THE EXPERIENCES OF POSTGRADUATE PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS REGARDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the experiences of postgraduate psychology students regarding their multicultural competence development (MCCD). King and Baxter Magolda's multidimensional framework for the development of intercultural maturity, comprising cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions served as theoretical grounding. A qualitative, case study design was employed, using thematic analysis to analyse focus group data. It was found MCCD takes place across the lifespan and in various contexts. Methods to overcome obstacles to MCCD were identified, as well as the participants' positions of MCCD. Lastly, educational experiences that promote MCCD are discussed.

Keywords: multicultural competence development, cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal domains, postgraduate psychology students, educational experiences.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa is known for its diversity in terms of culture, ethnicity, language, race and other contextual aspects. The South African population consists of 51.77 million people, comprising the African (79.2%), Coloured (8.9%), Indian (2.5%) and White (8.9%) racial groups (Statistics South Africa 2012). Integrated within the different ethnic and racial groups in South Africa, one also finds the people who have immigrated from the rest of the world who still maintain the identities of their cultural heritage (Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) 2011). The country hosts 11 official languages, of which English is the language that is most widely understood, although it is the mother tongue of only 9.6 per cent of the population (GCIS 2011; Statistics South Africa 2012). South Africa consists of a multicultural diverse population with a combination of Western values and indigenous practices and beliefs (Eagle,

Haynes and Long 2007). Moreover, South African citizens differ in terms of their levels of individualism and collectivism (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001), their integration with the general population, their political history, their socio-economic status, their adaptation with regards to Western influences and the generation in which they grew up (Berry, Poortinga, Segall and Dasen 2002). South Africans seeking mental health care thus have different cultural backgrounds that can impact on the type of psychological intervention methods needed.

Approximately 18 per cent of registered South African are Black (Duncan, Van Niekerk and Townsend 2004). Thus, when considering the psychologist-to-population ratio, it is required of psychologists to be able to work across racial and language borders in order to provide mental health care services to the whole continuum of the population. Thus, many of the clients that South African psychologists see come from different cultural backgrounds than their own. Psychologists' cultural backgrounds and their perceptions regarding mental illness impact the way that they think about psychological intervention, which explains why diagnoses of mental illnesses differ across cultures (Bernal and Sáez-Santiago 2006). According to Pedersen (2002), it does not matter how skilful, qualified or cognitively advanced psychologists are; if they are making biased or culturally inapt assumptions, they will not be precise in evaluation, meaningful in comprehending, or suitable in their interventions. There is a direct relationship between a psychologist's professional level of multicultural competence (MCC) and the outcomes of therapy (Campinha-Bacote 2002). The MCC of South African psychologists is thus greatly valued and a definite priority.

MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE (MCC)

Cultural competence refers to the skill of being able to function effectively within an unfamiliar cultural environment and to be able to communicate competently with individuals from various cultural heritages (Wilson, Ward and Fischer 2013). Although the specific nuances of the terms cultural, intercultural and multicultural interactions must be acknowledged, the terms are often also used used interchangeably (King and Baxter Magolda 2005), as was the case in this study.

MCC within a psychological setting refers to the on-going process in which psychologists strive to achieve the ability to work effectively within the cultural context of the client, which includes the individual, family and the community (Campinha-Bacote 2002). A multiculturally competent mental health practitioner is effective in treating clients who have different cultural, ethnic, racial, sexual, religious, ecological and educational backgrounds because they have the ability to adapt to different cultural contexts (Comas-Diaz 2011). Multicultural psychologists aim to incorporate objectives such as respect for human rights, language, age, sexual preference

and ethnic origin into their daily practice (Kaygusuz 2012). Psychologists who are multiculturally competent are more effective in addressing the needs of their clients (Hill 2003).

MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT (MCCD)

King and Baxter Magolda (2005) formulated a multidimensional framework for the development of intercultural maturity. In the context of this model, multicultural (or intercultural) maturity is defined as a multi-dimensional concept consisting of a range of attributes that can be divided into cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions (King and Baxter Magolda 2005). They suggested that individuals learn more complex tasks by taking a series of steps as they move along the multicultural developmental continuum (King and Baxter Magolda 2005). This continuum includes initial, intermediate and mature levels of development related to the cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of MCC (King and Baxter Magolda 2005). Braskamp, Braskamp and Engberg (2013) established that individuals simultaneously develop cognitive skills and more complex thinking; a sense of identity and internal self; and an ability to relate to other individuals. Landreman, Rasmussen, King and Xinquan Jiang (2007) contributed to this notion, suggesting an interrelated relationship between the three dimensions of intercultural development.

The cognitive domain relates to how individuals think about and make sense of diversity issues, and has to do with beliefs and perspectives centred on knowledge. The intrapersonal domain relates to how people view themselves, how they develop a sense of identity, and how they make use of their values and beliefs to make life decisions. Interpersonal development can be described as our interpersonal identity or sense of self-ability to relate to others. Individuals can be on different levels of maturity with regards to the cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions. As students take steps in the cognitive, interpersonal or intrapersonal dimensions, they gradually develop the ability to be more multiculturally competent (or mature) (King and Baxter Magolda 2005; Quaye and Baxter Magolda 2007).

MCCD IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Since it is of such importance for psychologists to be multiculturally competent, it is necessary that psychology students' training programmes include the development of MCC (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi and Bryant 2007) to equip students to work within various therapeutic contexts and a rapidly changing society (Abreu, Chung and Atkinson 2000; Vera and Speight 2003). MCC training will change the way psychology students conceptualise the therapeutic process, from the initial intake to termination (Heppner 2006).

There is a great demand for change and new psychological training models in South Africa (Marchetti-Mercer and Cleaver 2000). Psychology students who are trained to be multiculturally competent and sensitive towards the history, diversity and cultures of South Africa, will be able to provide meaningful contributions to macro-level systems interventions in the future (Leach, Akhurst and Basson 2003). Currently, South African educational institutions are not training their students adequately to intervene in a diverse South African population (Ahmed and Pillay 2004). Training institutions need to focus more on educating their psychology students on explanatory models and intervention strategies relevant to the population with which they are going to work. Ahmed and Pillay (2004) suggested that the training material of psychology students should be evaluated and reformulated to make it applicable and helpful within the current South African context.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Since the MCC training of South African psychology programmes is questioned, it is necessary to investigate students' experiences regarding their MCCD. King and Baxter Magolda (2005) highlighted that further research is needed to explore what types of experiences are related to the development of multicultural maturity, as well as the educational practices that will contribute to MCCD. Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate the experiences of postgraduate psychology students regarding the development of MCC and the educational practices that can enhance, hinder and/or mediate MCCD.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach with a case study design was employed because of the culturally specific and contextually rich in-depth data it produces (Yin 1999).

This study was conducted with postgraduate psychology students. A non-probability purposive sample was used (Tongco 2007) to select participants that could provide rich information that was relevant to the study's aim. The sample group was restricted to postgraduate psychology students, since they are in the process of becoming psychologists and were viewed as knowledgeable experts of their multicultural experiences. The study aimed to include participants from diverse ethnic backgrounds. In total, 11 postgraduate psychology students participated. The ages of the participants varied between 23 and 29 years of age, with the exception of one participant being 50 years old. Only one male student took part in the study, while there were ten female participants. Altogether, there were two Black and nine White participants. When taking the composition of the postgraduate psychology programme

into consideration, it can be argued that the sample was an accurate representation of the postgraduate class with regards to age, gender and race.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Committee of the Department of Psychology and the Dean of Students of the university. All participants were treated fairly and justly, by not discriminating against them, as stipulated in the Health Professions Act, 1974 (Act Nr. 56 of 1974) (South African Department of Health 2006). Prior to the data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of and process followed in the study, as well as the voluntary and confidential nature of their participation. All participants completed informed consent forms prior to the data collection.

Focus groups were used as the method of data collection. Focus groups are particularly useful for exploring people's knowledge and experiences (Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook 2007). Two focus groups, consisting of three and eight participants each, were held. During the focus groups, semi-structured questions were asked to evoke group discussions regarding MCCD. The questions that guided the focus groups were based on the two main research objectives of the study. The raw data of the focus groups were transcribed verbatim for later analysis.

The method of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) was used to analyse the raw data. The purpose of thematic analysis is to highlight the most prominent themes and meanings emerging from the data through the use of a systematic approach. The process of thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was followed. The whole process consisted of two main steps, namely identifying initial codes or meaning units, and categorising codes into themes. The main themes were confirmed and a comprehensive description was written about each theme.

Trustworthiness was obtained through the use of crystallisation and was guided by the four concepts of trustworthiness, namely, credibility; transferability; dependability and confirmability (Shenton 2004). Processes to ensure trustworthiness included the recording and verbatim transcription of both focus group sessions in order to ensure accurate representation of participants' accounts and the provision of adequate information regarding the study's theoretical grounding, the research context and participants, as well as the methods and procedures followed. The researcher made use of the 11 different participants' points of view, as well as her own, since the researcher was seen as an instrument through the process of gathering and analysing the research data. In conclusion, crystallisation was applied by the researcher in the on-going research process by reflecting on herself and the ethical considerations associated with the study.

RESULTS

In the following section, the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis will be presented.

Students' experiences regarding the development of MCC

Participants experiences are summarised related to the when, where and how of MCCD.

Theme 1: The when – The process of MCCD – the past, the present and the future

It was found that participants' cross-cultural experiences took place across their lifespans. This suggests that their MCCD started at a very young age, and still continues. The participants had experiences related to the past (using words such as 'when I was growing up', and referring to their primary and secondary schooling), the present ('varsity' and 'The course I studied') and the anticipated future ('if I do have a client one day', 'In the psychology industry we will be working as psychologists or counsellors' and 'if you are in the helping profession like us who want to do psychology').

While investigating the participants' past, it was found that pre-university experiences moulded the foundation of participants' multicultural knowledge, perspectives and interpersonal interactions. One participant explained how her childhood experiences shaped the way she perceived other cultures, the knowledge she had of and about other cultures, as well as the relationships she had with people from cultures other than her own: 'I grew up in mostly a Coloured and Black community, so it never occurred to me that there were Chinese and White [people]' (black female). The same participant continued by adding how coming to university changed her knowledge and perceptions of other cultures: 'When I came to university ... Wow! ... I suddenly realised how Black I am and who is White'. Another participant mentioned: 'We were more frequently in contact with other cultures at university' (White female). It appeared that the most rapid and intensive MCCD took place during participants' years at university, as they were directly exposed to a variety of different cultures many of them had never even encountered before.

When participants discussed the future, they spoke about how they would approach multicultural situations within an occupational context. One participant mentioned the following: 'I am not afraid of working with people of other cultures and if I do have a client [from another culture] one day I will gladly take them on because I love a challenge' (black female). Another participant added by commenting: 'Yes, even though it is a challenge ... I will

really try [to do therapy with a client from another culture] because you need to adapt to different situations' (black female). Most participants were unsure about their abilities to practice as multiculturally competent professionals in the future. Some of the participants felt uneasy about the idea of working with clients from different religions: 'What happens when you get somebody who doesn't believe in God and you do?' (black female), while others were more comfortable with the idea of working with clients from different cultures and religions.

It was found that the participants' childhood years built their multicultural foundation, and that most growth took place after they started attending university. Participants, however, appear to be unsure about their abilities to cope with future multicultural situations in the therapeutic context.

Theme 2: The where – The contexts that facilitate / hinder MCCD

Participants related a variety of milieus to their MCCD.

*Neighbourhoods and community settings***:** The environment in which the participants grew up exposed them to certain kinds of cultures. While many of the African- and English-speaking participants grew up in a neighbourhood with a variety of different cultures, most of the Afrikaans-speaking participants grew up in neighbourhoods where they were exposed to only one or two cultural groups. The participants who were exposed to a variety of different cultures mentioned that they became accustomed to these cultures' traditions, languages and behaviour. They learned how to interact with these cultures by observing them and by interacting with them. These participants also spent time conversing with the members of cultures other than their own, comparing the differences and similarities in their cultures. Participants made use of the words 'diverse environment' and 'mixture' to describe the cultural environments in which they grew up. One of the Sesotho-speaking participants shared her experiences growing up: 'I am Sesotho speaking, but I grew up around Coloureds and I actually got to observe their way of life everyday' (black female). She further mentioned that there were 'a lot of mixtures' in her neighbourhood. 'I got to know the different types of people there are. I got to learn about the Lesotho culture which is different from ours and how they do their stuff'.

The family context: Respondents indicated that their families had greatly influenced their perceptions of and interactions with other cultures. Some of the participants grew up in families where they were told that they should not have relationships with members of other cultures. As the participants were exposed to other cultures within a university setting, they realised that

their personal multicultural experiences differed from that of their families. One participant commented, 'My beliefs and values expanded' (black female), after discussing how her perceptions changed when interacting with an individual from a different cultural background. Experiences related to family mostly hindered the building of meaningful relationships with members of other cultures. According to the participants, conservative family members are not in favour of them having relationships with individuals with cultural backgrounds different than their own. One participant mentioned the following about her family; '... they almost make you feel guilty because you have black friends' (white female). According to the participants, their families were not in favour of their cultural perceptions changing. 'I think that for me the biggest challenges are actually faced within my family and not necessarily in the world out there' (white female), one participant mentioned. This brought up a difficult question from another participant: 'Do you choose your friends over your family?' (black female). This particular participant believed that family can be a barrier to developing meaningful relationships with individuals from cultural backgrounds other than her own. However, another participant believed that they should rather see their family's perceptions about other cultures as a challenge and not a barrier. She perceived it as a challenge to develop meaningful relationships with individuals from other cultures, even when her family disapproves, because she believed that it would provide the opportunity to assist the family in changing their perceptions as well.

Religious environments and experiences: Exposure in church made some of the participants realise that, even though an individual may share the same race, language, sexual orientation and even religious affiliation, they may differ greatly. Participants particularly felt that their values were challenged during experiences at church and that they now think differently about diverse individuals. Some of the participants mentioned that they did not know that there were subcultures within followers of the same religion: 'I don't understand the contradiction because it is one God and one Bible, it is one Word and it is shared' (black female) and 'There are a lot of challenges ... we are all Christians, but we come from different churches, so the way I pray, the way I do things is different from somebody else' (black female). One participant mentioned that while she was spending time with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, 'The one boy wanted to pray in his own language, he wanted to pray in Xhosa and I thought 'Wow how cool is this?', almost as if I thought that one can only pray in English and Afrikaans. It was a lightbulb moment' (white female).

*Primary and secondary school settings***:** During the participants' primary and secondary school

years they were exposed to different cultures in the classroom, by participating in the same sports teams and by doing the same extra-mural activities where they learned more about the other team members and their cultures via interaction and observation. One of the participants shared how her perceptions changed when she started interacting with the members of another culture: 'In high school I used to think that Coloured people are so rough. I had this perception, a negative perception about them ... when I started to get to know them; they were really not violent people ...' (black female). As part of the school curriculum, the participants had to learn about different cultures. According to the participants, the content of the subjects was very basic and limited, covering mostly the major traditions and activities. One participant described her schooling on other cultures as 'very superficial'. The participants mentioned that they would have appreciated more comprehensive school education on other cultures.

*Voluntary and community work***:** Participants mentioned that they have also been involved with voluntary community work, where they were directly involved with members of the community. In most of the cases, the culture of the community was different from the culture of the participants who engaged in the voluntary work. These experiences provided them with direct involvement and communication with the different cultures in the community. Through explaining their cultures to each other, they were able to understand each other's behaviour and belief systems, making the process significantly easier.

*Career and occupational settings***:** Some of the participants already had some work experience. They mentioned that their colleagues were members of other cultures and that they learned how to interact with people of those specific cultures. They believed that they had learned about their colleagues' cultures by working and interacting with them on a daily basis. Another participant's job involved babysitting two children from another culture. Although she had knowledge about the other culture, she still found it difficult to accommodate their behaviour because it was so different from her own. She made it clear that having knowledge about another culture is not sufficient in making an individual multiculturally competent.

Theme 3: The how – Overcoming the obstacles on the road to MCC

Theme 3's focus is on how the development takes place. It was found that, although there have been various barriers to learning in the participants' journey of developing MCC, they were able to break through these barriers. They accomplished the aforementioned by viewing the obstacles as hurdles, something that they could overcome, instead of blocks that prevented them

from continuing their journey. Some of these obstacles included stereotypes, biases and wrong perceptions; social class; language differences; and lack of self-confidence. It was found that common themes amongst the participants in overcoming these obstacles were curiosity and a willingness to learn.

Breaking through stereotypes, biases and wrong perceptions: Participants' responses reflected that stereotypes were one of the main hindrances in psychology students' development of MCC. As previously discussed, some participants experienced pressure from their families to think about other cultures in a certain, stereotypical manner. They often found it difficult when the stereotypes and wrong perceptions they grew up with were challenged. Moreover, they not only found biases within the family context, but also at university. Some of the participants mentioned that other students who do not share similar experiences or perspectives tend to judge them when they build relationships with members of other cultures. Students who still hold the conservative beliefs of their families, do not approve of multicultural relationships between students on campus. One participant made the following comment about the senior residence inhabitants, 'I realised that they are people like our grandparents, they are old seniors, people that come from a different background – a background where they are comfortable and here we come inter-racial and mixed' (black female). Another participant made the following comment about her experience of university relationships; 'It is just a known fact, you don't mix' (black female).

Participants reported that as they were exposed to different cultures in the university context, their wrong perceptions started to change. Although some of the participants grew up in families that did not encourage relationships with members of other cultures, experiences at university changed their perspectives regardless. As the participants' knowledge about other cultures increased, they realised that they do not necessarily agree with their families' beliefs. One participants mentioned, '... you realise that it [a stereotypical belief] is not true because you get to know them [members of other cultures] as people' (white female). One participant commented, 'I realised that I was just wrong and that I should stop generalising' (black female). One participant mentioned that, in learning how much courage it took for another student to interact with her as a member of another culture, both of their perceptions changed. As a result, their relationship developed to be more intimate and meaningful. The process of sharing a mutually enlightening experience with a member of another culture, enhanced participants' abilities to form meaningful relationships with members of other cultures. Another participant mentioned that finding commonalities between members of different cultures may enhance an

individual's ability to build meaningful relationships with them. She, for example, started building relationships with people who were in the same church as she was. Although they differed in terms of race, home language and so forth, they followed the same religion. Finding common ground thus made it easier for them to build a close relationship.

Seeing beyond social class: Social class tends to inhibit people's ability to build meaningful relationships with members of different cultures. Participants made mention of the fact that they do not necessarily want to be friends with individuals from a different social class than themselves. One participant mentioned, '... people will have a problem with another culture but as soon as you are rich it is fine, then you are the same' (black female). They also agreed that social ranking plays a role within the same cultures and not only between cultures. The discussion emphasised the complexity of culture and social class. Social class differentiated individuals within the same culture through means of wealth and other aspects. The participants found that individuals from different cultural backgrounds would interact with each other as long as they were on the same level of social class. The participants found the barrier to building multicultural relationships to be established in social class. If one is not in the same social class, building a relationship with someone from another culture can be quite difficult. However, it is possible to overcome the barrier of social class when wrong perceptions are changed through exposure to diverse others and a curious willingness to learn.

Understanding each others' language: Participants believed that language is a barrier to the development of meaningful and close relationships with members of other cultures. One participant commented that 'if you cannot speak the same language, then it is a problem' (black female). Another participant gave the following example of how language can be a barrier; 'The other day I went to a restaurant and there was this White guy and I started talking to him in Afrikaans and he looked at me so weird and then he spoke to me in English with this really heavy Russian accent' (white female). Participants made mention of situations in which they wanted to make interpersonal contact with members of other cultures but failed to do so as they could not understand each other's languages. Some participants were of the opinion that close relationships cannot be built in situations where both individuals are communicating in a language other than their home languages. Others believed that communication through broken sign language and hand signs would be sufficient for building relationships, although they may not be as close as relationships with people who speak the same language. They concluded that it would definitely benefit multicultural relationships if individuals could speak each other's

languages. A willingness to learn another language can thus be a useful tool for overcoming barriers to MCCD.

Having self-confidence: Self-confidence appeared to be an important influence in the participants' MCCD journey. The participants indicated that when they were unsure of a cultural aspect from another student's culture, some of them would have the confidence to ask the other person about it, e.g. '... if I don't understand something I will ask them' (black female), while others preferred to just observe their peers because they did not have the confidence to ask. One white female participant explained how she had the confidence to ask black fellow classmates about their 'weave' hairstyle. Another white female participant commented on the first participant's remark, saying that 'she has much more self-confidence [than me] to be able to ask' (white female). Those who asked, gained more knowledge about the other person's culture, and even built relationships through their curious interaction. It can be argued that when someone is curious enough to learn about other cultures, they will build up the courage to approach diverse individuals. The positive experiences with individuals from other cultures will then boost their confidence, motivating them to do so again in the future.

Students' experiences regarding the educational practices that can enhance, hinder and/or mediate the development of MCC

Experiences regarding educational practices can be divided into two categories, namely, experiences in the classroom and experiences outside the classroom.

Experiences in the classroom

Module content: According to the participants, they did not have a specific undergraduate module dedicated to multicultural perspectives in the field of psychology. They did, however, mention that some of the theoretical concepts discussed in the lectures focused on African and Asian perspectives, compared to Western perspectives. Non-Western perspectives were, however, not part of the compulsory work to be studied for examination. Consequently, not many of the students studied the work and thus very few of them were familiar with the content of the work. One of the participants commented, 'I think our education in psychology actually hinders it [development of MCC] because it is very Westernised so you only learn about a very Western culture' (White female). Another participant mentioned the following about the content of the undergraduate degree in psychology; '... it is just theory, theory, theory and

Western cultures ... and then you are still not competent enough because you are not exposed ... [to] the practical side of it' (black female).

Some of the participants experienced the need to add an additional module to the programme that focuses solely on MCC. One participant mentioned the following about their current education in psychology; '... we need more South African theories, South African based text books and psychologists from South Africa who are exposed to different cultures' (white female).

Diverse lecturing staff: Some of the participants mentioned that exposure to lecturers from different cultural backgrounds expanded their knowledge about the lecturers' cultures. Two participants described their desire to have a larger cultural variety in the lecturers that present their classes: 'I think if we had more different coloured lecturers, it would much make it interesting you know ... she [the lecturer] talks a lot about her culture, ... just by her actions and her behavior and her approach to things and so on, you can already make a difference' (white female) and 'Other people's [lecturers'] experiences teach you more than you think' (white female).

Classroom needs and requests: The participants expressed their need for lectures and discussions by professionals and experts in the field of MCC. The participants believed that the discussion of practical examples in the lectures will not only help them understand the theory better, but will also help them in future encounters with members of cultures different than their own. Participants also expressed a strong need for more practical exposure to diverse cultures. One of the needs they experienced was to learn from their fellow students by practically engaging in culturally specific activities with them and thus increasing their MCC. Another need expressed by the participants was to develop an exchange programme for postgraduate psychology students to increase their exposure to cultures they know little about.

Experiences outside the classroom

Community work: According to the participants, they were exposed to hands-on experience by interacting with fellow classmates during projects. One participant mentioned her experience in doing a community based group assignment with unfamiliar fellow students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Her stereotypical perspectives initially formed a barrier to building relationships with her fellow group members. As she interacted with them, her perspectives

changed. She described how it was an enriching experience to learn from her group members as they viewed the situation completely different than she did. Furthermore, she also developed meaningful friendships with her fellow group members.

Some of the participants had the opportunity to participate in community engagement through the Psychology Student Association (PSA), a student association that initiates community projects. As becoming part of the PSA is voluntary, not all psychology students have this experience. The opportunity is, however, open to all psychology students and can thus be considered as part of an educational experience. One of the participants who was previously a member of the PSA mentioned how the experience changed her perspectives. She initially did not know how to handle working with individuals from cultures other than her own. Now, a year later, she is friends with the people she struggled to understand initially.

The psychology postgraduate programme includes a module that focuses on teaching students about the process of implementing community interventions regarding specific contemporary psychosocial issues. As part of this module, the students engage in the community via the Study Buddy Project. The participants worked at schools where they were exposed to school learners as well as teachers from cultures different than their own. The more they interacted with the people, the more they learned about them and more meaningful relationships were built. One participant mentioned the following about her experience with the Study Buddy Project; 'What I learned the most was understanding cultural diversity'. Not only did they learn from the teachers and the learners, but especially from their fellow students with whom they were working. The participants mentioned learning about working with different age groups, people with different value systems and people talking different languages. Another participant made the following comment; 'I think that I also learned to be more sensitive towards different cultures', while another participant mentioned; 'I think my cultural competence has definitely improved'.

DISCUSSION

MCCD is a journey that takes place across the lifespan. Students start developing MCC long before they enter university, while they are in university, and continue to develop long after they have completed their university studies. Levels of complete maturity are not expected to be reached by the end of psychology training, as most students are often still in their twenties and have their whole lives ahead of them to further their MCCD. This finding corresponds with a variety of developmental theorists that support a lifespan approach to development – individual development is a progressive process that takes place from conception to death

(Staudinger and Baltes 2001). Comas-Diaz (2011) believed that the process of developing MCC is a lifelong challenge, and Heppner (2006) noted that the acquisition of MCC is a lifetime commitment. King and Baxter Magolda (2005), who built their developmental model of intercultural maturity on Kegan's (1994) model of lifespan development, also supported this notion. Multicultural development thus takes place across the spectrum of human development (or life) and consists of multiple dimensions and directions (Staudinger and Lindenberger 2003). However, significant development can take place by increasing the amount of experiences that promote MCCD during the postgraduate training process. It can thus be argued that psychology students have the potential to reach mature levels of MCCD at the end of their training by including sufficient multicultural learning experiences that facilitate MCCD. It can thus be argued that it can be expected of psychology students to be relatively multiculturally competent at the end of their training, i.e. to ethically and efficiently work with multiculturally diverse clients (Hugo, Boshoff, Traut, Zungu-Dirwayi and Stein 2003).

Illeris (2009) suggested that development should not only be viewed across the lifespan, but also 'lifewide', or across learning environments. Being exposed to a variety of specific environments on the journey facilitates MCCD. No single factor leads to MCCD, but rather the combination of various contexts. In this study, throughout the participants' developmental journeys, they were exposed to a combination of experiences in various contexts. These contexts include neighbourhoods and community settings, the family context, religious environments and experiences, primary and secondary school settings, the university context, voluntary and community work, career and occupational settings. According to Hughes et al. (2006), different neighbourhoods vary with regards to cultural composition and thus also in the types of intercultural relationships between individuals. The participants who grew up in neighbourhoods that comprised a variety of cultures thus had more diversity experiences and learning opportunities, and as a result developed more than their counterparts with less diverse experiences. Furthermore, in this study, students who attended schools with a diverse learner population appear to have less stereotypical perceptions about members of other cultures. Their knowledge with regards to cultures other than their own appears to be more advanced than students who attended schools with less cultural diversity. Park (2013) believed that interaction with diverse individuals during school years contributes to the development of MCC. Individuals who attended schools with diverse learner populations may be more accustomed to cultural differences, preparing them for diversity experiences at university (Denson and Bowman 2011; Kendall Brown 2008). In addition, interpersonal encounters with followers of religious practices made some of the participants realise that people of the same race, language,

age, ethnicity and even religion can be part of different cultures. Lee (2002) found that experiences with diverse others were associated with strengthened religious beliefs, while being more open to accept other individuals' religious beliefs and experiences. A common denominator leading to MCCD across the various contexts was that the greater the extent of exposure to other cultures, the greater the MCCD. An individual is thus expected to move quicker along the multicultural developmental continuum when exposed to various multicultural contexts. Various authors have emphasised the need for exposure to and experiences with unfamiliar cultures as important learning experiences (Landreman et al. 2007; Pedersen 2002).

Being exposed to certain environments on one's journey can also hinder or be a barrier to MCCD. Some of these obstacles mentioned in this study included stereotypes, biases and wrong perceptions; social class; language differences; and lack of self-confidence. Furthermore, in this study, participants' older family members did not approve of the participants' interracial relationships. According Socha and Diggs (2009), family members have a large influence on the nature of children's perceptions and attitudes regarding culture. Hughes and Chen (1997) posited that parents' racial messages are often similar to the messages they had received from their own parents. Yet, according to Hughes and Johnson (2001), children do not only passively accept the messages they receive from family members. The participants in this study experienced that they started challenging their beliefs about members' cultures different than their own while being at university.

It was found that, although there have been various barriers to learning in the participants' journey of developing MCC, they were able to break through these barriers. By viewing the obstacles as opportunities to increase their self-confidence, to learn a new language, and to challenge their beliefs, participants used the obstacles to their advantage. Common themes amongst the participants in overcoming these obstacles were curiosity and a willingness to learn. Individuals who have the self-confidence to interact with diverse others may move along the developmental continuum much faster than individuals with low self-confidence. From the results in this study, it can be deducted that confident persons will seize opportunities to learn about other cultures. Although increased confidence may not indicate increased MCC (Kumas-Tan, Beagan, Loppie, MacLeod and Frank 2007), self-confidence mediates the process of developing MCC.

The ability to speak another culture's language may provide more opportunities to interact with members of the specific culture than for individuals who cannot speak the culture's language. There is evidence of the benefits of culturally adapted mental health treatments,

particularly when the interventions are conducted in clients' preferred language (Griner and Smith 2006). In this study, language was often mentioned to be a barrier to MCCD. Verbal communication appeared to be difficult when the interacting parties did not understand each other's lamguage. Although individuals often make use of hand signs in an attempt to communicate a message, communication is very limited. Furthermore, the relationships built are superficial, as the individuals have difficulty sharing more intimate details through the language barrier. According to Kendall Brown (2008), this barrier cannot be overcome by simply teaching individuals' each other's languages, but rather by reflecting on and making sense of their experiences.

Furthermore, social equality mediates the process of MCCD while social biases, such as social class, can hinder it. It was found that social class tends to inhibit people's ability to build meaningful relationships with members of different cultures. Padilla and Perez (2003) argued that social comparison can cause interpersonal conflict, even in the absence of obvious discord between groups. Social hierarchies or dominance thus appear to be hindering the development of intercultural relationships. According to King and Baxter Magolda (2005), concerns over social class may be indicative of feelings of being threatened by another person's culture, which could be suggestive of a lower level of development. However, the current study found that exposure to differences in social class increased awareness regarding variety within cultures, stimulating growth in the cognitive domain of development.

According to King and Baxter Magolda (2005), MCCD takes place across the cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal domain. Evidence for this was found in this study. Similar to Merryfield (2000), this study established that early life experiences within the individual's home environment and community can influence cognitive development related to the knowledge, beliefs, biases and stereotypes about other cultures. Diversity experiences in school, such as in the classroom, on the sportsfield and in extracurricular activities changed the participants' perceptions and stereotypical thinking. In accordance with the work of Zúñiga, Williams and Berger (2005), the results of this study concluded that university experiences in the classroom (in the form of discussions, theoretical content and assignments), as well as experiences outside campus residence are strongly related to cognitive development. Similarly, intrapersonal development in this study was facilitated by diversity experiences in already early in life. Denson and Bowman (2011) found that frequent exposure to members of other cultures in a school environment promoted intrapersonal development through creating a level of comfort to engage openly with other cultures. Similar to Denson and Zhang (2010), this study established that university diversity experiences promoted intrapersonal development, in that it

expands their ability to value, respect and appreciate diversity, and improves their capacity to work with diverse others. Experiences with diverse others within the university context increased individuals' awareness of their own values, as well as the different social structures (such as race, social class, language, etc.) (Zúñiga et al. 2005). It was found that individuals do not passively accept the messages they receive from family members, resulting in changed beliefs (Hughes and Johnson 2001; King and Baxter Magolda 2005). Furthermore, intrapersonal development was promoted in the ability to view others as socially equal. With regard to interpersonal development, participants' MCCD developed through the building of relationships with diverse others. Similar to Denson and Bowman (2011), and Park (2013) the findings of this study indicate that interaction with diverse individuals during school years contributed to more enjoyable and comfortable interactions at university. Furthermore, this study indicated that, within the university context, there are sufficient opportunities to observe, to come into contact with, and to build relationships with individuals from other cultures. Zúñiga et al. (2005) found that diversity experiences in various areas in the university context facilitated cultural integration, while Denson and Zhang (2010) found that diversity experiences at university improve individuals' ability to work with diverse others.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The university experience provides ample opportunity for diverse learning experiences in and outside the classroom. Similar to Lee, Williams, Shaw and Jie (2014), findings from this study illuminate the importance of enough intercultural exposure within and outside of the university classroom to facilitate MCCD. Kendall Brown (2008) found that university experiences deliver more effective contributions to multicultural development when they provide continuous exposure to members of other cultures; include regular class meetings; equip students with knowledge about other cultures' practices, beliefs and values; and when they provide opportunity for reflective discussions for the purpose of understanding complex multicultural concepts. It is thus suggested that multicultural concepts be incorporated in every possible way by applying the content of the training to various cultural groups (Constantine 2002). In this study, participants indicated the need for more exposure to theoretical content and practical learning opportunities within their educational environment. This suggested that their training programme may not be providing adequate training on multicultural issues relevant to South Africa. A stronger focus on the cultures of South Africa, both theoretically and practically, may thus enhance their ability to develop MCC. Researchers provide arguments for multicultural experiences within the classroom (Pedersen 2002), as well as outside the classroom (Vera and

Speight 2003). Furthermore, there are arguments for the integration of multiculturalism into the entire postgraduate programme (Abreu et al. 2000; Hill 2003). It can thus be argued that the inclusion of practical, hands-on multicultural learning experiences should be included in the postgraduate psychology programme in order to ensure optimal MCCD.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the unique journeys of postgraduate psychology students on their road to MCC. It highlighted the when, the where and the how of MCCD, as well as the students' positions on the developmental continuum. This study provided insight into a postgraduate psychology training programme's efficacy in preparing psychology students for the multicultural client context that awaits them. Additionally, the study underlined students' educational needs regarding their process of MCCD.

While the findings in this study concurs with existing theoretical perspectives emphasising the importance of the cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of MCCD, this study also highlights some novel aspects that can be utilised to build on current knowledge. The uniqueness of students' journeys towards MCC and their processes of moving along the developmental continuum suggest the importance of foregrounding individuality in models of MCC. Recognising the facilitating role of a variety of multicultural experiences and diversity contexts over an extended period of time, as well as the importance of individuals' confidence and curiosity to explore difference, can lead to a more nuanced understanding of MCC. Furthermore, the hindering effect of language barriers and social inequalities are aspects that can be more fully explored and incorporated into models of MCCD – especially in societies such as South Africa where multilingualism, difference and diversity is prominent.

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