally, interpretations were explored, reflected on, and related to occupational therapy practice and occupational science concepts. This is not typical in IPA studies, but it seemed appropriate to make the links between the themes and occupational therapy practice and occupational science given the context of the study and the implications for a Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD) (Cronin-Davis, Butler and Mayers, 2009). Please see Chapter 4.1 Table 5 for the Table of subordinate and sub themes.

### **3.13 Ensuring quality within the study**

Yardley (2000) suggested four key areas when considering the quality of qualitative research: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency, coherence, impact, and importance. These will now be discussed in relation to this study.

#### **3.13.1 Sensitivity to context.**

Commitment to sensitivity has been demonstrated by the degree of attentiveness to the participant during data collection and the rigour in which each analysis was carried out. According to Yardley (2000), there is a balance to be made between closeness and separateness, which is considered essential in a study that involves ex-students. In IPA, analysis of data should be thorough and systematic and an exploration of a pure description of what is said to an interpretation of what it means (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022). The interpretations made were sensitive to and reflective of the raw data.

There was a need to adopt a compassionate approach when working with communities of vulnerable people and to consider the relationship between the research team and the asylum seekers and refugees (Spring et al, 2018). It was important to ensure there was co-learning and mutual benefits, rather than carrying out the research as partial fulfillment of a degree with no benefits to the asylum seekers and refugees (Wallerstein and Duran, 2006). There was a need to consider culture explicitly and reflexively in the research (Richardson et al, 2017). Power and its meaning for the researcher and participants was explored in terms of ethics and reflexivity. I demonstrated a sensitivity to participants' needs through establishing a rapport and acknowledging the power dynamic between myself and the SCoRe participants (Lowe and Paul, 2006). In the data analysis stage, I ensured that I remained sensitive to participants experiences by ensuring any analysis was based on the

raw data. I bracketed or put aside any thoughts of what I thought the participants would say about the SCoRe projects based on my previous interactions with them as a tutor and research supervisor.

### **3.13.2 Commitment and rigour**

This study followed the IPA process (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009) and all data were analysed in a systematic and interpretative manner. This took considerable time and effort to achieve and involved reading and re reading literature on IPA, philosophy, and ethical considerations. Detailed data analysis resulted in findings that were thorough and well considered. Verbatim quotes were used to support many of the points made in the findings.

### **3.13.3 Trustworthiness**

Many positivist critics are reluctant to accept the rigour of qualitative research because their concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way as quantitative studies (Shenton, 2004). Trustworthiness is the extent to which the findings are an authentic reflection of the personal lived experiences of the phenomena being studied (Curtin and Fossey, 2007, p.89). Guba and Lincoln (2005) developed four criteria to ensure trustworthiness during qualitative inquiry and can be related to thoroughness of the study (Shenton, 2004; Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022). These were: credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. These will now be discussed.

Shenton (2004) suggests that establishing the trustworthiness of research increases the readers confidence that the findings are worthy of attention. Demonstrating that research is

trustworthy involves ensuring there is a full description of the setting, the participants and the events discussed in the methods and findings section. This has been done throughout this study. Triangulation of the interview transcriptions with reflections of each interview improved the trustworthiness of the study.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) credibility is the degree to which the findings make sense. Each participant was offered a transcript at the time of the interview to check for accuracy and agree or disagree with what was said. Credibility is therefore related to triangulation and checking of the data for accuracy, presenting a thick or detailed description and using supervision and a reflexive diary. Geertz (1973) introduced the term 'thick description' and involves providing a detailed description of the context and circumstances of the phenomena being studied so that interpretations can be fully understood. This has been completed throughout the study.

According to Guba (1981) qualitative researchers do not claim to be completely objective. However, findings should be able to be confirmed. I used techniques such as triangulation, research supervision and reflexivity to challenge and explore my rationale and interpretations throughout the research process.

Dependability refers to the stability of the data. Qualitative research studies are considered dependable by being what Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) described as being consistent and stable over time. Data was collected by semi structured interviews and a well-reasoned argument was given for the use of IPA as the method for data analysis.

Transferability is where there is a detailed description of the subject and its context (Finlay and Ballinger, 2006; Shenton, 2004). This is so that the reader can determine the applicability of the research and its findings to other settings to determine whether comparisons can be made (Shenton, 2004). Throughout this research there has been a detailed account of the study, how it came about and how it fits into the Occupational Therapy programme curriculum. The study in its broader terms i.e., students involved in a

SCoRe research study would be applicable to other Occupational Therapy programmes. What makes this study is unique is its specific focus on Students as Co-Researchers working with asylum seekers and refugees.

#### **3.13.4 Triangulation**

In qualitative research, it is accepted that a researcher's cultural and experiential background contains biases, values and ideologies that will have an influence on the interpretation of research data (Fusch, Fusch and Ness, 2018). What is important is that this is acknowledged and mitigated against to ensure that any bias is reduced. Denzin (1978) believed it was impossible to eliminate bias as researchers bring their own personal beliefs in addition to the social and political environment. Denzin (2006) suggested one way to mitigate against bias was to adopt a process known as triangulation. Triangulation is a method by which the researcher analyses the data and then presents the results to others to understand the phenomenon being explored. Denzin (2006, p.13) stated that triangulation is the method in which the researcher must learn to employ multiple external methods in the analysis of the same empirical events. Therefore, triangulation is the way the researcher explores different levels and perspectives of the same phenomenon. Denzin proposed four types of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and method triangulation. These will now be discussed in relation to this study.

Data was triangulated by interviewing 18 participants who had taken part in 3 different SCoRe projects with asylum seekers and refugees over 3 consecutive years. The participants had all completed their training and were working. The interviews took place over 8 weeks, using MS Teams during Government restrictions for the pandemic. I cross checked and compared data from different participants, on different projects at different

stages of their career. Some had been qualified as occupational therapists 4 years, others 3 years and others 2 years.

I was the sole investigator for this research, but I endeavoured to consider investigator triangulation by keeping a journal throughout the research process and reflecting and making notes after each interview. I then read through the transcriptions and added to my notes and started to consider codes. I then discussed these at length with my supervisory team.

Theory triangulation was achieved by analysing the data through a theoretical lens. I was able to link the findings to occupational therapy theory and particularly around the concepts of 'Doing, being, belonging, and becoming (Wilcock, 1999). Examining the data over a period, I was able to create a conceptual framework on which to articulate my own ideas.

In terms of methodological triangulation, there were several ways this was achieved. A research protocol was used in the form of pre discussion before the semi structured interviews to put the participants at ease. Semi structured interviews were carried out at a time and place to suit the participants (these were all on MS Teams). Reflections were written after each interview. Interviews were transcribed by a colleague, and the recordings checked for accuracy against the transcriptions. Participants were offered a transcript of the interview for member checking. Notes were made on the transcriptions and then cross checked with the reflections. These were then coded, checked re-coded where necessary and then discussed with the supervisory team.

As a qualitative researcher, it is important to acknowledge that I brought my own personal experiences, values, and perspectives to the research process. I strove to mitigate against bias by adopting the different triangulation strategies to ensure I correctly interpreted the data from a range of participants. I made significant attempts to ensure the authenticity of my findings, so they are representative of the participants experiences (Curtin and Fossey, 2007).

### **3.13.5 Transparency and coherence.**

Transparency refers to how clearly the various stages of the research process are documented in the write up of the study. Yardley (2000) suggested that coherence can refer to the degree of fit between research that has been done and the underlying theoretical assumptions of the approach being implemented. This research followed the theoretical principles and methodology of IPA. There was a coherent fit between the research question, aims, methodology, philosophy, and method.

### **3.13.6 Impact and importance**

Yardley (2000) proposed that a test of research's true validity is whether it tells the reader something interesting, important, or useful. It was anticipated that this research will provide evidence to affirm the value of SCoRe project in the occupational therapy curriculum at the University. It was hoped that the research will demonstrate the impact of participating in the SCoRe project on occupational therapists' professional identity and employment choices.

I developed a systematic and thorough analysis of the data, but these needed to be interpreted in the context of my own knowledge, values, and beliefs. The value of a piece of research can only be assessed in relation to the objectives of the analysis and the community for whom the findings were relevant and the research's ultimate utility. The findings of the SCoRe projects have been widely disseminated at conference presentations and peer reviewed publications (Spring, Howlett and Connor, 2017; Howlett and Spring, 2018; Howlett and Spring, 2019; Spring et al, 2019). There is an international community of practice of occupational therapists and occupational scientists who research into the area of

cultural awareness and meaningful occupation with asylum seekers and refugees (Whiteford, 2005; Hammell, 2015; Smith, 2015). It is hoped that this study will contribute to this community of practice's evidence base.

### **3.14 Validity and reliability**

Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on whether the findings are accurate from the view of the researcher, the participant, and the reader. It is often used interchangeably with trustworthiness. However, some qualitative researchers reject the concept of validity believing it is not compatible with qualitative research (Ravitch, 2021).

Reliability is more difficult to determine in qualitative research in that the only consistency is the way the data are collected and analysed rather than the consistency of results.

Qualitative research determines the responses of a participant at a specific time and place and within a specific interpersonal context (Finlay and Ballinger, 2006). Another researcher, interviewing the same participant at a different time or place may not elicit the same story.

According to Morse (2015) in qualitative studies, validity and reliability are intertwined.

Strategies to ensure validity and reliability are adoption of appropriate well recognised research methodology, prolonged engagement with the participants in the study, persistent observation, engagement with previous research to frame the findings, and thick description of phenomena being studied, which will in turn elicit rich data (Shenton, 2004).

Morse (2015) suggested that prolonged time spent with the participants would result in greater trust and therefore provide richer data. More data will therefore be revealed and therefore will be more valid. If the sample size is too small – the restricted data may yield predictable and easily determined results. Lack of sample size could be a validity issue.

However, within IPA methodology data saturation is rarely reached (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). Having data from three different SCoRe groups produced a wider data set of eighteen participants made from up to thirty ex-students who had had time to reflect on the impact of SCoRe projects. Consequently, it is hoped that the data obtained was both rich and thick.

### **3.15 Generalisability**

Qualitative research is not strongly linked to generalisation issues. Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp. 110) stated that 'in qualitative research the only generalisation is there is no generalisation'. However, Finlay and Ballinger (2006) disagreed stating that qualitative researchers seek to show that findings can be generalised to the wider population. In this research, I am not seeking to generalise the findings. I am aiming to develop a rich and meaningful discussion of participating in a SCoRe project which could be shared with other Occupational Therapy programmes and have some meaning for other health students doing similar research projects.

### **3.16 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is a valuable yet time consuming component of IPA. Finlay (2002) described it as a 'swamp' of interminable analysis and self-disclosure. It involves the acknowledgment by the researcher that they are an active participant within and throughout the research process. 'Reflexivity is the process of continually reflecting on our interpretations of both our own experience and the phenomena being studied to move beyond the partiality of our previous understandings and our investment in particular research outcomes' (Finlay, 2003, p.108).

Reflexivity therefore influences the development of the research and the engagement of the participants, and it is important for the researcher to be aware of their role in the co-construction of knowledge (Finlay, 2002; Finlay, 2003; Curtin and Fossey, 2007). It was important that I was explicit about the intersubjective nature of this research with many complex elements which could impact on data collection and analysis. Being reflexive in this research helped to enhance the trustworthiness, transparency, and accountability of the research.

Part of the reflexivity was to acknowledge my own positionality. This was in relation to being an occupational therapist, a tutor, a research tutor as well as a researcher who is a White British female, living in a Western democracy, from a middle-class background and working alongside asylum seeker and refugees. I also needed to consider the SCoRe participants as students, student researchers and now qualified occupational therapists and how that impacted on the research. I also needed to acknowledge the role of my supervisory team and the role they played in the research process. They challenged my thought processes and the analysis of some of my interpretations of the data.

I needed to be mindful to continue to learn about the communities of people I worked with and continue to reflect on the potential power imbalances and the interconnectivity and complexity of the numerous roles and relationships of people involved within this research. The participants had all completed their studies and were professionals. There was no longer the tutor/student relationship and I deliberately spent time before the interviews commenced to reconnect with the participants to find out what they had been doing since qualifying to put them at ease and reduce any perceived imbalance of power. I spoke to the participants on a professional level. I also discussed the impact of the pandemic on the participants after the interviews as many were keen to discuss their experiences and impact on them personally and professionally. Although this was not part of the research process it felt important to do this.

I was explicit throughout the research about the assumptions I held, namely that I thought the SCoRe projects would be beneficial to the participants. By being reflexive and explicit participants had capacity to be involved in reflexive dialogue with myself as the researcher which informed the data analysis and evaluation. I was able to demonstrate my learning through engagement with the participants in the study and I used a reflective journal to consider my thoughts and interactions throughout the research process.

In terms of my own academic development and positional reflexivity, I made notes throughout the research process, including the struggles and the frustrations I found trying to make sense of ontology, epistemology, and theoretical frameworks, which initially made no sense at all. I spent many hours reading and re reading trying to understand the complexity of the terminology and tried to relate it to this study. Trying to piece the together the philosophy took considerable time and effort. I struggled to process how the philosophy linked to hermeneutic phenomenology and then how it linked to my own study. I remember saying to a colleague at that time that the philosophy was hard to understand, and it felt like, 'I was knitting with treacle' trying to make sense of it. To which she replied. 'It is meant to be hard, you are studying for a doctorate'. A piece of early feedback from one of the doctoral tutors said that my writing was 'torturous' in places, which felt a bit harsh at the time but, was sound advice looking back, as it made me re-visit what I had read and written. I then tried to ensure some clarity of thought in my writing.

I needed to acknowledge the need for cultural humility in my work, defined as 'a process of openness, self-reflection, and critique after willingly interacting with diverse individuals' (Foronda et al, 2016 p.215). This has been discussed earlier (Chapter 2.6 p.22).

I also needed to appreciate the joyful moments in which I finally understood complex methodological concepts and the humility of hearing about the impact of the project on the participants' professional identity.

I was delighted that out of a possible 30 students who had undertaken students as co researcher projects with asylum seekers and refugees that 18 chose to take part in this research. The participants were genuinely pleased to assist in the research project, and all were keen to share how the project had helped them in their careers to date. I had a good rapport with the participants, and this may have helped or hindered the research process. They spoke with fondness about the projects and their time at the university and on the Occupational Therapy programme. They also spoke about how difficult it had been working during the pandemic and how being on the front line was like nothing they had experienced before. At times it felt like I was back in a supportive tutor role as I listened to some of the difficulties in their day-to-day practice as the covid restrictions were easing.

Reflection is seen as central to occupational therapy practice (Bannigan and Moores, 2009). Booth and Nelson's (2013) research advocated reflection to develop a therapist's professional role in practice and was instrumental in settings where practice was recognised as being informed by a therapist's past experiences as well as their technical knowledge. Kinsella (2001) and Bannigan and Moores (2009) concurred with this view and go further in proposing that reflective practice is essential for professional development. The professional development encompassed by reflection is crucial to occupational therapy as a profession and phenomenology as a philosophy and research methodology. Therefore, adopting a phenomenological approach to methodology fits well with the profession, its focus on human occupation and the contextual impact of occupation on everyday life (Townsend and Polatajko 2007; Finlay, 2011).

### **3.18 Summary**

This chapter demonstrates the rationale for IPA and its appropriateness for this study. The three SCoRe projects that were the focus of this research also utilised IPA as a methodology

and following much deliberation, and studying different methodologies, it seemed appropriate that IPA was used in this research too.

The theoretical and epistemological reasoning have been justified to underpin the choice of a qualitative, interpretivist, phenomenological design using IPA for the data collection and analysis. Details of the sample size and participant recruitment were given. Data collection and analysis were discussed. Ethical considerations and trustworthiness have been deliberated and defended. The findings will be considered in the next chapter.

## 4. Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the interviews conducted with participants who had undertaken SCoRe projects with asylum seekers and refugees as their dissertation project in part fulfilment of the BHSc in Occupational Therapy. The participants undertook one of three SCoRe projects with asylum seekers and refugees between 2016 and 2019 (See Table 4 below for details of project titles).

|                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Project 1                                                                                                                                   |
| The value and meaning of a drop-in centre for asylum seekers and refugees in the North East of England (2016/2017).                         |
| Project 2                                                                                                                                   |
| The value and meaning of women participating in client centred client led activity groups for asylum seeking and refugee women (2017/2018). |
| Project 3                                                                                                                                   |
| The sustainability of craft-based activity groups for asylum seeking and refugee women (2018/2019).                                         |

**Table 4: Overview of project titles**

### 4.1 Overview of participants

There were 18 participants interviewed. All had successfully completed their Students as Co-Researchers' Projects and had all qualified as Occupational Therapists. Participants were given a code to protect their anonymity (RCOT, 2021b). Project 1 was given the code A; Project 2 was given code B and Project 3 was given code C. The number each participant was given reflects the alphabetical order of the participants, and the second letter denotes a letter relevant to the participants' name. Tables 1, 2, and 3 (see section 3.6.1 Sample group, pp.49-51) provide an overview of participants, project group, and employment information.

Most participants (15) were working as Occupational Therapists, two participants were working within a youth work setting and one participant was working within a health and

social care setting. The three participants who were not employed as Occupational Therapists were using their occupational therapy skills but not specifically working as Occupational Therapists. Fifteen participants were working in the United Kingdom and three were working in the United States. There were two male participants, one working in the United Kingdom and one in the United States. One female participant lived and worked in Wales. Two female participants were living in the United States, one was working in youth work, the other in a care setting and was undertaking further studies. There were thirteen female participants who worked in England.

Following Interpretative phenomenological analysis. 4 super-ordinate themes emerged.

Please see Table 5 below:

|         | <b>Super-ordinate Themes</b>         | <b>Sub Themes</b>                                                                                        |
|---------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Theme 1 | Working as part of a supportive team | 1.1 Working together.<br>1.2 The highlight of my time at university.                                     |
| Theme 2 | Enabling meaningful occupation       | 2.1 It's like hope in a dark room.<br>2.2 I think we did something tangible to add value to their lives. |
| Theme 3 | Developing cultural awareness        | 3.1 Connectivity and collectivism<br>3.2 The importance of seeing the person.                            |
| Theme 4 | Impact of project on current role    | 4.1 Enhancing professional identity.<br>4.2 What we were doing made a difference.                        |

**Table 5: Table of Super-ordinate and sub themes**

These themes reflect the interpretations of the recordings and interview transcripts of the participants' experiences of the SCoRe projects with asylum seekers and refugees. Each participant had a unique perception and experience of their project and brought different opinions, values, skills, and attitudes to the project. The super-ordinate themes and sub themes reflect an overview of the shared experiences of the participants. Participant experiences could not always be matched exactly and there was some deliberating to determine which experiences would translate into each theme. Direct quotations from the interviews are used to support the analysis and interpretations of the data. This supports the trustworthiness of the interpretations (Shenton, 2004; Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009).

#### **4.2 Theme 1: Working as part of a supportive team**

This theme relates to the participants' perceptions of undertaking the SCoRe projects. Their responses provided an insight as to why they chose to participate in the project rather than conduct a more traditional individual research project or literature review. A few of the participants said they did not have the self-belief to do a research project on their own, so being part of a group was helpful. All participants highlighted the advantages of being involved in a group project. Teamwork and support from others, including the tutors was felt to be a valuable and important component of the SCoRe group.

##### **4.2.1 Working together**

For most participants, it was the first time they had undertaken any primary research. They were interested in working with asylum seekers and refugees but felt it would be challenging to undertake a research study on their own. They saw the benefits of working on a group project.

*'I had no confidence in doing a project, so I felt like having the help of the tutors and the group I would have support around me.'* B1D

Being able to share ideas was deemed essential for the project as well as an integral part of the project and IPA methodology. The project group came together after each interview to debrief, to discuss each recording and transcript and reflect on the findings. There was camaraderie, mutual co-operation, and respect for each member of the project group and a willingness to share thoughts and ideas to aid the data analysis.

*'We had a great team. Just having that team support made it a nice joint experience really...You could bounce ideas off each other and yourself, I really did enjoy it.'* A5E

There was strength in the diversity of participants in each group. Project group 1 was the most diverse of the SCoRe project groups and had a mixture of participants of different ages, backgrounds, ethnicity, and research experience. They were able to bring different skills and values to the research process. There were two students who were Asian-British who were able to speak Punjabi and Urdu. Project group 2 had more male and Asian students (although not all participated in these interviews), and Project group 3 was less diverse in terms of age, sex, and ethnicity of participants, being predominantly White British or White Irish and female. There was one White American student. There were benefits to having SCoRe project participants who were able to speak Punjabi and Urdu as they could converse with the asylum seekers and refugees without the need for interpreters. Some had previous research experience, others were novices, but all participants felt they were able to contribute to the research process.

*'I felt the skill mix in the group was really good, as there were areas in which I am really not strong but other people in the group had skills that I didn't have...there was no way of predicting that'* A4C

The participants' responses indicated that they learned from one another and learned how to work in a team. Listening to others' views was important. For some there was strength in the

number of people in the research team which gave the participants the confidence to go to the centre and work alongside the asylum seekers and refugees.

*'If you were doing the research on your own it could be a bit of a lonely process I suppose.'*  
A5K

This participant felt the strength in working with a group of people with a shared interest in working with asylum seekers and refugees. The research process can be an immersive and solitary process and can become all encompassing. It is important to acknowledge the value of working with others especially when working with people who have experienced trauma and multiple losses. It helps to be able to process the sometimes-harrowing narratives with co-researchers. The participants valued working together as a group to provide mutual support.

Feedback about working in a team was not all positive, one participant in project group 3 sometimes found working together in a team difficult. The participant often struggled with the group dynamics, found group work challenging and vocalised this on several occasions throughout the project. Having had time and space to reflect on the project, she was positive, saying she had enjoyed working with people in her friendship group.

*'Group work definitely has its ups and downs, and it could sometimes be difficult to work together, but I think working with people who were in my friendship group really helped and added to the fun...I thought it was brilliant, I loved it.'* B2R

Reflecting on this response, I was surprised, I had expected that the participant would say more about the challenges of working on the project, but this was not the case. Other than saying she struggled working with the project team on occasions, she did not comment further on the group aspect of the SCoRe project. However, she did note that working with people she knew well added to her enjoyment of the project.

#### 4.2.2 The highlight of my time at university

Several participants valued the opportunity to work as a team with asylum seekers and refugees. Many had never worked with this community of people before. It opened their eyes to some of the experiences and trauma faced. The participants met the asylum seekers and refugees on several occasions and were able to establish a rapport with them. This helped the participants to feel immersed in the research process and get to know the people with whom they were working. For most it had a significant impact, for others, it was one of the best parts of the course. This was an unexpected finding and one that was quite humbling to hear as a tutor.

*'It was the highlight of my time at university, to be fair I think it was the best experience I could have possibly got for a dissertation.'* A6S

Although the students had done a lot of group work throughout their undergraduate training the intensive focus on a specific project where they all worked together appeared to be comforting and reassuring in equal measure. Those who were stronger academically helped with articulation of ideas and insightful reflections. Those whose strengths were more practical, were more active in the organisation and planning for the sessions they did with the asylum seekers and refugees. There was mutual support from the tutors and the SCoRe participants through the debriefs after each session and each SCoRe participant's voice was important.

### 4.3 Theme 2: Enabling meaningful occupation

Individuals have a right to engage in a variety of occupations to meet their basic needs and to do what they decide is most meaningful and useful to themselves, their families, and communities. Restricting occupations that are meaningful can be seen as an injustice.

Occupational imbalance occurs when people spend an inordinate amount of time in one area of life at the expense of other areas. In this context when people seeking asylum are not permitted to work, excessive time is spent under or unoccupied. The participants in the SCoRe projects saw first-hand how occupational imbalance and deprivation impacted on those people within the asylum seeking and refugee communities they worked with.

People who are seeking asylum face a lengthy passive wait for a decision on their status. Therefore, finding occupations that are meaningful to them is important, yet challenging without finances. It is vital for people to have a say in the occupations they participate in when they have so few choices when seeking asylum.

*'It is important to understand what the occupations mean to people and find out what makes them tick.'* B1D

Several people the SCoRe participants worked with at the community centre complained of having nothing to do and being disconsolate and dejected. They could see that those people who were engaged in occupations they had previously found meaningful such as hairdressing and playing sport, gave them purpose to their time at the centre. The participants tried to seek out opportunities to help people engage in a range of activities.

*'It would be good to look for alternatives for something to occupy their time. I remember a lot of people said, 'we are bored; we want to help; we want something to do...when we visited the centre, they were doing things they wanted to do like hairdressing and things, [I wanted to see] is there any way we can replicate that'* A1A

It felt important for the SCoRe participants to listen to what the asylum seekers and refugees wanted to get out of the sessions at the community centre and to consider what activities they would find meaningful.

#### **4.3.1 'It's like hope in a dark room'**

There was a diverse mix of asylum seekers and refugees from a range of countries such as Pakistan, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and Albania. The male asylum seekers and refugees formed close bonds and actively engaged in table sports such as table tennis and snooker. The women did not engage with the men for cultural reasons and were hesitant to join an all-male group activity. They were isolated from the men in terms of occupations they might find meaningful. They drank tea, talked, and looked after their children. There was a clear need to expand the range of occupational opportunities for women who attended the centre and an opportunity for the female asylum seekers and refugees to integrate successfully into the wider community.

*'Our project focussed on women ...these centres were set up for asylum seekers in general... they were supposed to be getting participation in groups and benefits... there was still isolation going on they felt really bored. It affected their mental health' B6H.*

The use of an advisory group of women asylum seekers and refugees at the community centre informed the SCoRe project teams which creative groups they would like to take part in. They requested the following activity groups: jewellery making, card making, cake decorating and healthy eating. The SCoRe participants facilitated these sessions which enabled them to develop their practical group skills whilst providing a creative outlet for the refugees and asylum seekers. There were benefits for the asylum seekers and refugees as well as the group facilitators (participants in this study).

*'It was a really enriching experience for me. I loved the practical aspect of it as well it wasn't just sitting behind a computer screen.'* B4B

The participants felt that they were making a difference in the craft sessions they were facilitating. A small number of women came to the groups each week. One of the participants in the SCoRe project reflected on one of the refugees saying coming to their sessions was 'like hope in a dark room.' This was immensely powerful and rewarding for the participants in the SCoRe project group. They did feel they had made a small difference in providing some activities that were meaningful.

*'When the lady said our sessions were like hope in a dark room, it really shows you how much something so small can make such a big impact on somebody... Just to show you care or just have one conversation... the impact you can have is huge.'* B3I

The weekly sessions were well received and just sitting down and giving the women time and space to be seen and heard was important, especially when they often felt isolated, alone and outsiders in a new country.

#### **4.3.2 I think we did something tangible to add value to their lives**

The participants engaged with the SCoRe project on various levels. For some, it was a means to complete a dissertation and complete their programme of study, but for others it was much more. Some participants felt they learned a lot, not just about themselves but about the challenges asylum seekers and refugees face. There were symbiotic benefits. The interactive and practical nature of the projects enabled the participants to establish a rapport and be part of something tangible and useful for the asylum seekers and refugees.

*'It wasn't just about doing the research and doing the dissertation and getting the result... it was more of a life experience doing the project.'* A5E

The SCoRe Project participants highlighted the importance of working with people from diverse cultures who were asylum seekers and refugees. Several participants stated that they valued doing the project and felt it was important to make a difference to peoples' lives. There was an altruistic element to doing the project.

*'The project aligned with the things I felt strongly about, it felt a bit more personal so I could put more into it. It looked like it was going to do good, and I wanted to be a part of that.'*  
A2J

Gaining an insight into what was meaningful to the asylum seekers and refugees mattered to the participants. The participants were able to establish a therapeutic rapport and felt that what they were doing was important and beneficial to the people they worked with. They were able to build up relationships with the women which was significant when they had so few relationships with people in their new country. The participants felt like the creative activities were meaningful for the asylum seekers and refugees and the women enjoyed the sessions. The same women came to the sessions each week out of choice, there were no restrictions on who could attend. The asylum seekers and refugees built up trust and positive relationships with the participants in the SCoRe projects. They came to the Occupational Therapy Society fundraising events at the University and the Christmas Occupational Therapy Society events in which some of the asylum seekers and refugees performed. This highlighted the connections between the participants and asylum seekers and refugees.

*'We built relationships with people over a series of weeks...they came to subsequent OT society events... I think we did something tangible to add value to their lives.'* B4B

There was a sense of mutual benefit for the asylum seekers and refugees as well as the participants. Having time and space to discuss their experiences and have someone to listen to them was important to the asylum seekers and refugees. The participants in the SCoRe project were able to develop their therapeutic use of self, gain valuable practical group work skills and have a positive impact on others.

*'You get to meet the participants; you get to do a lot more hands on... you get to see the people and how it's making a small impact with these people with your own eyes. I like the hands-on approach.'* C4K

It was important to recognise the sensitivities involved and not to pry for information. The asylum seekers and refugees were encouraged to talk at their own pace and without probing. This was to not cause distress through reliving the original trauma that led them to leave their home, and the potential secondary layer of trauma deriving from their experiences as asylum seekers and refugees.

*'I think it helped the therapeutic side of myself...you use your skills to provide a service, but not to ask questions that would make them sad or miss home, but to get to know them and their interests, but not take them back to the trauma they had been through.'* C3C

There were also important lessons to be learned in facilitating a regular group activity with the women, engaging them in an activity that was meaningful, and then depriving them of that activity when the project had finished. It was hoped that the asylum seekers and refugees would continue with the creative activities and there would be sustainability to the groups that the participants undertook each week, but when the project finished the creative activities finished too.

*'Our project was about sustainability and the last week we were there... it would have affected a lot of the women as they didn't have anything to do, and we gave them a kind of little... I don't know we gave them something then we took it away. I felt quite sad'* C1A

This was one of the disappointing aspects of the projects as the centre in which the projects were conducted was quite a distance from the university. Although there was a willingness for the SCoRe project team to remain involved it was difficult for the project team to facilitate the creative sessions on a regular basis due to their ongoing programme of study. The SCoRe project team had hoped that the advisory group might take on the facilitation of the creative groups, but this was not to be the case. They were reluctant to take on the

responsibility of carrying on the craft sessions despite support and encouragement from the SCoRe group and tutors.

#### **4.4 Theme 3: Developing cultural awareness**

All the participants acknowledged that the project had a significant impact on their cultural awareness and understanding of peoples' differences. Several participants had not worked with asylum seekers and refugees before. The cultural awareness sessions in university prior to working with the asylum seekers and refugees prepared the participants to have an appreciation of the challenges they may encounter. Face to face discussions with the asylum seekers and refugees helped to establish rapport and develop an understanding of the cultural differences between the asylum seekers, refugees, and the participants themselves.

*'It gave me a lot more insight into different communities and different cultures and how different experiences affect people when they come to the UK.'* C5H

The participants valued working in a setting that was unlike their experience in previous professional practice placements. Working in the community centre was challenging in terms of language, culture and peoples' needs. The participants were able to put into practice their learning about meaningful occupation and work with people from a range of cultures different to their own.

*'Working with people in that type of environment was new... nice to work with people from different cultures and apply what we'd learned about the meaning of occupation to people we might not normally work with.'* C1D

Working with people with diverse cultures and recognising the complexities of the power dynamics involved is known as cultural humility. The emphasis is on learning about peoples' differences rather than making assumptions about those differences. In the context of the

SCoRe projects this links to critical self-evaluation and recognises the imbalance between the participants and the asylum seekers and refugees. The participants stressed the importance of learning about culture and how it impacts on people and reflected on how this influenced their current practice and challenged their thinking.

*'People think about the language barriers and that sort of thing, but that cultural understanding is much deeper.... that to me is the thing that must make people feel most alienated coming to somewhere like Britain, which is diverse on the face of it, but very Western.'* A3C

One participant stressed the significance of understanding people at a deeper level. It was not just about language difference, but how culture is part of an individual and how beliefs and customs differ and translate into everyday practices and occupations.

*'I was working with a man from Syria, I was doing a kitchen activity... and saw that he had put a tea bag in the kettle and set it to boil. Pre-project I might have thought it was indicative of cognitive impairment or a visual problem, but realised... it was culturally appropriate... It was a perfectly acceptable way of making a cup of tea in his culture and I don't know that I would have taken the time to explore that in more depth without having worked on the project.'* B4B

The participant had used her knowledge of the project to inform her practice. Making a cup of tea in a kettle was culturally appropriate for the individual she was working with. If she had not participated in the project, she might not have thought to question why he was doing this. He could have been inadvertently misdiagnosed, and this could have implications for future treatment and discharge.

The SCoRe participants needed to respect and be open to culturally based differences and to consider the impact on occupational opportunities and wellbeing. They now questioned how occupations should be carried out and challenged their own assumptions.

*'It made me more critical... I think working with people from other cultures and very different backgrounds does make you question preconceived ideas of how things should be done.'* B4B

The participants felt confident in their awareness of cultural differences and felt able to pass on their knowledge to others in their current working roles. Listening to the stories the women told, and their increasing understanding of the asylum-seeking processes aided their knowledge. The participants were keen to share customs and practices that may be relevant to clinical practice and challenge some of the media stereotypes about asylum seekers and refugees.

*'The project prepared me. I remember speaking to colleagues about the processes, the differences, as they were not aware of them...I had a bit of knowledge to share which was helpful.'* A4K

The participants were able to highlight the importance of maintaining occupations that connect and reflect a person's past, present and future as a way of improving health and well-being. They saw it as an important part of their role to consider the cultural and occupational preferences of individuals to support their integration into the community and to begin to feel like they belonged to the community.

#### **4.4.1 Connectivity and Collectivism**

One participant in the study had not considered the importance of collectivism until she took part in the project and saw how fundamental it was to put family and friends' needs first. She did not realise how much the sense of community mattered to the asylum seekers and refugees she worked with. Having the support of other people and doing things together was also important. In the UK occupational therapists' focus is around the individual, to enable people to do the things they want and need to do and to enable people to be independent. For people from collectivist cultures their priorities may be different, they may choose to engage in occupations that are shared and collaborative, and focus on the interconnectedness between health, wellbeing, and occupation.

*'In health we are always pushing people to a state of physical independence and things... it was so interesting working with people who come from a more collectivist background where community is more strongly prized.'* B4B

The participants were surprised at how the asylum seekers and refugees sought to put others first before themselves. They realised the importance of being with and caring for others even when they had so little themselves. The participants saw that the sense of community is central to their culture, and it is seen as necessary for family and friends to help in the rehabilitation process. This has an impact on therapeutic interventions with patients.

*'[When I spoke to the women] ...Almost every answer was about how much they cared about others and how much they wanted their families to be happy and that sense of company. When working with people from different countries now I notice they have more visitors... they are really engaged in their rehab process.'* C3C

People from typically communitarian or collectivist cultures want to be together to be amongst people. It was notable that the asylum seekers and refugees actively sought to help each other and extended that friendship to the participants in the SCoRe group. They were made to feel welcome and feel part of the community at the centre where they facilitated the group sessions. The participants were humbled by this, as many asylum seekers and refugees had not always been received positively by services designed to support them in the community in which they now lived. They were now trying to establish their own community and provide support for each other.

*'It was really nice to see how they helped each other out and feel the sense of community from them and how welcoming they were to us as strangers ... this group of people have often been neglected and don't trust services in our society.'* A7S

Cultural inclinations towards collectivism assist and influence ways of coping with migration induced occupational disruption. Participants saw that occupations such as volunteering to help others to adjust to personal and cultural needs is part of the acculturation process.

#### 4.4.2 The importance of seeing the person

The participants were able to adopt a person-centred approach to ensure individuals had choice in the interventions offered. This was especially important when asylum seekers and refugees have so many parameters as to what they are permitted to do when going through the asylum-seeking process. They felt it was important to understand the person and find out what they wanted and needed to be able to do.

*'I always try and take myself back and remind myself what I am doing and why... it is what is important to the person isn't it? You might have your own agenda and what you have to get through but, but it's irrelevant if it is not meaningful to the person.'* B1D

Some of the participants used their knowledge gained in the project to advocate for occupational rights of asylum seekers and refugees. The asylum seekers and refugees routinely face occupational deprivation, imbalance, and marginalisation. They have differing occupational needs, strengths and potential which require a variety of forms of enablement to flourish. They may require specific forms of support and may need signposting to this. The participants recognised this.

*'The occupational deprivation, the imbalance, the injustice side of things... the political side of things and how we as OTs are not just responsible for the patients in our care in hospital and community... we are ethically obliged to speak up about occupational injustice.'* A6Z

People develop a sense of belonging in places where they feel safe and can be themselves... Indeed, the both the refugees, asylum seekers and the participants in the project felt a sense of belonging and the women had a choice as to what creative activities they took part in. Encouraging people's right to choose what they want and need to do cannot be underestimated. It was mutually important to share stories and experiences and was highly valued by those involved in the creative groups.

Asylum seekers and refugees face the challenge of integrating into a society in which they have little prior knowledge, whilst trying to live a life that has meaning for them in new and often difficult circumstances. The participants reflected on how they wanted to make people feel welcome and put them at ease whilst helping them to integrate into the community. The SCoRe project enabled the participants to develop and adapt their communication styles when working with asylum seekers and refugees in their current role.

*'If you are working with somebody, if they have a different language or don't have English as a first language, you have to think how you might adapt that... otherwise the questions aren't going to get the answers and information that you need.'* C4K

A few participants were mindful of peoples' cultural needs when communicating with people in their current role and the importance of understanding the differences between eastern and Western values and cultural beliefs. Several of the participants said they felt it was important to be receptive and be considerate of people and their differences. It was important to listen and not judge. One participant highlighted the importance of understanding the wider impact of not being respectful of others' communication style, preferences, and culture. The person she was working with could have been labelled as having a cognitive impairment which could have had implications for her rehabilitation and her ability to return home.

*'When I worked for the ... Team I had to go and see a lady from Pakistan... this lady had a totally different upbringing to people in this country... I was asked to complete a MoCA (Montreal Cognitive Assessment - an assessment of mild cognitive dysfunction). It was recognising that she was being asked questions that she didn't understand.'* C3G.

For participants it was clear that acknowledging a person's culture was important when assessing their needs. The participants recognised this as a vital part of their learning and an area to continue to build on in their future practice.

#### 4.5 Theme 4: Positive Impact of project on current role

The SCoRe project impacted on the participants in different ways. Many said they learned a lot from the projects, not just cultural awareness and how to communicate with others, but a developing sense of empathy and life skills too. Participants acknowledged the initial trauma that triggered the need to seek asylum as well as the ongoing stress and strain of the asylum-seeking process. They recognised the importance of not probing about how individuals arrived in the UK and why. They did not want the asylum seekers and refugees to have to relive their trauma, but they valued them as people, heard them as unique individuals and supported them when necessary. The participants linked their knowledge acquired in the project to their current professional practice.

*'I have one patient who experienced human trafficking... he doesn't speak any English and doesn't have any family around him, so I can imagine the deprivation and isolation he is feeling... we have linked him up with someone from his own community which has helped him. He is isolated and is experiencing all the things the people in the project were.'* C5H

For several participants, their knowledge about asylum seekers and refugees before doing the project was narrow and based on assumptions and commonly used narratives adopted by the media. As a result of the project, the participants felt that they could challenge these stereotypes and had developed a more compassionate and considerate approach towards asylum seekers and refugees. They were subsequently more empathetic.

*'Just putting myself in other people's shoes... being more open... we learned a lot about the journey of asylum seekers and refugees. It opened my mind to more global issues... and how few refugees there are in the UK... it did open my eyes to different cultures and what people were fleeing from and why they needed to seek refuge.'* C1A

The cultural awareness acquired on the project, the ability to collaborate with interpreters and use appropriate communication was highlighted by one of the participants. He is currently working in the US where there are many people from different countries and cultures whose first language is not English. The project helped to develop and understand

the need to adapt his communication skills based on the needs of the individual. It also gave him an insight as to the challenges some of the people he works with face.

*'I am now working in the US and so it's culturally diverse and I'm working with people all the time that don't speak the same language as I do and I'm using translators and having to try and find ways to communicate with them and understand their context. I think doing the project really helped with that.'* A5E

Another of the participants, B2R works in Wales and made the comparison with living in a country with a different language and culture to her own. She found it difficult to adjust to the different language and culture when she first moved to Wales. She linked this to people who had moved to Wales from other parts of the UK with disabilities who could feel as if they do not fit in and feel alone. She said she knows they are not asylum seekers, but they have come to a different geographical area with its own language and culture, and she can see how this can affect them.

*'I have found it difficult sometimes to integrate, especially with the language, and I think a lot of people who come here, people with disabilities ... could feel very isolated ... culturally that has really impacted on them.'* B2R

Several of the participants felt that they had gained sufficient knowledge about working with asylum seekers and refugees to impart that knowledge to others in their teams who were not so familiar with some of the issues they face. They were able to advocate for the asylum seekers and refugees, challenge other's stereotypes and offer training and suggestions as to how best to meet their needs.

*'Some of the stories of the trauma they had been through, it was eye opening... I can tell them about my experience, and I can put them straight...Some of my colleagues don't know what to do in that situation and might not want to go and see that patient. Not because they are a refugee, but because they haven't had enough experience and enough awareness.'* B6S

A couple of participants were more specific and valued their experience of being culturally aware when assessing people's personal care needs. They cited examples of when adaptations may need to be made to address culture specific toileting requirements such as

a shower hose facility in a toileting area or adapting a therapeutic intervention to meet someone's cultural needs.

*'Understanding different cultural issues with personal care, for women or men, I learned so much about awareness and that sort of thing.'* B2R

The project was humbling for a few of the participants. They reflected on their experience of working with the asylum seekers and refugees in their current practice. The project had a lasting impact on the participants in understanding what the asylum seekers and refugees had been through to get to this country, and how they behaved towards others once they were here. The participants were insightful about their experiences.

*'There is something really nice about working with asylum seekers and refugees because they are so modest, and the experiences they have been through doesn't reflect the way they behave. So, they are just a lovely community to work with. I think Western culture has a lot to learn from them.'* A6S

This links to the collectivist culture that was discussed earlier, the importance of being part of the community and the welcome that was given by the asylum seekers and refugees when they did the group projects and gave their time and energy to the Occupational Therapy Society events.

#### **4.5.1 Enhancing Professional Identity**

Professional identity is seen as a complex and dynamic process which is shaped by a set of beliefs, attitudes and understanding about specific roles within the context of work. It is concerned with how individuals are perceived and influenced by themselves and others. The participants felt the project developed their professional identity by enabling them to develop communication skills, have an awareness of cultural difference, and realise the importance of providing services to those people who are most in need.

*'I think that's why I chose to be an occupational therapist. To look at individuals, their experiences, and what makes them who they are, and I think being a migrant in another country after going through all that traumatic experience... it really is contributing to my identity.'* A7Z

The impact of working with asylum seekers and refugees was highlighted by many of the participants. For many, their professional identity was enriched by their experiences including: their ability to communicate on various levels, to recognise trauma, to signpost people to relevant services and to adopt a compassionate and empathetic approach. It strengthened their vocation to be an occupational therapist. Several participants had discussed the project in interviews either for their current role or previous posts. The project was often given as an example of how they had considered culture, diversity, and cultural humility in their practice and how they had worked with others to raise awareness of the needs of asylum seekers and refugees.

*'I think it definitely helped with my employment; I brought it up at interviews a couple of times. It's something current and focusing in on that ethical situation and refugees is quite current... It really helped me.'* B6H

The participants were proud to have participated in the project and acknowledged that it had made a difference to people's lives and themselves as occupational therapists. The participants felt able to discuss the project in depth in job interviews and to share the knowledge and skills that they had gained. They acknowledged that working with asylum seekers and refugees is a developing area of occupational therapy practice which employers recognise and knowledge gained in the SCoRe projects was transferable to other areas of practice.

#### 4.5.2 We were doing something that was making a difference

None of the participants interviewed were employed directly to work with asylum seekers and refugees. A few participants worked with asylum seekers and refugees as part of their clinical caseload but interestingly none had come across specific roles for occupational therapists to work with asylum seekers and refugees. Depending on the clinical area of practice and location, some participants had worked more with asylum seekers and refugees than others. Participants working in large national or regional hospitals were more likely to come across asylum seekers and refugees in their job role. This is because following arrival in the UK, and processing at one of the immigration removal centres, asylum seekers are dispersed to specific areas of the country such as Leeds, Merseyside, Hull, Lincolnshire and Middlesbrough to await a decision on their asylum status.

Many of the participants said they would like to work with asylum seekers and refugees in the future if a post came up. However most noted that posts are scarce in this area of practice and posts that are available are with charitable organisations and not occupational therapy specific roles. Pay is limited and less than that offered in traditional occupational therapy posts. They did however, value the skills obtained in the research and enjoyed working on the projects.

*'It may be an avenue, I would like to pursue a job in, but jobs like that are very few and far between... it would definitely be something I would like to pursue in the future... In terms of availability of jobs out there, working in that area is quite limited.'* A1A

However not all participants wanted to work with asylum seekers and refugees as their main job role. One participant was currently working and studying in the United States. Health care systems differ to those in the United Kingdom as do services for asylum seekers and refugees. This may have had a bearing on why she wouldn't choose to work with asylum seekers and refugees in a paid role.

*'I don't think I would choose to work professionally with asylum seekers and refugees but would consider volunteering or socially. I really enjoyed it.'* B4C

This participant enjoyed the camaraderie, the sense of collectivism and community and had friends who had been asylum seekers and refugees so now saw it as less of a job role, but more of a volunteering role, something to do outside of the workplace. She felt there were currently a lack of designated occupational therapy posts working with asylum seekers and refugees. Those posts that were available tended to be generic and attract low pay.

One participant summed up working with asylum seekers and refugees on the project. This was an insightful reflection on the how he felt as he met the asylum seekers and refugees at the centre.

*'I remember walking into that hall and thinking how vibrant it was, I didn't know what to expect – I was expecting a lot more depression, doom, and gloom, it was a very vibrant community and very welcoming at the same time...The project gave me a sense that we were doing something that was making a difference'* B1D.

The positivity he felt was clear as he entered the community group space the first time. He put into words what he valued about working with asylum seekers and refugees - the project had an impact on the people they worked with.

#### **4.6 Summary of findings**

In summary, this chapter presented the findings of eighteen interviews with participants from three SCoRe projects working with asylum seekers and refugees. There were four super-ordinate themes and eight sub themes which emerged from the analysis. I thought it would be helpful to reiterate previous Table 5 here for clarity. See below:

|         | <b>Super-ordinate Themes</b>         | <b>Sub Themes</b>                                                                                        |
|---------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Theme 1 | Working as part of a supportive team | 1.1 Working together.<br>1.2 The highlight of my time at university.                                     |
| Theme 2 | Enabling meaningful occupation       | 2.1 It's like hope in a dark room.<br>2.2 I think we did something tangible to add value to their lives. |
| Theme 3 | Developing cultural awareness        | 3.1 Connectivity and collectivism<br>3.2 The importance of seeing the person.                            |
| Theme 4 | Impact of project on current role    | 4.1 Enhancing professional identity.<br>4.2 What we were doing made a difference.                        |

**Table 6: Table of superordinate and sub themes**

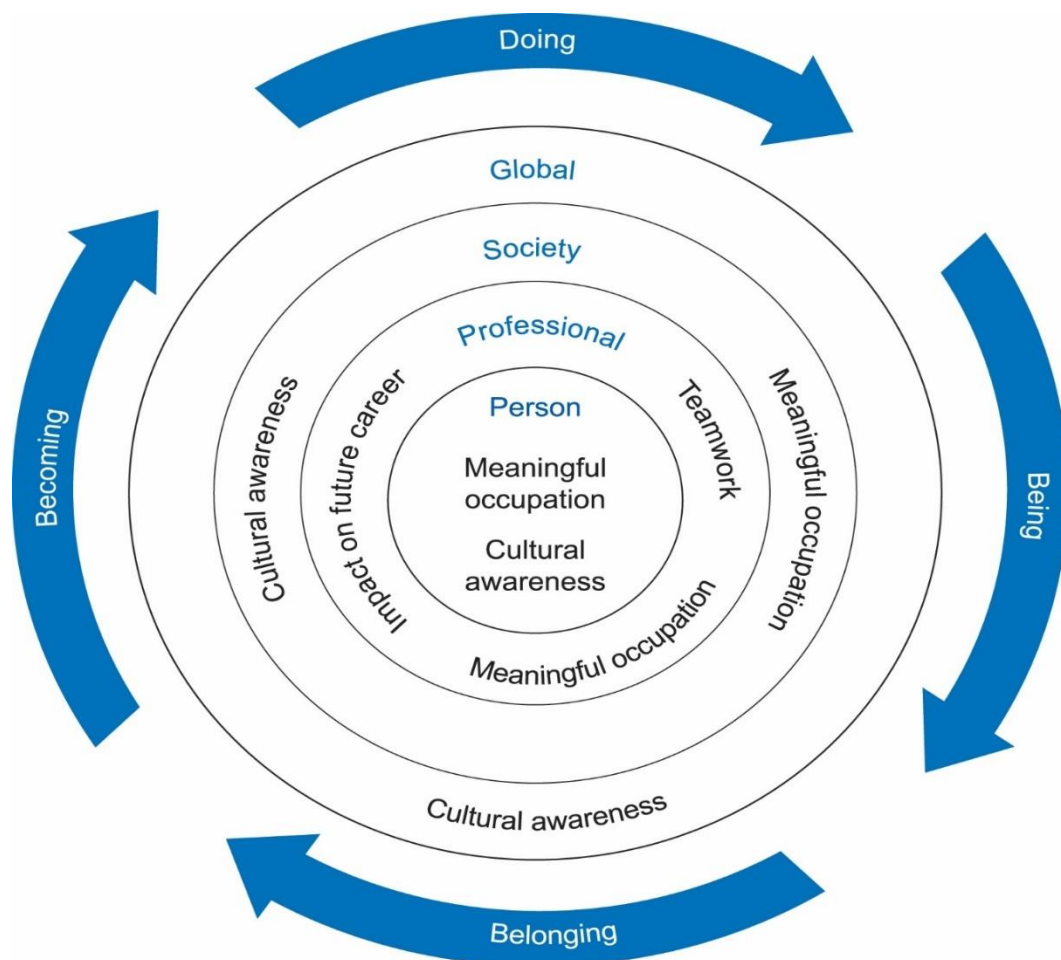
The findings revealed that the participants all found the SCoRe projects valuable in terms of learning experience. For some it was the highlight of the course, others found understanding the asylum-seeking process and becoming more culturally aware had informed their learning the most. Cultural awareness was a highlight for all the participants, and many had applied their learning from the SCoRe Projects into their current roles, even if they were not working with asylum seekers and refugees. The importance of person-centred practice and adapting communication to meet the needs of people who seek asylum and people from a range of diverse cultures was also important to the participants. The projects had helped to develop professional identity and had had an impact on how participants worked with a variety of people with differing cultural needs. It was notable that none of the participants had found specific occupational therapy posts working with asylum seekers and refugees although there was a willingness in most instances to do so.

The following chapter will consider a conceptual framework devised to link to the findings of this research and their relationship to the literature.

## 5. Conceptual Framework

Occupation is central to the foundations of the occupational therapy profession and contributes to the formation of a person's identity, sense of self, and sense of wellbeing (Twinley, 2020). Wilcock defines occupation as all the things that people do, the relationships of what they do, with who they are as human beings (Wilcock, 1999 p10). The central constructs of occupation – Doing, Being, Belonging and Becoming have become increasingly debated in the occupational therapy profession (Hammell, 2004). A conceptual framework has been devised to demonstrate how these constructs elevate the findings and connects them into the wider professional discourse for occupational therapy. The text within the concentric circles align to the subordinate themes. Please see Figure 1. below.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**



The concentric circles within the framework labelled as: Person, Professional, Society, and Global and represent how the SCoRe project participants worked with refugees and asylum seekers. At the core or Person level are Theme 2: Meaningful occupation and Theme 3: Cultural awareness. The framework is designed to reflect how the SCoRe participants considered the person at the centre of their work with asylum seekers and refugees. They used an informed and compassionate approach to find out what occupations and craft activities were meaningful, and considered what groups the asylum seekers and refugees wanted to participate in.

At a Professional level are Theme 1: Teamwork, Theme 2: Meaningful Occupation, and Theme 4: Impact on Future Career. The SCoRe participants developed an awareness of the importance of building relationships between the refugees and asylum seekers and themselves. Through cultural awareness training they were able to consider the importance of cultural humility (Hammell, 2013), whilst being mindful about learning from and with the people they worked with. The cultural awareness training enabled the SCoRe participants to consider the lived experience of being a refugee or asylum seeker and how they are often marginalised, stigmatised, and deprived of occupations that are meaningful to them. It was important for the refugees and asylum seekers to have choice in what groups/activities they took part in when they are allowed so few choices in their day-to-day existence (Smith, 2015; Burchett and Matheson, 2010)

At a Society level are Theme 2: Meaningful Occupation and Theme 3: Cultural Awareness. The SCoRe participants were encouraged to consider and reflect upon the wider impact of being an asylum seeker or refugee. This included: the stigma they face from sustained negative media and political rhetoric, the poor housing allocated to them in Home Office approved dispersal areas (Bates, 2017) and the lack of finances which impact on day-to-day participation in meaningful occupations. The physical and social environments that asylum seekers and refugees live in can enable or prevent participation in occupations (Hammell, 2008).

The societal aspect of the model highlights how the participants advocate for asylum seekers and refugees in their work now they have completed their studies and qualified as occupational therapists. The knowledge gained from their developing cultural awareness through participating in the SCoRe projects meant they could offer advice to their colleagues who were not familiar with working with people who were asylum seekers and refugees.

In the outer circle, the Global level, Theme 3: Cultural Awareness, the participants reflected upon the wider implications of local, national, and international policies on asylum seekers and refugees. They considered their ability to engage in meaningful occupations and have their needs met as they navigate their way through legal processes and Government policies. An inseparable part of human rights is the right to participate in meaningful occupations (Ingvarsson, Egilson and Skaptadottir, 2016). The World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) in their statement on Human Rights states that people have the right to participate in occupations that contribute to their wellbeing (WFOT, 2014). Having a deeper understanding of legal systems and processes and the UNHCR (2021) helped to inform the participants' current practice and advocate for the needs of asylum seekers and refugees.

Consideration of the Person, Profession, Society, and Global issues all helped to inform the SCoRe participants' practice, and many said it also helped them to develop their professional identity. These concepts will now be linked to Doing, Being, Belonging and Becoming (Wilcock, 1998).

Doing is fundamental to the occupational therapy profession and is seen as the medium through which people actively engage in occupations and develop skills over time. People usually engage in occupations that are meaningful to them. These can be purposeful, healthy, or unhealthy, organised, or disorganised. Some people also choose to engage in occupations that may be perceived as 'dark' occupations e.g., taking drugs, theft, illegal or inappropriate behaviour (Twinley, 2020). People express meaning through doing, and the

ability to do can provide structure, an affirmation of competence and enhanced feelings of self-worth (Hammell, 2004). People choose to participate in occupations at their own pace according to their own situation (Hitch, Pépin and Stagnitti, 2014). In terms of this study the doing construct can be aligned to participating in the research project and facilitating the group activities with the asylum seekers and refugees. Many of the SCoRe participants valued carrying out the craft activities with the refugees and asylum seekers. Visiting the community centre, building up a rapport with the asylum seekers and refugees and facilitating the craft groups helped the SCoRe participants to develop their group skills, increase their confidence and become more cohesive as a SCoRe project team.

Being is the least defined of the constructs and is described by (Wilcock, 2006 p.113) as 'what people feel about what they do'. Being is the sense of who someone is as an occupational being and as an individual – this includes their physical, mental, and social abilities and capabilities (The capabilities approach will be discussed in in Chapter 6). Occupation can provide a focus for being, but it exists independently of it during reflection and self-discovery. Roles that people choose to have or that are imposed on them are linked to being. There is a link between meaningful roles and occupational engagement. In relation to the being construct, this aligns with the participants in the SCoRe project team and how they felt working together as a group. Teamwork was important for many of the participants as it helped to give them confidence and helped them to develop skills in an area of practice that was new to them.

According to Hammell (2004) and Wilcock (2007), belonging can be aligned to people's relationships with others and their interconnectedness to people, places, cultures, and communities. This involves social interaction, mutual support and friendship and giving as well as receiving (Molineux and Baptiste, 2011). The construct of belonging aligned to the Teamwork theme as well as the Meaningful Occupation and Cultural Awareness themes. The SCoRe participants worked together to facilitate the activity groups. They had a shared connectedness of coming together to develop their skills and build rapport and confidence.

The SCoRe participants developed an increasing awareness of the importance of a shared community and collectivism when working with asylum seekers and refugees. It was important to sustain the relationships with each other and the asylum seekers and refugees so that they could continue to belong (Hitch, Pépin and Stagnitti, 2014).

Becoming is often linked with personal development, change and self-actualization and links to people's strengths, needs, personal growth and future goals (Wilcock, 2006). Becoming depends on connectedness to others, feedback, and willingness to adapt and make changes. Learning about and experiencing the challenges of working with new people in new situations and reflecting on these, enabled the participants to work together and grow professionally. They were able to carry these skills forward into their professional careers as occupational therapists and this informed their own professional identity. Several of the participants spoke about the impact of doing the project and how it had helped inform their practice. Becoming can therefore be linked to the growth and development of the participants from the initial sessions in university when they learned about cultural awareness. They broadened their skills as they reflected on what they had learned, and this helped to develop their continuing professional identity. The conceptual framework has linked the Person, Profession, Society, and Global to the constructs of Doing, Being, Belonging and Becoming. These constructs are not linear, they are inter-and intra-dependent and aim to explore the complexities of the occupational perspective of health (Wilcock, 2006).

According to Forhan (2010) our identities can be determined through a combination of both doing and being. Doing things together leads to positive connections and group members can derive satisfaction from working with each other. Doing in the context of working with asylum seekers and refugees must be meaningful and purposeful. It is not just participating in the groups, but the meaning and value people attach to those groups that is important.

The relationship between doing and becoming is between active engagement in meaningful occupations and hopes, goals and aspirations for the future. In the context of this research, both constructs doing and becoming impact on the person's immediate transitions from a student as co researcher to a practicing occupational therapist. The relationship between doing and belonging relates to active engagement in meaningful occupations and a sense of connectedness. Doing supports belonging in relation to connecting people to their communities. In this research the SCoRe participants engaged the asylum seekers and refugees in groups that were meaningful and built up a rapport with them over several weeks.

Being and becoming connects a person's sense of themselves as an occupational and human beings and their hopes, goals, and aspirations for the future (Craik et al, 2010). The relationship between being and becoming brings together people who have shared positive experiences which draw together who people are and who they can be. This was the case when completing the group work with the asylum seekers and refugees. The participants in the SCoRe project felt that the skills and knowledge acquired in the project had inspired them and influenced how they worked with people in their practice in their current roles. Being and belonging is between a person's identity as an occupational and human being and their sense of connectedness. The creative opportunities that the asylum seekers and refugees undertook encouraged them to belong ensuring their connectedness to the group and community. The relationship between becoming and belonging is between hopes and aspirations and a sense of connectedness. Occupations that enable people to achieve their goals are therefore interlinked.

Doing and being constructs are often linked with belonging and becoming which is why they have been positioned on the outside of the concentric circles of the conceptual model as they can be explored in relation to the person and occupation, profession, society, and globalisation. It is hoped this will be a useful model for students and practitioners to consider when working with asylum seekers and refugees. According to Hitch, Pépin and Stagnitti

(2014) engaging in occupation requires us to perform activities and occupations (doing) that meet the needs of ourselves and others (being and belonging), that we can learn from and build upon through time (becoming).

The next chapter, Discussion, will critically explore the findings of the research in relation to relevant literature and the concepts of Doing, Being, Belonging and Becoming (Wilcock, 2006).

## 6. Discussion

This study aimed to explore the value and meaning of participating in a SCoRe project with asylum seekers and refugees and explored the potential impact of the experience on future practice and identity as occupational therapists. The findings offer novel insights into the research question, 'Does participating in a Students as Co-Researchers' project with asylum seekers and refugees impact on professional identity and employment?'. The findings demonstrate how the project impacted on the SCoRe participants' journey to become occupational therapists, their professional identity, and their current or future employability. The findings respond to the following objectives:

- To determine the value and meaning of student involvement as co researchers in a cross-cultural research project with asylum seekers and refugees.
- To critically explore the impact of the Students as Co-Researchers project experience on future employment.
- To critically examine how participating in the Students as Co-Researchers project with asylum seekers and refugees has impacted on the development of professional identity.

The study supports a vision of cultural awareness in response to increasing globalisation and migration (Blankvoort et al 2019). It also supports the European Network of Occupational Therapists in Higher Education (ENOTHE) Action for Peace initiative - Core values (Bergin et al, 2022). They recommend that occupational therapy research/practice initiatives should be human rights driven, have social justice at their core and research undertaken should follow high ethical standards. This study has social justice at its core and will add to the growing body of evidence across countries, organisations, and contexts to inform the occupational therapy curriculum and the future occupational therapy profession.

Occupational therapy education emphasises the importance of recognising cultural values and beliefs in developing therapy interventions and considers why they are important to individuals and communities (Park et al, 2005; WFOT, 2016). Students need to be able to apply knowledge and skills in the future when designing culturally relevant interventions and need to become skilled at recognising how meanings are constructed and influenced by culture (Odawara, 2005; RCOT, 2019). What is missing from current literature is how occupational therapy students develop a meaningful and compassionate approach to inform their practice with people from a range of diverse cultures including asylum seekers and refugees.

The findings within this research highlight how participating in a SCoRe project with asylum seekers and refugees have positively impacted on the participants' personal and professional development, giving them opportunities to develop their own professional identity as they embarked on their professional career as occupational therapists.

This chapter situates the four themes identified from the data analysis (See Chapter 3.12): working as part of a supportive team, enabling meaningful occupation, cultural awareness, and the positive impact of the project on current role in relation to the wider evidence base and occupational therapy discourses. These will be linked to the constructs of doing, being, belonging and becoming (Wilcock, 1999; Hammell, 2004) and will be discussed and supported by relevant literature.

### **6.1 Expanding capabilities through meaningful occupation.**

Working as part of a supportive team was the first theme. As Chapter 5, Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework indicates this relates to 'Doing', 'Being', and 'Belonging' (Wilcock, 2006; Hammell, 2004). This also aligns with the 'Professional' constructs of the Conceptual Framework in which participants considered their role as members of the research team and

working as a team with the asylum seekers and refugees. The SCoRe project tutors created a learning environment in which participants could work alongside asylum seekers and refugees to explore the lived experience of using drop-in services and engage in a range of meaningful and creative group activities. This relates to the innermost circle (core) of the conceptual framework connecting the person to occupations that are meaningful. The participants needed to have an increased cultural awareness of the people they were working with to ensure dignity and respect. They also needed to be mindful of ethical issues when working with people who may have experienced trauma and who may be clinically vulnerable.

The three groups of Students as Co-Researchers undertook a series of creative group sessions with asylum seekers and refugees who were women. The focus of the creative activities in the SCoRe project groups was to enable the women to engage in occupations that were meaningful to them. The use of the advisory group of women asylum seekers and refugees informed the participants which creative sessions they would find meaningful. They chose jewellery making so that they could make gifts for others or create something for themselves. Many people who seek asylum come to the UK with the clothes on their back and very few possessions, so to have something that they have chosen and made for themselves is important (Spring et al 2018). They also chose to make cards so that they could send them home to their families and baking so that they could eat what they made and share their own recipe stories with each other. Meal preparation and cooking in general can be used as a vehicle to transmit cultural values and recreate a sense of home (Beagan and D'Sylva, 2011). These sessions proved popular, as having choice in occupations can have a positive impact on health and wellbeing (Bishop and Purcell, 2013; Suleman and Whiteford, 2013; Aldrich, 2011). The SCoRe participants valued the creative sessions as it allowed them the time and space to get to know the women they worked with at their own pace, in a way that was collaborative and without the need for intrusive questions.

Creative arts sessions have been widely used with asylum seekers and refugees to aid community integration and to prevent social marginalisation and decline in their mental wellbeing and a diminished ability to function (Smith et al 2013; Huot, Kelly and Park, 2016). Liebmann (2022) described the use of art tables in drop-in centres as a place to feel safe and a place to gather focus, which had a calming effect on those involved and provided the opportunity for individuality and creativity. Creative activities can be a safe occupation for people to practice their language and share skills (Trimboli and Taylor, 2016). The participants commented on how the refugees and asylum seekers helped each other out and created their own sense of community. They welcomed everyone - the research team included, even if they could not speak English. This speaks to their inclusive collectivist culture where all are made to feel welcome (Liamputtong, 2009; McKay and Bradley, 2016).

The discourse on social justice has increasingly turned to human functioning as its prime focus. That is what people 'can do' and 'be' (Nussbaum, 2011). This resonates with the 'Capabilities approach' advocated by (Sen, 2009) which protects and promotes a person's ability to do things he or she has reason to value (Sen, 2009 p 231). The emphasis on 'doing' and 'being' within the capabilities approach is synergistic with the core concepts of occupation: doing, being and becoming (Wilcock, 1998). In more collectivist cultures the interdependent and collective self is well established and individuals adjust to the relationships in which they are embedded and promote the needs of others in the group (Bailliard, 2016). The central issue is the importance of capability, reflecting opportunity and choice, aligned with occupation and occupational sciences' emphasis on 'doing' something and consideration of whether a person's environment provides access to 'doing' an occupation which builds the foundations for health and survival (Hocking, 2015).

The SCoRe participants could express meaning through 'doing.' These were contingent on each other – you cannot 'be' without 'doing' and 'doing' impacts on your 'being' (Wilcock, 2002). Working in a group helped to build self-confidence and develop skills in an area of practice that was new to them. SCoRe projects can only function within a co-operative

context. There was no competition for one project participant to perform better than another and this ensured mutual respect within the project group and a combined, collaborative responsibility to ensure the learning took place. This helped to keep the projects on track and helped with group dynamics for all the projects.

Collaborative learning is an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of learners coming together to problem solve, complete a task, or create a specific product (Laal and Laal, 2012, p 491). The value of learning within groups in the research process can promote critical and imaginative thinking and encourages people to question and debate. It does not assume the tutors are the experts, rather, they were there to help the participants learn from each other and develop their knowledge and skills according to their abilities. These teamwork practices are based on the principle that people will be more motivated to help group members when they are working together towards a common goal. The participants were challenged both socially and emotionally to listen to different perspectives and were required to articulate and defend their ideas (Laal and Laal, 2012). This provided insight into the students' 'being', reflected in their skills and knowledge. The project led them to challenge preconceptions or inconsistencies in values which may have previously impacted understanding. This was certainly the case when the group were interpreting the data and making sense of the findings. One participant captured this well,

*'With a group you have someone to talk to...and ask, am I on the right lines? It was really useful to get together... to see what we had already done, where we were going, and discuss the different things we have thought about'* (Participant C4K).

This was the ethos the tutors adopted when working with the SCoRe participants and asked them to challenge themselves and each other throughout the projects.

## 6.2 Enhancing shared connectedness.

Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991) suggested that collaborative teams achieve higher levels of thought and retain information longer than learners who work as individuals. They identified basic conditions of a collaborative learning situation: positive interdependence; - involving face to face interaction, individual and group accountability; - interpersonal and small group skills; - and group processing skills. Of those identified the most prominent conditions of collaborative learning identified in the findings (see Chapter 4) were individual and group accountability and positive interdependence. The participants felt the need to work together to achieve the aims of the study and there was an underlying belief that the projects would not work unless they all focussed on the projects as a team. Each group had collaborative objectives to ensure the team worked together. The first project group were the most cohesive and the most diverse of the project groups in terms of age, sex, and ethnicity. Face to face interaction in the planning interviews and debriefs within the projects ensured the group played to each other's strengths and benefitted from each other's talents to accomplish tasks. (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, 1991).

A further positive interdependence present in the findings was one of the participants in the first study who spoke Urdu and Punjabi (participant, A6Z) and assisted when the group was conducting the interviews in those languages. She could also attribute meaning to some of the interview narratives as part of the IPA process. Some of the nuances and meanings may have been lost if an alternative interpreter had been used. This also enhanced the credibility of the researcher in the eyes of the women in the creative groups and enriched the data obtained (Chen and Boore, 2010).

As the data showed (Chapter 4), individual and group accountability required each group member to be active and be able to do things that they learned in a group so that they could build on those skills to perform at higher levels as individuals. The participants were held individually accountable for their share of the work. Two of the participants commented on

this as they felt that the support provided in the group and by the tutors helped them to understand the research process and put their research skills into practice.

In terms of Interpersonal and small group skills, the participants were encouraged to work together on tasks which helped to build trust, develop communication, leadership, negotiating and conflict management skills. They shared tasks between them and helped each other with organisation and planning the sessions. In terms of group processing several participants described how the group worked together to plan the research, assess where they were up to in the research process, completed interviews, analysed the data, and identified any actions they needed to undertake to enable the group to perform efficiently.

Collaboration and cooperation between participants in each of the SCoRe groups was key to their success. Shared connectedness, building skills, developing rapport, and having a growing awareness of community and collectivism all contributed to the students' sense of belonging (Spring et al, 2019). This helped the participants in their future careers, not only to develop their research and teamwork skills but also how to facilitate groups. The remit of today's occupational therapists demands that practitioners need to be autonomous, work well as part of a team as they negotiate new and more complex clinical situations and take control of their continuing professional development (RCOT, 2021a).

For some, working in a team gave them confidence to complete a research project. The process of developing knowledge and coming to know and form an understanding of how to complete the research project has implications for the participant's being (Jenkins, Kinsella, and DeLuca, 2021). Being can effect knowing itself and the move from ontology to epistemology. This relates to Wilcock's concept of 'being' and 'doing' (Wilcock, 1999).

Students require knowledge and an understanding of ways of being in the world to navigate professional practice and learn to 'do' (Barnett, 2009 p.439). Those that were confident in one area of the research helped others who were less so. Research skills are components of

a research continuum with evidence-based practice skills at one end of the spectrum, progressing to developing the skills to conduct research and contribute to the evidence base at the other (RCOT, 2021b).

The participants were able to recognise the value of listening to each other and the importance of respecting each other's contributions to work well as a team. To be recognised and heard is a positive aspect of everyday life when working as a team and involves the realisation that other people are essential because of how they react to each other (Fleming, 2022; Taylor, 1992). Honneth (1995) described recognition as people being able to successfully listen and interact with each other and believed it to be the foundation on which successful communicative action and social change can occur. Thus, recognition acknowledges an individual's worth or 'being' in relation to others. This increased participants' confidence and gave them a sense of security knowing there was the backup of the SCoRe teams' support and collective knowledge.

The participants in the SCoRe projects saw first-hand the importance of collectivism. The sense of community was evident throughout their creative sessions. The sense of doing, being, belonging and becoming was palpable for the SCoRe participants and the women participating in the group sessions as the creative sessions gathered momentum. The women were keen to link their past skills with the present. This demonstrated how they could develop a sense of connection to others and the wider community through engagement in activities.

The experience of social support and sense of belonging is important and particularly in periods of transition (Whiteford, 2005). The asylum seekers and refugees' need for social support can be met through shared occupations and experiences where they can bond with others (Bishop and Purcell, 2013; Spring et al, 2019). Linking skills, knowledge and familiar occupations from people's home and host cultures helped to connect people's past lives with their new lives (Thornton and Spalding, 2018). It is important to recognise that each person

'belongs' to a familial and societal context and occupations are perceived differently depending on their values and traditions (Spring et al ,2019).

Indeed, the asylum seekers and refugees enabled the SCoRe project participants to feel part of their community by welcoming them to the centre and sharing food and drink with them, even though they were comparative strangers whom they had not known long. There was a shared connectedness between the asylum seekers and refugees, and the SCoRe Participants. The SCoRe participants were also able to see and experience the value of promoting social cohesion on a personal, community and collectivist level.

The UK is often seen as individualistic by asylum seekers and refugees which is inconsistent with their own collectivist cultural ideations (Smith, 2015). This connects to Wilcock's (1999) concept of being. What influences an asylum seeker or refugees 'being' may therefore differ from a person who has been brought up in the UK. A couple of the participants commented on how their experience of the asylum seekers and refugees' valuing collectivism enabled them to see how important it was to include family and friends in the rehab process. They saw first-hand the altruism of the asylum seekers and refugees – putting others before themselves to ensure the wellbeing of their family and friends through moral and emotional support (Smith, 2015). Many asylum seekers and refugees are part of large supportive familial and social networks, so it is important that in their new country, community and support networks are there to support asylum seekers and refugees when needed. Several of the participants said they might not have considered this before undertaking the project. The SCoRe participants used the knowledge gained from this in their therapeutic interventions with patients in their current roles.

### **6.3 Enabling collective understanding.**

Much of what we know about the world we learn socially by connecting with others (Hollingshead, 1998). Team cognition according to DeChurch and Mesmer-Magnus (2010) represents cognitive, motivational, and affective processes and refers to how knowledge that is important to the group is shared amongst group members. Collective understanding allows for common ground or a shared understanding of tasks and teamwork to develop. Being an integral part of the team made the participants feel informed and all felt they had a useful contribution to make. It helped to increase confidence and gave them a sense of security, knowing there was the backup of the team's support and collective knowledge (Mellor, Cottrell, and Moran, 2013).

All three research groups worked well together and had a shared understanding of what was required for each project. There were, however, some productive conflicts in the third SCoRe project group. These mainly focussed on ideas and tasks. The SCoRe project team tried to resolve these using a co-operative style to encourage communication and the exploration of ideas and alternative approaches to solving problems (Levi and Askay, 2021). For the third group there were some strong characters within the group and on occasions there were a few challenges and disagreements. One participant in the third research project group found working with a large group of students intense and found learning from different team members and adapting her understanding of what was being said difficult. This may have been due to a variety of reasons, she may not have felt safe to take interpersonal risks or she may not have wanted to embarrass herself in front of other team members whom she did not know well (Tasca, 2021). The same participant was asked how she found working in the group, she did not see this as a problem, she said there were 'ups and downs' with the group, but it was not seen as an issue and had not impacted on her enjoyment of the project. None of the other participants in the third project group commented on group work being a challenge so it may well have only been worthy of note by one participant.

Interpersonal support from the project team and project supervisors helped the SCoRe participants to process some of the harrowing stories they heard. Vicarious trauma can result from empathising with a survivor as they describe their traumatic experiences, or by witnessing the pain caused by another's trauma (Posselt et al, 2019). This can lead to intense emotional reactions in the observer such as profound helplessness, sadness, and anger (Woolhouse, Brown and Thind, 2012). As noted in Chapter 3.1.4 (Ethics) effort was made to mitigate secondary trauma by engaging students in debrief sessions after each interview. Care was taken to reflect on the narratives, interpret meaning and consider the impact on the researchers carrying out the interviews as well as the wider research team.

The SCoRe group also had support from the research team on 'WhatsApp' and the lead researchers' mobile phone numbers should they feel the need for a personal debrief with the project tutors. The participants in all three SCoRe project groups appreciated the guidance and expertise of the tutors. They learned to listen, respect different opinions and present and defend their own ideas. Participating in a practical dissertation project gave the participants a sense of relevance and enabled them to see the application of what they were learning as valuable preparation for their future careers both theoretically and methodologically (Mellor, Cottrell, and Moran, 2013). One participant in the second project group (B3I) reflected on her time working with the asylum seekers and refugees,

*'I found the project eye-opening – it was like looking into a different world'* (Participant B3I).

There were many positive outcomes for the SCoRe participants working with the asylum seekers and refugees such as: experiencing empathy, compassion, satisfaction and feeling like they were making a difference, helping people to make meaning, and enriching their lives (Barrington and Shakespeare-Finch, 2013).

This links well with the concept of communities of practice as proposed by Wenger (1998) offer a collaborative environment in which to connect with peers and support people to reflect on and share their practice. They consist of a group of people who share common

interests and who interact regularly in a process that shapes and builds knowledge.

Communities of practice collectively reflect, analyse, and consider their own practices, actions, and values to create new knowledge (Whiteford et al, 2019; Atala, Bennington and Domheldt, 2023; Marcolino et al, 2021).

The partnerships within the communities of practice can advance knowledge relevant to clinical practice and support evidence-based practice within the profession (Gelinas, 2016).

They can be seen as an opportunity to develop networks and overcome professional isolation and provide a safe space to share resources and ask questions. Knowledge stemming from practice dilemmas respond to local perspectives and enables the creation of innovative solutions for local as well as global practices. Collective discussions allow practitioners to become aware of key practical dilemmas and to create practical solutions together (Marcolino et al, 2021). An advantage of collaborating in research in occupational therapy communities of practice is that the partnerships can enhance the validity of the research by focussing on issues and questions associated with practice.

There is a growing interest in understanding and addressing complex everyday issues that arise from health and social inequalities that lead to social injustices (Whiteford, 2004; Suarez-Balcazar et al, 2015). University-community social partnerships for communities of practice can become catalysts for social change and can act as a means for improving services for communities (Suarez-Balcazar et al 2015).

Occupational therapy researchers and practitioners are in a strong position to develop what is known as engaged research. Embedding the philosophy of engagement in everyday realities links to the profession's history of learning by doing. This relates to Freire's (2000) praxis framework in which there is an ongoing discussion between reflection and action and is achieved through the community and consciousness building from within the community. There is therefore a joint commitment between the researchers and the community to support social change and practice (Hammel et al, 2015).

The SCoRe participants within this research who continue to have an interest in working with asylum seekers and refugees can share their thoughts and practice with other health professionals interested in the same issues. Indeed, there is an active community of practice for researchers across Europe and globally who regularly collaborate on ideas and share research and practice. This culminated in the launch of an on line WFOT module for occupational therapists, therapy assistants and students entitled Occupational Therapy: Working with Displaced Persons (WFOT, 2021).

#### **6.4 Enriching professional development.**

The data suggested that for some participants, doing the research project was the highlight of their Occupational Therapy Programme and their learning was transformative (Mezirow, 1991). This links to the sense of being through reflection and self-discovery (Wilcock, 2006 p113).

*“It was the highlight of my three years. It was more of a personal journey and made me think about people’s stories”* (Participant, A2J).

Participating in a study that used IPA methodology enabled the SCoRe participants to develop a unique understanding of the experiences of the asylum seekers and refugees in a safe supportive environment. Sharing ideas is an integral part of the IPA methodology and the SCoRe project teams valued coming together after each data gathering session. This allowed for debriefs and discussion of each recording and reflection on the transcripts. It offered a way of gaining a much deeper understanding of how occupation is experienced by human beings and is central to their daily lives, health, and well-being. This links to the ‘becoming’ construct (Wilcock, 1999; Hammell, 2004) which is often linked to personal development, growth, and change. The findings highlighted that working collaboratively

provided the participants with the opportunity to further each other's learning, whilst being individually accountable for their own work (Cohn, Dooley, and Simmons, 2002).

### **6.6 Enlightening through meaningful occupation.**

The second major finding was the importance of engaging in meaningful occupations to provide structure, routine, and continuity to peoples' lives. According to Rebeiro (2001), people develop a sense of belonging in places where they feel safe, can be themselves and do not have to worry about doing or saying the right thing. The participants discussed the importance of participating in occupations with the refugees and asylum seekers and being able to relate to them and to converse with them in a meaningful way that made a difference. They had an impact on other peoples' lives, and they could see that.

The World Federation of Occupational Therapists' (WFOT) Position Statement on Human Rights (WFOT 2019) and the Position Statement on Human Displacement (WFOT 2014) highlighted that meaningful occupation enhances health and well-being. Human displacement and forced migration are closely linked with a range of trauma related, personal and social challenges. For many who experience displacement and forced migration there is a lack of access to and engagement in, meaningful and dignified occupations (Whiteford, 2000; WFOT, 2014; Spring et al 2019). Their participation in leisure occupations is often limited due to financial and language difficulties. The SCoRe researchers in their discussions with asylum seekers and refugees reported that attending the group activities gave them some purpose to their week and something tangible to take away like baking, or jewellery or cards (Spring et al, 2019).

Conversations can evolve naturally around the creative activity when there is no requirement or pressure to speak. One of the participants reflected on the SCoRe project's creative sessions being 'like hope in a dark room.' This was a powerful reflection of the value of the creative sessions to the asylum seekers and refugees and was quite humbling for the SCoRe participants. Attending these groups enabled the asylum-seeking women to engage with others and gain confidence. Participating in the creative sessions, they saw that they were not alone and that other women faced similar issues finding the transition to a different country and culture difficult. For the women, what they learned and who they engaged with gave them purpose and direction and made them feel valued and a sense of belonging (Burchett and Matheson, 2010; Smith, 2015).

For each of the participants in the SCoRe project there was a positive impact of doing the project. It was not just a means to an end to complete a dissertation, they felt they were making a difference at a deeper level. It was crucial that the research with the asylum seekers and refugees was conducted ethically, and that the cultural integrity of the participants was considered in the creative sessions so that the research would not cause harm but benefit the people who took part (Liamputtong, 2008). The participants set up the creative sessions to give some autonomy to the asylum seekers and refugees in occupations that were purposeful (Smith, 2015). Occupations can be disrupted by the asylum-seeking process yet are central to adaptation and adjustment to a new life (Blair, 2000) and are therefore central to the concepts of doing, being, belonging and becoming (Wilcock, 2006).

Understanding the potential vulnerability of the women who took part in the creative groups, reminds us that the women were ordinary people whose lives had been transformed by extraordinary events. The SCoRe group participants needed to understand enough about the context of the women they were working with to understand their sensitivities and vulnerabilities. Not all would be affected by the same issues, it would depend on their own context. As a result of previous trauma, the women may have had issues relating to trust,

gender roles and cultural norms (Taylor et al, 2020). It was important to have some responsibility towards the women and the SCoRe group participants. Managing the relationships between the women group members and the SCoRe participants was important for the tutors and achieved through training and supervision of the participants pre and post group sessions. Several participants in the project groups commented on the support provided by peers and tutors as being an important and necessary part of the research process.

There were also lessons to be learned in working alongside the asylum seekers and refugees for several weeks and forming relationships, and then stopping abruptly when the scheduled creative sessions ended, and the SCoRe participant input stopped. The intention had been for the women to sustain the creative activities by encouraging the women to continue to run the groups themselves after the SCoRe participants had finished their research - but this was not the case. They wanted the activity groups to be facilitated and did not want to run the groups themselves. Stickley and Stickley (2010) suggested that many services and community projects are set up to help people to help themselves and therefore become self-sustaining. However, they do not always become self-sustaining according to Scaffa et al (2006) because long term crisis and aid interventions can in themselves create a dependency culture. Often there is inadequate preparation and commitment to work alongside people to develop community focused interventions that promote autonomy. Models of service delivery that are strengths based and solution focused are more likely to succeed (Stickley and Stickley, 2010). No specific reasons were given by the women as to why they didn't want to run the sessions themselves for each other when the space and resources were available to do so. Despite having an advisory group to determine the types of creative groups on offer, it may be that not enough time was spent on training the women to take over the groups when the sessions came to an end. It could also have been due to perceived language barriers, or the women's lack of confidence in their own abilities to facilitate a group session

WFOT (2019) encouraged occupational therapists to pursue occupational justice for all. This includes the right to occupation which may be impacted by cultural, social, and political contexts. Also, people have the right to engage in occupations they need and choose to survive, find meaningful, and contribute to their own wellbeing and that of their communities without risk to safety or human dignity. This ensures that people can realise their potential.

The term, occupational justice, emerged with the integration of the work of Townsend and Wilcock (Townsend and Wilcock, 2004; Stadynek et al, 2010). They believed that values are attached to occupations and are dependent on cultural and socio-political factors. As occupation is central to human existence, any restrictions to being able to participate in occupation can be seen as an injustice. Townsend and Wilcock, (2004) and Stadynek et al, (2010 p 331) described justice as focusing on meaningful and purposeful occupations that people want to do, need to do, and can do, considering their personal circumstances.

Therefore, an occupational justice perspective recognises people as occupational beings and acknowledges each person as having a unique set of occupational wishes, habits and needs based on their own circumstances and capacities. Each person will seek out different occupational opportunities to meet their own needs.

The capabilities approach mentioned earlier in the chapter (Sen, 1979), can be likened to the Occupational Justice Framework (Stadynek et al 2010; Townsend and Wilcock, 2004) and is a view of economic development that considers human and social development (Townsend, and Wilcock, 2010). Social justice theory suggests that individuals have diverse needs and require a range of resources to reduce inequalities. The capabilities approach examines social inclusion and exclusion, justice and injustice and the freedom to be able to be able to live well and with occupational rights. It also emphasizes 'doing' and 'being' and this is synonymous with the core concepts of occupational therapy: doing, being, belonging and becoming (Wilcock, 1999). Occupational science and occupational therapy suggest that people have the occupational right to engage in and be included in their chosen occupations and thereby contribute to their own wellbeing and that of their community (Townsend and

Wilcock, 2010; WFOT, 2019). It is important to see the capability to offer opportunity and choice rather than the rewards of a particular lifestyle. Promoting occupational participation that enhances health and wellbeing is therefore a focus of justice work and occupational therapy and is the ethos of this study (Whiteford and Townsend, 2011).

The economic, social, and political context of asylum seekers and refugees often results in occupational injustices such as occupational deprivation, imbalance, marginalisation, and alienation. Restrictions to participation in occupations can be seen as an injustice (Whiteford, 2005; Whiteford et al, 2018). At a societal and community level, occupational injustice can dissipate human potential, overwhelm health services, reduce social cohesion, and threaten peoples' sense of safety and belonging (Hocking, 2017).

Engaging in meaningful occupations to enhance daily life and for pleasure is often seen as the foundation for good health and wellbeing (Hammell, 2004). Occupational therapists make a significant contribution to enable people to participate in valued occupations that help bridge their former life to the current situation (WFOT, 2014). Individuals have a right to engage in a variety of occupations to meet their basic needs and to do what they decide is most meaningful and useful to themselves, their families, and communities (Whalley Hammell, 2018; Stadynek et al, 2010).

Occupational imbalance occurs when people spend an inordinate amount of time in one area of life at the expense of other areas (Stadynek et al, 2010; Durocher, Rappolt and Gibson, 2013). In this context when people seeking asylum are not permitted to work, excessive time is spent under or unoccupied (Townsend and Wilcock, 2004). Occupational deprivation is argued to have a pervasive and long-term effect on individuals and can lead to significant health problems (Wilcock, 2006). Furthermore, these forms of occupational imbalance are often the result of economic, political, and social policies. These policies can therefore maintain or create situations of imbalance and could be seen as occupational apartheid (Durocher, Rappolt and Gibson, 2013 p.422). Occupations may be unfairly

distributed and the rights and rewards of these occupations such as pay, and benefits are also not available (Townsend and Wilcock, 2004). Unresponsive, collusive, or exploitative policy measures can be seen to maintain privilege over poverty (Kronenberg and Pollard, 2005, p.66).

Exclusion from participating in occupations that are meaningful and the obligation to participate in occupations that have no purpose or value may affect an individual's health and wellbeing. The relationship between health and wellbeing, occupational rights and human rights has been well documented (Whalley Hammell and Iwama, 2012). Hammell (2008, p 61) described occupational rights as 'the right of all people to engage in meaningful occupations that contribute positively to their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of their communities'. This includes the right to participate in meaningful occupations described as the culmination of doing, being, belonging and becoming (Hammell, 2004). There is also a need to engage in occupations that are culturally meaningful, ensure critical awareness of Western-focussed practice and to consider how occupational therapy practice includes cultural sensitivity (Trimboli and Taylor, 2016). Asylum seekers and refugees value culturally appropriate, occupationally focussed opportunities alongside practical and emotional help to negotiate the complex asylum processes (Spring et al, 2019).

### **6.7 Enacting cultural humility.**

The third main finding was the need for cultural awareness. This speaks to the global dimension within the Conceptual Framework (see Chapter 5), but also resonates with doing, being, belonging and becoming (Wilcock, 2006). Hammell (2009) suggested that culture describes the knowledge, values, beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, perspectives, norms, and customs that people acquire through membership of a particular group or society. Culture is not just about ethnicity or nationality; it is part of who a person is as an occupational being.

Culture shapes what a person does, how they do it and why they do it (Smith, Cornella, and Williams, 2014).

Although culture is an integral part of the Occupational Therapy profession's conceptual models of practice, Iwama (2005) critiqued these theories for reflecting on the culturally specific perspectives of a minority of the global population, being derived from middle class, white, heterosexual able-bodied experiences. Western world views within the occupational therapy profession such as individualism, capitalism, materialism, and independence have heavily influenced the development of occupational therapy practice (Mahoney and Kiraly-Alvarez, 2019). Gerlach (2012, p.156) went further and claimed that the occupational therapy profession is ethnocentric. Hammell (2013) suggested that dominant theories and models of occupation may have achieved widespread global acclaim and use because of superior power and marketing rather than superior theorising. Valuing Western ideals and beliefs without seeking to question cultural relevance can create a power imbalance that lessens non-Western values of interdependence and collectivism (Bourke-Taylor and Hudson, 2005; Gerlach et al, 2018; Simaan,2020). Ramugondo (2015) invited us to explore occupational consciousness and to consider the power imbalances and inequalities which exist in occupational therapy practice.

Decolonisation should be considered in the philosophy, education and practice of occupational therapy and occupational science students, practitioners, and researchers (Ramugondo, 2018). This will mean prioritising research, theory production, and concepts that originate from Global South communities. Decolonisation is a complex and life long process. It is both individual and collective for the profession and professionals and involves listening to the person, hearing their stories, cultures, and life narratives, suspending judgement and being in the moment, and being silent (Simaan, 2020). It is necessary to embed a human rights approach to transform current practices (Gibson et al, 2015). Recognising cultural safety and the need to be sensitive to difference, legitimising the differences and exploring power differences are essential if we are to work together as

equals. This is a process likened to Freire's (1996) concept 'conscientization' which aligns to developing a critical consciousness. It is important to encourage students, practitioners, and researchers to reflect on a person's political, social, and historical contexts and adopt a human rights approach to minimise any anti oppressive practices which directly impact on communities (Simaan, 2020). The globalisation and decolonisation of occupational therapy practice requires an approach which thrives in larger emerging cultural contexts, adopts a human rights perspective, and addresses problems brought on by disasters, conflict displacement and scarcity of resources (Odawara, 2005; Hammell, 2015).

Indeed, the research tutors and many of the participants in the SCoRe project groups were middle class, white heterosexual and able bodied. There were, however, some exceptions and there was some diversity within the project groups. Some of the participants in the project groups would not identify as being middle class. Others were from Asian British backgrounds, mixed or multiple ethnic groups and, white English or Irish. Part of the preparation for undertaking the score projects was to prepare the participants to reflect on difference and how that impacts on day-to-day interactions and to consider power relationships in interactions. Having a diverse group of students on the SCoRe projects added to the diversity of reflexions and interpretation of data.

Most of the participants in the SCoRe project had not worked with asylum seekers or refugees before embarking on the women's projects. They acknowledged that the projects taught them about the importance of understanding peoples' differences. The cultural awareness sessions in university helped the participants prepare for working with the asylum seekers and refugees. On a superficial level, the participants initially thought cultural difference was about language but quickly realised that it is not just about language but a deeper understanding of how beliefs and customs vary and how these translate into people's daily practices and occupations.

Reflecting on the project, the SCoRe participants all said they had developed cultural awareness and cultural competence during their projects. As noted in Section 1.1 cultural awareness is having specific knowledge of peoples' differences to become more sensitive to the cultural aspects of health and wellbeing (Awaad, 2003; Agner, 2020). Cultural competence, according to Hammell (2013), assumes that culture is experienced and interpreted in the same way by everyone within a group and that values and perspectives of a culture can be learned by an outsider. Customs and social beliefs of a particular people or society distinguishes the members of one culture from another (Beagan, 2015). In individualistic cultures, such as those prevalent in the UK, the self is independent, the emphasis is on individual goals over collective goals, and value is placed on self-reliance and uniqueness (Spring et al, 2019). Importance is given to standing out. Whereas in collectivist cultures the self is interdependent, and importance is given to fitting in (Smith, 2017). Within collectivist cultures belonging and interactions centre around care and protection and connections within a social group. Collective goals, close relationships and group membership are therefore valued (Smith, 2015).

The participants quickly realised the importance of not grouping all asylum seekers and refugees together as they have diverse needs and come from a variety of different countries with different language, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds. They saw it as an important part of their role to consider the cultural motivations and occupational preferences of individuals to support their integration into the community and generate a sense of belonging and connectedness (Whalley Hammell, 2015; Hart, 2021 p.1324).

Cultural humility encourages practitioners to be aware of the power dynamics in interactions and to welcome inconsistencies between cultures, and a readiness to discuss diversity within and across cultures (Hammell, 2013; Hook et al 2013). Cultural humility, therefore, requires occupational therapists to think critically about themselves as practitioners and respect the life experiences and perspectives of those that differ from us. This may assist in the development of culturally safe practice (Hammell, 2013). The SCoRe participants

reflected that cultural humility is a valuable learning point to take away from the project and to consider the power dynamics in their interactions with service users who have differing cultural values and beliefs to their own.

The SCoRe participants realised the importance of understanding people and their cultures at a deeper level and how beliefs and customs translate into everyday practices and occupations. This connects with the person, professional, societal, and global aspects of the conceptual framework (discussed in Chapter 5). It also speaks to the 'being' constructs as the participants tried to work with the refugees and asylum seekers as individuals and tried to get a sense of who they were as occupational beings, and their abilities and capabilities (Sen, 2009). In terms of the participants themselves they explored their own 'being' in terms of their growing awareness of who they were as professionals and their increasing knowledge of the importance of cultural humility in their work and their ability to do the things they valued (Sen, 2009). As the project developed the SCoRe participants developed a growing sense of personal change as they challenged their own beliefs and learned how to connect with the women in the creative groups.

One of the participants gave an example of 'becoming' in terms of her developing cultural humility in her current practice. She considered a person she was working with putting a tea bag in a kettle to boil and how this could have been perceived as a cognitive issue for someone not being able to sequence a task, when in fact this was the cultural norm for that person. Another participant mentioned the need to be aware of a person's culture specific toileting and self-care regime and to be mindful of that when providing equipment and adaptations. As a result of participating in the SCoRe project, the participants saw the value and meaning of a more collaborative approach to understand the needs and wishes of the asylum seekers and refugees in their occupational therapy practice (Tervalon and Murray-Garcia, 1998).

The SCoRe projects enabled participants to question the differences in values, beliefs and cultural practices that are present in interactions and potentially challenge existing unequal power dynamics. The participants felt that the project had given them a knowledge of the difference between cultural difference, competency and humility and were now able to pass on their knowledge to others in their current working role and to members of their multi professional teams.

### **6.8 Exploring existentialism in occupational therapy practice.**

One of the philosophical areas to consider in relation to occupational therapy is existentialism. Yerxa (1967) was one of the first occupational therapists to discuss existentialism in relation to person centred practice and identity. Babulal, Selvatnam and Taff (2018) advocated that every individual has the responsibility to shape his or herself. (Aho, 2014) suggested that 'existentialism was a concern for the human situation as it is lived...it can only be felt and made meaningful by the choices and actions of the existing individual' (x-xi). Existentialism is about becoming and evolving and has relevance today to steer conversations around responsibility and meaning in a global society (Sartre, 2007). We create who we are and what we want to become through life choices and actions, and those actions have a bearing on others and on society.

Marcel (1970) explored human interactions and proposed a concept known as social beneficial interaction. Despite two people sharing the same experience, each person may experience different emotions and thoughts and meanings, which provide feedback for existing and interacting with the world. Mead (1934) proposed that an individual's emergence of mind and self were facilitated through the social process of engagement with and interactions with others. Wilcock (2002) linked this to the concept of doing, being and becoming (2003, p3). Doing can be linked with occupations, being can be related to oneself

and one's capabilities and becoming encompasses time, and potential for change in future identity. The core occupational therapy concepts of mind, self, and occupation over the lifespan are linked to existentialism.

Biesta (2009) described three purposes of education: qualification (knowledge and skills, socialization (enculturation into a profession) and subjectification (teaching students how to be pioneers in having original and diverse thoughts). An existential approach supports a gradual growth-orientated approach which values the role of the individual learner as well as the educator. This links with the SCoRe projects in which the community of tutors, students (participants in this study), asylum seekers and refugees are connected in a shared endeavour. The approach to the SCoRe projects is one in which there is shared and deep learning which is a paradigm that existentialism would support (Brown, Roediger and McDaniel, 2014). I guided the students in their research but expected a degree of self-direction and learning and reflexivity which promoted personal growth. This was summed up by Ozmon, (2012p. 239), 'Meaningful learning only occurs when the student actively faces the world and interacts with it'. Thus, existentialism is an important philosophical lens through which to explore practice research and education and fits well with the ethos of this SCoRe research.

### **6.9 Engaging as advocates for asylum seekers and refugees.**

The fourth and final theme is the positive impact of the SCoRe project on the participants' current work role. This is the theme in which the core concepts doing, being, belonging and becoming (Wilcock, 1999; Hammell, 2004) concepts come together. All the participants in the SCoRe projects were employed at the time of the interviews. Most were employed as occupational therapists. Those who were not employed as occupational therapists were all

living and working in the United States but said they were using skills they developed during the project. Many of the participants said that the project had a significant impact on their current practice.

Asylum seekers and refugees' mental health needs are often cumulative and complex. They often experience dual sources of distress including past trauma, and the trauma of acculturation. Some studies have found that post migration stressors have a more devastating impact on mental health outcomes than pre-migration traumas (Schweitzer et al, 2006; Taylor et al, 2020; Hart, 2020). It is important for health professionals and occupational therapists, to understand mental health as the result of a series of adverse experiences in multi-layered contexts (Porter and Haslam, 2005). They should also be aware that Western centric models of health care which focus on the individual, may be culturally incongruent for asylum seekers and refugees who view illness from a communal or collective perspective (Baird et al, 2017). Many assessment measures widely used in Western countries are not translated into languages of diverse cultural groups (Kirmayer et al, 2011) nor, culturally validated for the specific refugee populations (Im, Rodriguez and Grumbine, 2021).

The experience of being in the SCoRe project prompted the participants to use professional interpreters when required. They also learned to adapt their communication style to meet the needs of a culturally diverse range of people for whom English was not their first language, not just those who were asylum seekers and refugees. The knowledge and skills gained by the SCoRe participants in the projects enabled them to challenge how they communicated with people on a variety of levels. This included the use of language in assessments, recognising cultural humility, acknowledging difference, recognising trauma, and adopting a compassionate approach when working with asylum seekers and refugees.

Several of the SCoRe participants felt it their duty to inform, educate and challenge those they worked with and the wider multi professional teams. They were able to recount their

experiences of the asylum-seeking processes, the impact on those asylum seekers and refugees and to challenge recent media informed stereotypes.

For many of the SCoRe participants the impact of working with asylum seekers and refugees was strongly felt. Their professional identity was enriched by having a greater cultural awareness, to recognise trauma, to signpost people to relevant services and to adopt a compassionate approach. They recognised the importance of not probing about how individuals came into the UK and why there is no justification for them to relive their trauma when working with them. The participants reflected on the perceived lack of support by authorities throughout the asylum-seeking process. Some asylum seekers believed that there is a conscious effort by the authorities to make the whole asylum process as traumatic as possible (Taylor et al, 2020).

One SCoRe participant said she felt culturally isolated when moving to Wales and not being able to speak the language. She acknowledged that her experience was nothing like what the asylum seekers and refugees had gone through. Nevertheless, she empathised with what it felt like to experience cultural difference and feel 'different' to those in her new community.

Many of the SCoRe participants felt that the project had a lasting impact in terms of how they behaved towards people who had recently moved to the UK. They enjoyed the camaraderie, sense of community and belonging when working with the asylum seekers and refugees and their welcome to be part of their developing community. The asylum seekers and refugees extended their sense of community and collectivism in giving their time and energy to the university Occupational Therapy Society community events in which they volunteered to play instruments and performed a range of songs that had meaning for them.

The participants found themselves acting as advocates for asylum seekers and refugees guiding them through differences in language, knowledge, and culture to enable them to function in their new community. Blankvoort et al (2018, p.94) named this role a 'translator'

of culture and society including norms, assumptions, and expectations in the new country. The translator role ensures asylum seekers and refugees can access services and engage in a range of occupations. It also highlights gaps in own and others' understanding and the need to respect peoples' cultural backgrounds. Occupational therapists need to understand the legislation and policy systems that displaced people find themselves in. Asylum seekers and refugees are often in a place of insecurity, uncertain whether they can stay in one place or another or what their new life will look like. Looking forwards is not always practical, safe, or a priority for them. Basic needs of accommodation, health and legal confirmation of asylum status and residency are needed before meaningful therapeutic interventions can occur. Asylum seekers may only be motivated by getting confirmation of their right to remain in the UK and cannot see beyond that (Hart, 2020) Trying to engage someone in meaningful occupation as part of an intervention programme may be difficult when people are immersed in a political system that dictates that people do not work, and to wait with minimal opportunity for meaningful engagement in occupations until their refugee status is known (Smith, 2015).

SCoRe participants were able to challenge cultural appropriateness with their work colleagues in the multi professional teams they worked in. They were able to advocate for asylum seekers and refugees in their care who had a completely different way of life in their previous country and were able to recognise cultural differences in their interpretation of assessments and presentation (Greiner, Zafran, and Roy, 2020; RCOT, 2019). One participant commented on how a person she was working with who was originally from Pakistan, did not understand the questions being asked of her in a standardised assessment. She may have been incorrectly labelled as cognitively impaired had the SCoRe participant not realised that she did not comprehend the language being used in the assessment.

As the construct indicates (section 3,4,2), the importance of seeing the person, the SCoRe participants were able to consider the role of male and female caregivers and understand

that in some cultures the female family members are the sole caregivers. They were able to advocate for the focus to be on the individual and their cultural needs and for services to be aware of culturally insensitive assessments, interventions, policies, and practices that negatively impact asylum seekers and refugees. Practitioners with lived experiences of the impact of displacement on asylum seekers and refugees can help to translate the norms, history, strengths and challenges of the asylum seekers and refugees to those they will encounter (Huot, Kelly and Park, 2016).

The SCoRe participants were able to challenge those health professionals who believed that asylum seekers and refugees were unmotivated because they do not participate in what we would consider everyday occupations. They were able to challenge the medical model blaming person specific factors as the cause of lack of engagement in occupations rather than exploring the policy systems and lack of opportunities around them (Laliberte Rudman, 2013). The SCoRe participants envisaged a clear role in helping the asylum seekers and refugees to navigate their way through health and social care systems to enable them to integrate into their new communities.

#### **6.10 Envisaging new identities.**

The SCoRe participants developed a clear sense of professional identity and believed that the knowledge which they gained over the duration of the project could benefit their future professional interactions. This knowledge would be particularly relevant when working with asylum seekers or refugees or, people who were from cultures different to their own. They could then use their professional networks for sharing and disseminating their knowledge.

According to Whitcombe (2013) professional identity developed from professional values, beliefs, and expert knowledge. Clouder (2005) suggested that professional identity is 'doing' and 'being' in practice. De Weerd et al (2006) considered that reflection is a key process for

professional identity development and is an important link between experience and identity. Participants in the SCoRe project were able to reflect on their experiences on the project and highlighted how their personal and professional skills and values widened through being involved in the project. This resonated with Wilcock's (1999) constructs of doing, being, belonging and becoming and contributed to the development of their professional identity.

The role of identity formation has been highlighted in the literature on communities of practice as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Wenger (1998) proposed that identity is constructed through active participation in social communities. The challenge in the SCoRe projects was to balance teaching knowledge, with participation in practice and to develop meaning for the SCoRe participants. As Trede, Macklin, and Bridges (2012) suggested, the development of identity is lifelong and through education and participation. The SCoRe participants felt that their professional identity development occurred throughout their training and post-graduation and only after reflecting on their experiences could they see the true value of the impact of the SCoRe project on their learning and professional identity. This can also be aligned to the conceptual model (See Chapter 4) in which the SCoRe participants bring together the person, profession, society, and global considerations in their practice with asylum seekers and refugees.

The participants were proud to have completed the SCoRe projects and felt they had made a difference to the asylum seekers and refugees and could see a difference in their occupational therapy practice. Indeed, many said taking part in the SCoRe project was the highlight of their occupational therapy programme. They worked on the project for a brief time – 6 months in total but, they felt confident in their knowledge to be able to inform others and to share the experiences they had observed. Having a greater insight into their professional roles working with asylum seekers and refugees engendered professional pride and self-confidence. The creative sessions and the SCoRe project group helped the SCoRe participants to place their learning in context. It helped give them relevance and enabled

them to see the practical application of what they were learning at university as valuable preparation for their future careers (RCOT, 2021a)

Employability is about supporting students to develop a range of knowledge, skills, behaviours, attributes, and attitudes which will enable them to be successful not just in their career but in life (Cole and Tibby, 2013). Several of the SCoRe participants discussed the project in their job interviews. They highlighted the project as an example of how they used cultural humility in their work and how they understood the daily occupational injustices asylum seekers and refugees face. They also discussed how occupational therapists could advocate and raise awareness of their needs. They also felt the project was current as the refugee crisis is increasing globally and they felt that that it helped them to understand the enormous challenges that people face seeking asylum and becoming a refugee.

Employability is not just about employment; it is a unique journey that can take multiple paths, it is not compartmentalised. Many people choose to have a few jobs in the same or different careers throughout their working life (Taylor, 2016; Taylor, 2022). There are links to lifelong and 'life wide' employability to the theoretical underpinning of occupational therapy and between the need for meaningful occupation and occupational balance (Taylor, 2022 p. 3). Reflection is a key part of an occupational therapists personal and professional journey and is also key in the process of employability. The process of employability and career development are lifelong concepts which change over time depending on 'doing, being, and becoming' who you want to be in the workplace.

RCOT (2021a) in the Career Development Framework seeks to support career learning, and workforce development within the occupational therapy profession. Occupational therapy graduates are required to adapt their skills and knowledge in complex and ever-changing health and social care systems (Baptiste and Molineux, 2011). Participation in the SCoRe projects had a personal and emotional impact on the students, which helped to increase self-belief, confidence, and promotion of the profession on graduating, this carried into their first

posts. It helped them to promote and develop a diverse range of skills in settings that were often unfamiliar. From the position of self-awareness and appreciation of the needs of people within marginalised groups, the SCoRe participants were able to demonstrate how they could use their skills and highlight their knowledge. The impact of undertaking the SCoRe research project cannot be underestimated. There was an increased sense of identity and self-belief about how to advocate for occupational justice with asylum seekers and refugees. This was acknowledged in discussions during interviews and feedback they received when successfully obtaining their first posts as occupational therapists.

### **6.11 Energising change in occupational therapy practice.**

Recent political decisions to curb spending in health and social care, Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic have all had an impact on the development of services for asylum seekers and refugees. These decisions lie within a toxic media and political context over the last decade. The debate around refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and migrants has become increasingly charged and heavily politicised (Cooper, Blumell and Bunce, 2021). Metaphors such as 'swarms of people' and labels such as 'boat people' were frequently used in the media and by politicians to describe asylum seekers and refugees. The current Government's policy (November 2022) aiming to stop people who are entering the UK through irregular routes from claiming asylum could be in breach of the Refugee Convention (United Nations General Assembly, 1951). Whilst asylum seekers and refugees' voices are excluded from media debate, there will continue to be a lack of empathy and understanding about their experience – this is much needed to inform the development of services (Cooper, Blumell and Bunce, 2021)

The skills and experiences gained in being part of a SCoRe project working with asylum seekers and refugees helped participants to develop their practice to include interventions that were occupation focussed and addressed occupational injustices. There is a clear need

for occupational therapists to match refugees and asylum seekers to opportunities in their adopted localities, acknowledging their prior skills and interests and building on these to avoid what has been termed 'professional deprivation' (Blankvoort et al, 2018, p.95). Smith (2015, p.617) highlights the 'downward drift' and indignity of being granted refugee status and then being told to work in a kebab shop with little regard for levels of skill or expertise. Occupational therapists have always been interested in work with refugees (Blankvoort et al, 2018, p.92). Over time occupational therapy perspectives and paradigms aligned with the 'medical' or 'deficit' model (Whalley Hammell, 2022, p.6). However, there is now a shift to collaborating with displaced people to develop a more occupational justice and advocacy-based focus to our work as a profession (Whalley Hammell, 2018). This recognises the asylum seekers and refugees as experts of their experiences and there is a need to advocate with, rather than for, asylum seekers and refugees.

The WFOT (2019) Practice resource: 'Occupational therapy for displaced persons' highlights how occupational therapists should use their core skills in collaborating with people affected by illness, disability, physical and or psychological conditions. Occupational therapists are well placed to support refugees and asylum seekers with education, health promotion strategies, creating routines and social networks, re-establishing engagement through life skills and advocating for justice (Krishnakumaran, Kiriazis and Giddings, 2022). They can provide services such as project co-ordinators or informal services such as being a volunteer or training volunteers (WFOT, 2019).

There remains a lack of occupational therapy posts specifically focussed on working with asylum seekers and refugees (Krishnakumaran, Kiriazis and Giddings, 2022). The posts which exist in occupational therapy are often part time, within a diverse and non-specific caseload or working outside of the title of occupational therapist and cover more than resettlement. Roles that are available are poorly paid and are in specific areas of the country where those seeking asylum are initially dispersed. It is rare for an occupational therapist to be employed in a setting that specifically serves asylum seekers and refugees outside of

third sector organisations (Krishnakumaran, Kiriazis and Giddings, 2022). Possible explanations for why this is the case are highlighted by Blankvoort et al, (2018) in which they suggested that despite increasing research on occupational therapy with refugees, much of this is by and for occupational therapists, published in journals for occupational therapy audiences. This approach could be construed as profession centred and therefore needs to be communicated beyond the profession to a wider audience. There also needs to be co-construction and co-exploration in which refugees can join the conversation to develop and promote the value of occupational therapy services. The therapists themselves need to reflect on their assumptions and beliefs and how they impact on those they work with.

Addressing the occupational needs of displaced people beyond health care settings demands a strategic approach and a mustering of the profession's existing capacity, knowledge, and partners. WFOT (2014) suggests there is a need to support practitioners in this developing area of practice and to highlight the policy void that privileges those in the Global-North and rarely engages those people who are displaced. Occupational therapists have a key role to play in enabling displaced people to participate in occupations they find meaningful that help to bridge their former lives to current situations.

All participants in the SCoRe projects were asked if they had worked with asylum seekers and refugees since qualifying. Most had worked with asylum seekers or refugees during their practice, but none had specifically been employed to work as an occupational therapist with asylum seekers and refugees. The political context has significant implications for the development of services and thus reducing the potential 'doing' and 'being' of occupational therapy (the profession) and significant implications for refugees and asylum seekers (the person) and society.

Several participants actively sought out people referred to their services who were asylum seekers and refugees believing they had knowledge and skills that could support the people being referred. Most participants in the study said they would like to work specifically with

refugees and asylum seekers in the future but at present paid posts were not available. A couple of the participants said they were doing voluntary work with people who were seeking asylum or who were refugees alongside their current posts.

Blankvoort et al (2018) suggested that occupational therapists who work with asylum seekers and refugees need to take the time and space to engage in reflexive practice to challenge assumptions as to how we work with asylum seekers and refugees and be culturally conscious as a profession. It would be advantageous to collaborate with colleagues within the resettlement sector and refugees and asylum seekers to codesign roles that fill identified gaps where occupational therapists could be effective.

However, it is important to acknowledge Western bias present within occupational therapy (Iwama, 2005) and advocate for actively recruiting people who have been through the asylum-seeking process and who are from a refugee background to inform, study and practice occupational therapy. There are growing numbers of occupational therapists around the world engaged in working with asylum seekers and refugees and displaced people. This is evidenced by the emergence of global, regional, and international occupational therapy networks focussing on forced migration, Facebook group Forced Migration4OT and more local Refugee Action Groups and Cities of Sanctuary.

According to WFOT (2019), Smith (2017) and Farias et al (2016) it is essential to train occupational therapy students to recognise and be critically reflexive in their understanding of the socio-political systems that create and perpetuate injustices and inequalities that impact on communities and groups. They need to be able to critically examine the assumptions that are taken for granted and to consider power relations, culture, and societal issues that impact on occupational rights. Students should have the knowledge and skills to work in diverse areas of practice as well as in traditional health and social care settings (RCOT, 2019, Learning and development standards for Pre-registration education Standard 4.3.2 p.45). There is a need to share occupation-based interventions that work towards

occupational justice, to relate theoretical concepts and practical examples. By decolonising the curriculum, preparing students to focus on social justice issues and to become more politically aware in their curriculum and placements, healthier communities can be fostered in traditionally marginalised groups.

That said, occupational therapy practice with asylum seekers and refugees is developing into an increasingly important area of practice given the growing number of displaced people around the world. Since the start of this study in 2017 the numbers of people forced to flee their homes has risen exponentially from 68.41 million people in 2017 – to a projected 89.3 million people (UNHCR, 2021). This is projected to grow due to 100 million, due in part to the crisis in Ukraine. Maintaining a strong professional identity is key when working alongside asylum seekers and refugees and involves having confidence in our role as occupational therapists and not undervaluing the contribution that we have to offer service users, be they individuals or communities.

Occupational therapy curricula need to provide learning opportunities for students to deepen their knowledge and to contribute to the evidence of meeting the occupational and social justice needs of asylum seekers and refugees. This will enable them to promote the important contribution occupational therapists can make in this significant and developing area of practice. As Mother Teresa, (in Ramani et al, 2021p.970) said, 'We alone cannot change the world, but we can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples'.

## 7. Conclusions

The SCoRe project participants embraced the opportunity to take part in research with asylum seekers and refugees. The project had definite value and meaning for them in their academic, developmental, and professional journey to becoming occupational therapists and into their first posts after qualifying. The importance of the project in terms of professional development was evident in all SCoRe project participants' responses, as was their enjoyment and engagement in the research process. The constructs of 'Doing, being and belonging and becoming' (Wilcock, 1999; Hammell, 2004) were important to their training and preparation for practice. The participants developed their 'doing' and 'being' through group work, communication skills and ability to work as a team when facilitating the sessions. The importance of teamwork, consideration of what is meaningful occupation, awareness of culture and cultural difference all had a positive influence on the student's current roles in their professional practice. They developed their 'belonging' in terms of their interconnectedness with the asylum seekers and refugees and with each other. The 'becoming' part of the construct could be applied to the personal development and change of each participant from the skills learned about cultural difference, to cultural humility and their own personal growth. They were able to draw on practical skills and enhanced communication skills as well as their understanding of the importance of cultural humility in practice. These all enhanced the sense of self, confidence and professional identity and enriched their performance in job interviews and boosted their employability.

The SCoRe project gave the participants the knowledge, skills, and confidence to inform others and advocate for the needs of asylum seekers, refugees, and social justice and to challenge media stereotypes. They learned through the research process, the occupational justice framework (Stadynk, Townsend and Wilcock, 2010) and the capabilities approach (Sen, 2009). They increased their knowledge of occupational science and occupational therapy, social inclusion, and exclusion that people have the occupational right to engage in,

live well and be included in their community (WFOT, 2019). This is particularly important for the profession as working with asylum seekers and refugees continues to be an important contemporary and developing area of occupational therapy practice. This study has demonstrated how inspiring and fulfilling working with asylum seekers and refugees can be. We will continue to develop and contribute to the evidence base through our SCoRe projects and disseminate our findings nationally and internationally.

## **7.1 Implications for education and practice**

There are four main implications that the findings of this study have for occupational therapy practice. Firstly, with appropriate support and training students can be given the opportunity to engage in SCoRe projects to engage in and develop meaningful real-world research addressing important contemporary issues for society. The SCoRe projects enable students to work in a team to develop knowledge and build on the evidence base that can inform their future career development, enhance employability, and inform the profession. This links to the RCOT (2021a) Career development framework and the RCOT (2021b) Professional standards for occupational therapy practice conduct and ethics.

Secondly, pre-registration occupational therapy students should be given the opportunity to consider cultural humility in their curricula to provide a critical and informed approach to working with people from a range of diverse perspectives and should be encouraged to critically examine and question the cultural safety and relevance of their practice (Lim and Duque, 2011p 103). If working with asylum seekers and refugees, they should have training in understanding the process of seeking asylum, cultural awareness, and cultural diversity. This will influence professional identity, increase the effectiveness of health professionals, reduce health disparities that fall along cultural lines and increase the relevance of occupational therapy as it develops globally (Agner, 2020).

Thirdly, the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 5 should be used with occupational therapy students and occupational therapists to consider how the person needs to be central to the development and delivery of services. Occupations that enable people to achieve their goals are interlinked. 'Doing, being, belonging and becoming' can be explored in relation to the constructs in the conceptual framework namely, the person and occupation, profession, society, and globalisation. This framework can be used to enable occupational therapists to plan and develop interventions, reflect on their own assumptions, and consider their practice when working with asylum seekers and refugees and marginalised groups. Engaging in studies that are value based enables occupational therapy students and occupational therapists to develop a conscious awareness of identity (being) and offers a vehicle for professional identity formation (becoming) (Ennals et al, 2016).

Occupational therapy is a justice-orientated practice that promotes the capability of individuals to participate in meaningful occupations (Hammell, 2017). Students should consider social and occupational justice as part of their curricula. Embracing a justice orientated occupational therapy practice requires therapists to broaden their clinical lens to identify, analyse and address environmental and system level barriers to participation (Wolf et al, 2010). Occupational justice is distinct from mainstream theories of social justice because it targets 'being' and 'doing' and the freedom to participate in occupations that promote justice. Occupational therapists use a person-centred approach and reflexive practice to recognise and consider how injustices could be different and challenge sociocultural values and beliefs.

Finally, occupational therapy students should collaborate with other professionals and participate in national and international networks of occupational therapists working with people who have been displaced. Several occupational therapists have formed an OT Europe Interest group working with displaced persons and who have produced an 'Action for peace initiative' (ENOTHE 2022) aimed at students and lecturers embarking on projects with displaced persons. WFOT (2014) have a position statement on Human displacement. They

and Interact (an International Erasmus project) have also produced resources and learning modules on working with displaced persons and global migration which are important essential additions to the occupational therapy curriculum.

## **7.2 Limitations**

This research was a small-scale study using groups of students engaged on the SCoRe projects working with asylum seekers and refugees over a three-year period. There were thirty participants who had undertaken the SCoRe projects within the timeframe of the study, eighteen participants were recruited, which was 60% of the total potential sample which was excellent. One of the limitations of the study was that of which participants chose to take part. The research findings were positive and feedback on participating in research was favourable. There is no way of knowing the views of the other 12 potential participants who chose not to take part in this study and whether the findings would have been any different. A larger sample size may have added to the findings but in terms of IPA methodology there needs to be a point at which data collection should stop. There is no right sample size (Smith and Osborn, 2008, p.54). Small sample sizes are the norm in IPA studies as the analysis of large data sets may result in the loss of potentially subtle nuances and meanings (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). It could be argued that only those that found the SCoRe project beneficial chose to participate, and this could have positively skewed the findings.

A methodological limitation was the fact that the interviews were conducted by one of the SCoRe project tutors. This may have led to bias in that the participants may have not felt they could have critiqued the SCoRe research projects as honestly as they might with a researcher who they did not know or with a researcher who did not have links to the SCoRe project. The participants may not have wanted to cause offence by offering negative opinions of the project. Although according to Finlay, (2006) in terms of reliability what is said

in the interview is dependent on the researcher's approach and takes place at a precise time and place, in a specific interpersonal context. Another researcher, or the same researcher interviewing at a different time or place may not elicit the same story (Finlay, 2006 p. 320). The findings were favourable towards the project and perceived as a valuable learning opportunity. The findings concurred with positive, anecdotal whole cohort module feedback on the SCoRe projects at the end of each project.

The interviews took place online during the pandemic. By their own admission, the participants were often physically and mentally exhausted from working in busy clinical settings. It could be questioned whether working in the pandemic may have changed participants' aspirations about where they chose to work in the future and/or if a more longitudinal study with a follow up interview may have yielded different findings. For some SCoRe participants, it was three years since they had taken part in the SCoRe project. A more longitudinal study may, therefore, not have altered their views.

Whilst the purpose of qualitative and IPA studies is not to generalise (Shenton, 2004) the findings will have value, meaning and relevance to students taking part in SCoRe projects within occupational therapy programmes in other universities and different professional health programmes. It was difficult to determine whether it was the specific subject area, the cultural aspect of the project, or working together as a research team that the participants found most beneficial. A SCoRe project focussing on a different marginalised community may have yielded comparable findings. Ultimately the results of this study can be understood in the context of the SCoRe project with asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. Similar studies employing the same methods in a different country or with different marginalised groups would be valued (Shenton, 2004).

### 7.3 Recommendations

Occupational therapy students should engage in students as co researcher projects to develop their research skills and contribute to the evidence base for occupational therapy, occupational science, and social justice.

Students engaged in research with marginalised groups should adopt a compassionate approach to research (Liamputtong, 2010), placing the people they are working with at the heart of the study, not just carrying out research as partial fulfilment for a degree.

Compassionate research that supports enablement and empowerment of the participants is important. Participants should be treated as equals in the research process. Cultural differences can be significant, and students should adopt appropriate approaches to build trust, establish communication, adopt cultural humility and a willingness to learn with and about others.

Once qualified, occupational therapists should continue to collaborate with asylum seekers and refugees in the design and delivery of services, conducting research to develop and influence policy at a local, national, and international level. They should continue to co-develop services and work alongside other professionals. There is a growing need to build capacity for a range of culturally appropriate assessments and for staff to be trained to adopt cultural humility in their practice. There are increasing and local partnership networks that advocate for social justice and occupational therapists should be part of those networks.

Occupational therapists are well positioned to work effectively with people seeking social and occupational justice and with asylum seekers and refugees. They can engage people in new environments, act as a 'Match maker' (Blankvoort et al, 2018, p.94) to different opportunities in their new localities, translating customs and practices, building connections, networking, and advocating for justice.

#### **7.4 Future research**

Interprofessional collaboration with other health care students engaged on allied health programmes would be beneficial in future SCoRe projects (Blankvoort et al, 2018; Blankvoort et al, 2019; Pecukonis, Doyle and Bliss, 2008). This would provide valuable opportunities for interprofessional learning for students across Europe and beyond as well as offering greater diversity of thought and broader interpretation and analysis of findings.

Further research into the benefits of SCoRe research should be conducted on an alternative project with people who experience social injustice (WFOT, 2016; Blankvoort et al, 2018) to determine whether it is working as a project team that enhances learning or whether it is the area of study that the students find beneficial.

There are opportunities to develop SCoRe projects with students from occupational therapy programmes overseas. There is a dynamic group of occupational therapists working with displaced people in Europe (ENOTHE; European Network of Occupational Therapists in Higher Education) who have an 'Action for peace' initiative in which occupational therapists work alongside refugees and asylum seekers to advocate for human rights and social justice to enable them to adjust, integrate and become self-supporting in their new environment. It would provide an excellent learning opportunity for the students as well as a diversification of ideas and help to develop the growing evidence base and expertise working with displaced people.

## 7.5 Personal and professional reflection

Given the context of this study, I thought it would be appropriate to use the Kawa conceptual model (Iwama, Thompson, and MacDonald, 2009) to reflect on my experience of doctoral research. The Kawa (Japanese for river) conceptual model focuses on contexts that shape and influence the challenges of people's day to day lives like a river. It is a culturally responsive framework which can be used in an increasingly diverse and global professional world. An optimal state of wellbeing is portrayed by a river with an unimpeded flow. Aspects of the environment and life circumstances like structures in the river can affect the flow. Rocks (life circumstances), walls and bottom (environment), driftwood (assets and liabilities) all determine the flow of the river and therefore life's journey.

Like many of the participants in this research study I have been on a research path. I would suggest it was more of an expedition, longer than anticipated and scattered with unplanned deviations along the way. The COVID-19 pandemic (large rock) had a significant impact on my workload for two years of the study and at times it was hard to keep the momentum going. It stifled my creativity and energy. With support from family, friends, research supervisory team and work colleagues I was able to keep going with the study which provided me with a stable environment in which to work (environment).

The research process has been challenging every step of the way (like driftwood), stimulating, frustrating, empowering but enjoyable. I experienced a range of emotions from imposter syndrome to pure delight. I learned about the research process and the arduous writing and re-writing needed to achieve a semblance of coherent thought.

I have gained practical skills and sufficient knowledge to engage in further research projects and supervise other students. Listening to participants and the impact that the research had on them was quite humbling. I had not prepared myself for the value and meaning that the project had on the participants and continues to do so in their current practice.

Insecurities in my knowledge and skill (driftwood) at the start of the study have reduced and I now feel confident to engage with the research community both in the UK and internationally. Coming to the end of this study, I feel I have learned an enormous amount, about the research process, myself, and how to support students to advocate with and for the needs of asylum seekers and refugees (river is able to flow).

As the number of people forcibly displaced worldwide continues to grow, it is imperative that graduating occupational therapists have the knowledge, skills, and critical reflexivity to challenge Western centric practices. They need to advocate for social justice, and work alongside people in occupation focussed practice within their communities. This research adds to the growing evidence base to influence the occupational therapy curriculum as per the Learning and development standards for pre-registration education (RCOT, 2019).

Learners are required to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to respond to occupational issues that arise due to health and social disparities, diversity and human rights issues for populations, communities, and individuals (RCOT, 2019, Standard 4.3.2 p.45).

A final thought, the SCoRe projects have value and meaning, not just for the students participating in the research but most importantly for the asylum seekers and refugees we continue to work with, as one refugee said of our work, 'It's like hope in a dark room'. This study focusses on the first three SCoRe projects with asylum seekers and refugees. I see it as an important part of my role as an occupational therapist and senior lecturer to work with increasingly diverse and multicultural people who seek sanctuary in the United Kingdom. I will continue to encourage students I work with to challenge media stereotypes and advocate for social justice. The SCoRe projects have continued, we are now in our 7<sup>th</sup> year working alongside asylum seekers and refugees who seek sanctuary. We will continue to disseminate our research both in the UK and internationally.

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## Abbreviations

AMED – Allied and Complementary Medicine Database

BHSc – Bachelor of Health Sciences

CAOT – Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists

CINAHL – Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature

ENOTHE – European Network of Occupational Therapy in Higher Education

GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation

HCPC – The Health and Care Professions Council

HEE – Health Education England

HM Government- His Majesty's Government

IPA – Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

MoCA – Montreal Cognitive Assessment

MSc – Master of Science

MS Teams – Microsoft Teams Software Package (Teams)

RCOT – Royal College of Occupational Therapists

SCoRe – Students as Co-Researchers

UKOTRF – United Kingdom Occupational Therapy Research Foundation

UKRI – United Kingdom Research and Innovation

UNHCR – office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WFOT – World Federation of Occupational Therapists

## Appendices

## Appendix 1 Ethics approval letter

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Fiona Howlett

School of Education

20 June 2019

Dear Fiona,

I am pleased to inform you that your project "*Value and meaning of participating in a students as co researchers project with asylum seekers and refugees: impact on professional identity and employability*" has been approved by the Cross-School Research Ethics Committee for the School of Education, School of Humanities, Religion and Philosophy, and School of Languages and Linguistics.

The approval code is RECedu00029.

You may now proceed with the project.

Yours sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. J. Hall', written in a cursive style.

Prof Christopher J Hall, Chair

Est.  
**1841**

## **Appendix 2 Participant Information Sheet**

### **Title of project**

**Value and meaning of participating in a student as co researchers project with asylum seekers and refugees: impact on professional identity and employability.**

### **Introduction**

In this research study I am interested in finding out about your experience of participating in a student as co researcher project (SCoRE) with asylum seekers and refugees. I am keen to understand if participating in the project has had any influence on your choice of employment and your developing professional identity. Anecdotally, the students' feedback of participating in the project has been that the experience of engaging in this research had deepened their knowledge and understanding of cross-cultural working and enhanced the importance of using a compassionate approach in their future work with asylum seekers and refugees. I wanted to explore this further.

### **What will I be asked to do if I take part?**

Taking part in the study will involve you taking part in a semi structured interview which may be face to face or telephone or via Teams. The focus will be on your experience of participation in the research and the interview should take no longer than 30 minutes.

**Will the information I provide be anonymous and confidential?**

Yes. Any information you provide will be kept confidential and your name will not be recorded. You will be identified by number.

**Do I have to take part?**

There is no obligation for you to take part in the study and you can withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

**Where can I obtain further information if I need it?**

If you wish to obtain further information about the study, please contact (Fiona Howlett [f.howlett@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:f.howlett@yorks.ac.uk) on 01904 624624.

**This project has been approved by the**

**Cross School Ethics Committee at York St John University**

## Appendix 3 Consent form

### RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

|                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Name of Researcher(s)</b>                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Fiona Howlett</b>                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Title of study</b>                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Value and meaning of participating in a student as co researchers project with asylum seekers and refugees: impact on professional identity and employability</b> |

**Please read and complete this form carefully. If you are willing to participate in this study, ring the appropriate responses and sign and date the declaration at the end. If you do not understand anything and would like more information, please ask.**

- I have had the research satisfactorily explained to me in verbal and / or written form by the researcher.

**Yes / No**

- I understand the research will involve a short semi structured interview which may be face to face or over Teams/Skype and should take no longer than 30 minutes.

**Yes / No**

- The focus of the interview will be on your participation in the Students as Co Researchers research project with asylum seekers and refugees that you undertook as part of your BHSc Hons in Occupational Therapy.

**Yes / No**

- All interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Each participant will be identified by a number. All recordings will be stored securely in the University's data repository until the EdD study is complete.

**Yes / No**

- I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time without having to give an explanation.

**Yes / No**

- I understand that all information about me will be treated in strict confidence and that I will not be named in any written work arising from this study.

**Yes / No**

- I understand that any audiotape material of me will be used solely for research purposes and will be destroyed on completion of the research.

**Yes / No**

- I understand that you will be discussing the progress of your research with research supervisors at York St John University

**Yes / No**

- I am happy to give some demographic data. The age category I belong to is. Please circle or highlight the relevant category.

- 21-30

- 31-40

- 41-50

- Which student as co researcher project did you undertake?  
(Please circle or highlight the relevant project)
- **2016-17** The value and meaning of a drop-in centre in the North East of England
- **2017-18** The value and meaning of women participating in client centred, client led activity groups.
- **2018-19** An exploration of sustainability in craft-based activity groups for asylum seeking and refugee women

I freely give my consent to participate in this research study and have been given a copy of this form for my own information.

**Signature:** .....

**Date:** .....

Please hand/send this form to the researcher before the interview/telephone/on line interview.

**Lead Researcher:**

Fiona Howlett

Senior Lecturer

School of Health Sciences

York St John University

Lord Mayor's Walk

York

YO31 7EX

[f.howlett@yorksj.ac.uk](mailto:f.howlett@yorksj.ac.uk)

## Appendix 4 Interview schedule

| Participant number | Date of interview |
|--------------------|-------------------|
|--------------------|-------------------|

**Value and meaning of participating in a student as co researchers project with asylum seekers and refugees: impact on professional identity and employability.**

**Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the research study. To reiterate, you will not be identified by name and will be given a participant number when the research is written up.**

1. Could I start by asking you which students as co researcher project you were part of?
  - a. Exploring the value and meaning of a drop-in centre in the North East of England
  - b. Exploring the value and meaning of women participating in client centred, client led activity groups
  - c. Exploring sustainability in craft-based activity groups for asylum seeking and refugee women.
  
2. Do you have a post as an occupational therapist? If so, what clinical area have you chosen to work in?

- a. Or, if not, have you chosen to work in health and social care? If so, what area have you chosen to work in?
  - b. If not, what is your work role?
  
3. Why did you choose to participate in the Students as Co-Researchers' project working alongside asylum seekers and refugees?
  
4. Describe your overall experience working on the Students as Co-Researchers' project with asylum seekers and refugees?
  
5. What, if any, was the educational experience of participating in the students as co researcher's project with asylum seekers and refugees? Could you elaborate?
  
6. Reflecting on your whole occupational therapy programme experience. What did you learn, if anything, from working with the asylum seekers project? Did you learn anything that you did not get from the rest of your undergraduate education?
  
7. What, if any, occupational therapy skills did you develop as a result of the project and do you think it prepared you for future employment? If so, how?
  
8. Has participating in this research influenced your views and understanding of different cultures? If so, how?

9. Has this research experience prepared you for occupational therapy practice? Or your work role? If so, how? If not, why do think this was the case?
  
10. Has this project helped you to develop skills to inform future work with asylum seekers/refugees? If so, how? If not, why do you think that is?
  
11. Has the Students as Co-Researchers' project impacted on your choice of employment setting? If so, how?
  
12. Have you worked with asylum seekers and or refugees in your current role?
  
13. We have come to the end of the interview. Is there anything you would like to add about participating in the Students as Co-Researchers project with asylum seekers and refugees that you have not had the opportunity to discuss?

Thank you for your time.

Would you like a copy of the transcript for you to verify? Yes/No

1 **Appendix 5 Example of interview transcript**

2

3 **SCoRe project research interview with Fiona Howlett and B3I**

4

5 B3I's consent to record the call and proceed with the interview was obtained.

6

7 F: Could you please start by telling me which project you were involved with and  
8 what year?

9 B3I: It was the participation of female asylum seekers and refugees in meaningful  
10 activity. It was 2017/18.

11 F: Did you do the craft groups?

12 B3I: I did the cake making groups.

13 F: Oh yes, I remember.

14 F: Firstly, why did you choose to do a SCoRe group project and why did you  
15 choose the asylum seekers project specifically?

16 B3I: I think I had two options. I was going to do my own idea with physical activity  
17 and mental health, but then I also saw this one and I hadn't done much in terms  
18 of refugees and asylum seekers, but I had always wanted to work with a different  
19 group rather than older people or something like that.

20 I wanted to learn more myself about the process and everything (which I did  
21 manage to do) and I think it was just really appealing.

22 Working with women as well and being able to make an impact on them was  
23 important and the fact that it was a bit of a different project, and I could relate to  
24 them and also learn myself about seeking asylum.

25 F: Could you describe your overall experience of working on the project? If you  
26 had to sum up what it was like to someone, what would you say?

27 B3I: In terms of the group, I felt it was a very caring and nurturing environment to  
28 be in, especially when you're doing something as intense as your dissertation  
29 and something that is so important for being able to qualify to become an OT.

30 Everyone was working together; there wasn't an 'I want to do better than you'  
31 atmosphere which was really nice. That could be a danger of doing a SCoRe  
32 project. So, I don't know if we were just very lucky, and the fact that you guys  
33 were very supportive, but we had a really nice group.

34 In terms of being an actual student and writing my dissertation, it was really  
35 caring, and we all worked together which was really nice. It was the actual project  
36 I found eye opening, and I thought it sort of inspired me to think that I can make a  
37 difference, and it made me think what an amazing thing we do, so that was  
38 lovely.

39 I actually read through my dissertation today, just to remind myself and I looked  
40 at my final quote and it was about how one of the ladies had said that it had been  
41 the hope in a dark room, and I just thought how wonderful that we have given  
42 someone that feeling that everything might be ok and that there are people who  
43 care about other people who don't always feel like there is someone there to care

44 about them. So that was eye opening, and really touching. Even now, I'm getting  
45 goose bumps talking about it.

46 F: It does make me emotional too to think about that.

47 B3I: It was such a wonderful thing to hear. I think it was also really fun.

48 I spoke to a couple of colleagues today as I had told them I was going to do this  
49 interview, and we were talking about our dissertations and they were all saying  
50 how they had done some of the literature reviews and things, and they said how  
51 exciting and how much more of this we should be doing as OT's.

52 We should be using our dissertation as a way of doing more research and go out  
53 into the community.

54 I feel like it was an amazing opportunity that not a lot of other people did get to  
55 do. I don't know how other universities work, but by the sounds of it, not many  
56 others do things like this.

57 F: They don't actually, no. We are one of the few that actually do research in the  
58 final year, which is bizarre isn't it.

59 B3I: It seems crazy, especially when you think we are going out to practice. So  
60 yes, I think it was an amazing opportunity, and people are almost jealous that I  
61 managed to do that. So, it was really good fun, and doing all those practical  
62 things was brilliant.

63 F: Thank you, that's really good.

64 F: How did working on the project impact on your overall educational experience?

65 B3I: It brought things together. We had done all the theory, we had done lots of  
66 looking up of different articles and seeing what other people say, and what other  
67 people put together, and sometimes it's not the most exciting thing, to read an  
68 article, so to be able to go through the process of writing an article and seeing  
69 what you find, why you use certain methodology, and how you find the  
70 conclusions and the results to be able to go through that sort of consolidated  
71 everything we had done, and showed us that there is actually a reason that they  
72 made us do these kind of things.

73 I'm not very good at reading articles anymore, but to actually have written one  
74 myself, it consolidated my knowledge, and made me realise that I do know  
75 something.

76 F: Yes, that's really good.

77 F: What did you gain from working on the project that you didn't get from the rest  
78 of your undergraduate programme?

79 B3I: I suppose with any university degree, you have to do things that you don't  
80 enjoy, such as doing a literature review about something you are not necessarily  
81 interested in. I was never very good at that; I was always good at the practical  
82 side.

83 I almost wish I'd done it earlier on because being able to do your own project  
84 makes you realise why you then need to know about the methodology, and the  
85 theory behind it. You need to know all that to be able to do your research study.

86 So that's what I got from it.

87 It's good fun doing the actual research, and going to meet the people and that's  
88 the main part, and you need that to be able to go through to be able to write an  
89 article or find research that actually back in 1<sup>st</sup> year, when we were going through  
90 methodology that I needed to be able to know all that to be able to do the project,  
91 if that makes sense.

92 F: Yes, it does make sense, thank you.

93 B3I: Are there any skills you developed on the project that prepared you for your  
94 first post? Are you in your first post? I haven't asked you that actually.

95 B3I: No, my first post was a Band 5 rotation with xxxx Care, funded by the NHS.  
96 It was older people's rehab, and then I rotated onto a stroke ward, then did rapid  
97 response, and then into the community. I have been in a school now for 2 years.

98 F: Did doing the project prepare you for employment in any way? Did you discuss  
99 it at interview, did it link to your employment in any way?

100 B3I: Not in my first post. In terms of diversity, yes it did.

101 The different people that you meet in whatever job or setting you are in; you are  
102 always going to meet people from different backgrounds. It made me more aware  
103 that there are lots of people from lots of different backgrounds. In that respect  
104 yes, it did link in.

105 In my current post now, I have spoken about it with some of the older children. I  
106 work with children from the age of 4 to 19/20. Some of the older children, I have  
107 actually spoken about the project with, not on a big scale, to show them that I  
108 have worked with other people and that I can help in lots of different ways and  
109 being able to explain what an OT does. They all want to know that.

110 They used to ask, “what’s the point in you being here?”. I then explain that I can  
111 help people in lots of areas. It explains my role and how I can help them, and how  
112 I can help other people.

113 So, in that respect, yes it has helped, and has helped the older kids, in particular,  
114 to see that there are lots of different ways that you can be taught.

115 F: That’s great, thank you. The next question is about culture, really. So, do you  
116 think the project has helped you to develop any cultural awareness, or cultural  
117 competence, would you say?

118 B3I: Yes, as I said at the beginning, I have never really known how the asylum  
119 seeking process sort of went, because I had never really had the opportunity to  
120 find out, so I think, in that respect, yes, I now understand why people come over,  
121 I now understand the stresses and strains – I mean I will never fully understand it,  
122 because I won’t go through it myself, but to see the emotions that the women had  
123 and how much something so simple as us going in impacted their well-being and  
124 how unbelievably stressful it must have been for them trying to seek asylum  
125 somewhere.

126 You know, there was one lady who tried 5 or 6 times, and it was at the point  
127 where she was going to be going back home again, and I have to appreciate  
128 what I have and the fact that I have everything so unbelievably easy, and it does  
129 make me literally appreciate, oh gosh everything. (B3I looked emotional.)

130 F: I will give you some positive news, that lady did get refugee status.

131 B3I: did she, oh that’s brilliant. Was it soon after we had been there?

132 F: Yes, it was (big smile!)

133 B3I: Oh, that's good. Oh, thank goodness, (head in hands) I remember she was  
134 so emotional, and it was just heart breaking, because you can't do anything.

135 F: No, but she's got her status now, so that's great. It took her 6 years, I think.  
136 (Shakes head)

137 B3I: Unbelievable.

138 F: Yes, it does make you think, doesn't it?

139 F: So, have you treated anybody who has been an asylum seeker or refugee  
140 since you qualified?

141 B3I: No, I don't think so. I am thinking back to when I was in Rapid Response, as  
142 you don't know as much about those patients, because you are obviously straight  
143 in and straight out (clicks fingers). To be honest, I probably will have, but I don't  
144 know, sorry.

145 F: And you probably don't have many on your caseload in a private school in  
146 xxxx, I wouldn't imagine?

147 B3I Well, I think we actually do.

148 F: Oh ok.

149 B3I: Or people who have relatives that have been seeking asylum so probably  
150 Mums and Dads, but because it is funded by the NHS, the parents aren't  
151 necessarily paying anything.

152 F: Oh, ok.

153 B3I: So, I think there are relatives, and we have a very culturally diverse school.  
154 There is a massive push at the moment for diversity to be spoken about and to  
155 be not something that people shy around.

156 The older kids in particular, talking about race, culture if there is any kind of  
157 language being used that shouldn't be used, then that is very much approached  
158 at the moment, and there's a big push for that.

159 F: Having done the project, do you feel more comfortable with that?

160 B3I: I think so. Like I said before, it has made me more aware that some people  
161 don't have it so easy, and so for some people they might be so appreciative that  
162 they are where they are and that they are likely to be the ones who thank you for  
163 what you are doing, and you know how people can be!

164 So, it has made me more aware that it's not easy for some people. We also have  
165 a lot of parents who don't necessarily speak English as their first language, if at  
166 all, so that's another thing that we have to be aware of.

167 F: Yes, am sure that has similar issues doesn't it, really?

168 B3I: Yes, exactly. Trying to contact parents who can't understand what you're  
169 saying, is yeah difficult, and for them as well.

170 F: Absolutely. And then this is probably the hardest question, really, it's about  
171 professional identity really. Do you feel that your professional identity, which is  
172 pretty hard to define – it's about your values, your beliefs and the way that you  
173 work with people and your working ethos, do you think being on the project has  
174 helped form that or shaped that in any way?

175 B3I: I think so. Yes, I suppose it was the first real time we were, or I was in that  
176 situation where we were somewhere where there were people who were so  
177 vulnerable and so unsure of their future.

178 I suppose, in a hospital, people are unsure of their future, and wherever you are,  
179 but this was like are they going to be in England, or are they going to be  
180 somewhere completely different?

181 I think it probably helped me to grow empathy towards people who don't have  
182 any idea of where they might be in one week, two weeks' time or a month's time.  
183 It also showed me that the smallest things can have a massive impact on people.

184 I think as long as I am trying my best to support whoever I am working with,  
185 whether it's an asylum seeker, whether it's someone that's homeless, a child with  
186 special needs, whoever it is, as long as I'm doing my best and communicating  
187 with that person, rather than just with the parent, or just with the carer, to find out  
188 what's important to them, then I'm doing my job well.

189 F: Yes

190 B3I: I think that's something I try and carry with me and putting that person first, is  
191 probably yeah, what was consolidated within that project.

192 F: Yes.

193 B3I I also think that the background of the children that I'm working with or the  
194 people that I'm working with, I try and look into it and don't judge them for their  
195 past but understand that the different jokes you might make or the different, you  
196 know, understand your audience, type of thing, and see that some things may be  
197 more sensitive to them. So yes, I don't know if I've covered that?

198 F: Yes, you have, that's lovely, actually. I could tell that's what you meant all the  
199 way through, but you said it really nicely there, so thank you.

200 F: So, has this project influenced your choice of employment at all? I don't know  
201 whether it has.

202 B3I: to be honest, in terms of employment, my first rotation was purely because I  
203 was in Australia at the time, and I was like, oh my goodness I am going to go  
204 home and I'm not going to have a job, so I applied for the job, had the interview in  
205 Australia over Zoom, and got the job, so probably not for that one.

206 Then in terms of the school, that was very much, I saw the job and thought wow I  
207 would love to work with kids and thought I wasn't going to get the job, but I did,  
208 and then I had to change my life completely and move to London. Laughs!

209 So probably not, but it has made me more aware that there are lots of different  
210 areas that I can work in. I was saying, just last week to my boyfriend, I want to try  
211 as many different areas as I can, before I specialise and settle down because I  
212 don't know where I can make the most impact, and I don't know.

213 So yes, I would love to try lots of different places. I think it's probably made me  
214 more aware of how many different areas I can be in. And you know, I've been in  
215 four different areas already, which is pretty good.

216 F: It is, really good.

217 B3I Yes, but I have only really had two jobs, so, yes it has made me aware that  
218 there are so many different avenues. One of my dreams is to go and work in  
219 Australia with the Aboriginals. I think that would be a total culturally different  
220 experience to what I'm used to, so maybe it has helped me.

221 F: Yes, I'd say that it probably has. Thank you.

222 F: And then finally, what is your current role and job title? Are you a Band 6?

223 B3: Because it is a private school, we don't do Bands. But I would like to think I  
224 am at mid to top Band 6 level at the moment. I have people that I help to  
225 supervise. I am an occupational therapist in a Special Educational Needs school  
226 predominantly for speech and language and sensory processing and difficulties  
227 for ages 3 – 19 so all the way through. I'm currently undertaking training in  
228 sensory integration.

229 F: That's brilliant thanks. You've done very well, haven't you?

230 B3: I'm doing ok yes – laughing.

231 F: We gave you a good grounding, I think?

232 B3: Yes, I think so! I just feel that all the experience I can get will help.

233 F: Yes definitely. I did lots of different things, and I feel it stood me in good stead.  
234 I'm not sure what you want to do in the future, but when I became a lecturer, you  
235 can pull on your experiences and it really helps.

236 B3: Yes, am sure it does.

237 F: So, is there anything else about the project that I haven't asked you about that  
238 you had a burning desire to say?

239 B3: I don't think so. I think it's really important to say what an amazing  
240 experience it was.

241 When that lady said it was her hope in a dark room, it really shows you how much  
242 something so small can make such a big impact on somebody and I think  
243 sometimes when I am practising, what am I doing, how am I actually helping this  
244 person, but just to actually show that you care or just to have that one  
245 conversation, or just to stand with that person while they are a upset, whether  
246 that's a client or a client's family member, the impact that you can make is huge.

247 Especially for someone who has no expectation of being looked after because  
248 they have had such a horrible time, that will impact their well-being so positively.  
249 You might never know how much.

250 It was an amazing experience, and to have that as your dissertation when  
251 everyone else is moaning about doing theirs, and you are like "Yay, we are going  
252 make cakes today!" (Laughs) and then to all come together and have a really  
253 nice time with people, that made it a much more pleasant experience. Lots of  
254 people have very bad experiences doing their dissertation and mine was great.

255 F: Thank you, that's lovely. That's really helpful.

256 F: Thank you for your time. It has been a pleasure speaking to you again.

257



## Appendix 6 Example of reflection: Reflection on B3I interview

This was an uplifting and positive interview. Despite the interview taking place at the end of a busy workday, I was humbled by the enthusiasm and the passion for the project and for the SCoRe project. This participant had completed the project 2 years before the interview took place, but she was still keen to discuss the project with her colleagues. She was proud of the project, and this came over in the interview.

*I discussed my dissertation with other OTs, and they said how exciting it was and how much more of this we should be doing as OTs.*

B3I was keen to learn about the process of seeking asylum and how it impacted on people. She considered her own values and beliefs, and the project was humbling for her as she saw how traumatic it was to be an asylum seeker. She spoke movingly about the plight of one of the women in the group she worked with and how difficult the asylum process is and what an impact it can have on an individual.

B3I enjoyed being part of a group. She had not always enjoyed research up until this point and found reading articles difficult. Putting into practice the theoretical components of research into practical group work brought the research to life for her. She enjoyed the camaraderie of the group and not feeling pressure to be better than any of the group. There was no competition. She felt inspired by the project. She felt the group was supportive and was not afraid to ask for support if needed.

For me the most powerful part of the interview was when she discussed one of the comments one of the women in the project had said to her when she was working with her. *It is like hope in a dark room.* B3I said it still gave her goosebumps thinking about that and that she had made such an impact on someone who had so little. The project clearly meant something to B3I. She was aware of the trauma some of the women has suffered and how much difference the creative groups made.

*'It is like hope in a dark room – how wonderful that we had given someone that feeling... they don't often think there are people that care about them'.*

B3I talked about the benefits of doing a hands-on project and what an opportunity it was. The practical group sessions were enjoyable both for the participants and the women who attended the sessions.

The research helped to prepare B3I for her first post. She was more aware of diversity and difference and making sure she was person centred in her approach. She felt the project influences her practice daily especially when working with children.

*'We have a culturally diverse school. There is a massive push for diversity at the moment. Made me more aware that some people don't understand English. We have parents that don't speak English'.*

I wondered whether it was more than language B3I was talking about in hindsight I should have pressed for deeper discussion here.

In terms of professional identity and employability the project helped B3I understand what someone who seeks asylum must go through in order to gain refugee status. B3I found it humbling that what the SCoRe group did in terms of their group sessions made such a difference.

B3I frequently shares her experience with other occupational therapists and the children she works with. She sees it as an important part of her role to advocate for the needs for asylum seekers and refugees and ensure their stories are heard. B3I believed she had more empathy with people because of the project and she puts this into her daily practice.

In terms of employability, B3I is not working specifically with asylum seekers and refugees but she is using her skills she learned on the project. She wants to work in Australia with the Aboriginal population in the future. B3I felt that the project helped with professional identity in that it helped to,

'grow empathy towards people who don't have any idea of where they might be on from one week to the next'.

B3I had a deeper understanding of peoples' needs and their contexts as a result of doing the project. Smallest things can have a massive impact on people. Putting the person first, that's what consolidated the project. She is much more person centred as a result of doing the project.

In summary this was a positive, lively interview. B3I's passion for the project was evident throughout. It was clear that the project had an impact on the occupational therapy practitioner she is today.

**Possible themes areas for discussion:**

Group work was important so too was teamwork

Supportive team

Practical hands on – inspiring to self and others.

Proud to be involved in the project

Practical application of the theory of research

Doing something creative

Personal growth and learning

Sharing knowledge gained

Person centred- understanding difference

Hope in a dark room small things make a big difference.

The practical aspects of the project were good.

Professional identity helped to develop empathy.