
# The “Good Practice” Training Philosophy in an International Psychotherapy Program

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## Abstract

Multicultural, indigenous and international movements in psychotherapy have raised numerous issues about cultural variables as essential considerations in mental-health research, training and practice. They have not, however, offered much guidance. The unique setting of the English-language International Psychotherapy Program at SFU in Austria provides an opportunity to investigate and describe the “good practice” training philosophy of international students’ favorite teachers. The three favorite teachers were chosen on the basis of quantitative elements of the international students’ survey in the first phase of the research. The favorite teachers’ training philosophy was explored with a narrative interview strategy and analyzed with grounded theory. Findings describe how they conceptualize the role of culture in psychotherapy and offer step-by-step guidance for teaching within the framework of transformative pedagogy.

## Keywords

Multicultural/international competencies, International psychotherapy training, Training philosophy, Transformative pedagogy, Transformative learning, Mixed-methods methodology, Grounded theory

# 1 Introduction

Western psychotherapies, as they developed in Europe and North America in the second half of the 20th century[1], evolved primarily as subdisciplines within the professions of medicine (psychiatry) and psychology (clinical psychology); as such, they have focused mainly on an individualistic conceptual framework (Society for Psychotherapy Research Interest Section on Culture and Psychotherapy - SPRISCAP, n.d.). Within the context of the rise of multiculturalism, postmodernism and ever increasing globalization, *cultural movements in psychotherapy training* have surfaced calling for the recognition of socially and culturally constructed knowledge and, consequently, for the acknowledgment of cultural, social, economic and political variables as essential considerations in mental-health research, training and practice (Alwood & Berry, 2006; Sue, 2001; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Pedersen, 1991, 2007). The allocation of psychotherapy training in the strict "medical context" (see Wampold, 2003) has somewhat isolated the theoretical development of cultural psychotherapy training from the existing corpus of cultural theory in other social sciences, such as anthropology. Ethnopsychoanalysis (see an overview in the biographical encyclopedia by Reichmayr, Wagner, Ouederrou, & Pletzer , 2003), for example, has investigated and described not only specific psychological phenomena in different people but also the role of the Western psychotherapist entering new and different cultures with his or her knowledge. An exchange among these disciplines has risen in recent years and needs to be further intensified.

## 1.1 Major tenets of cultural movements in psychotherapy training

Among the cultural movements in psychology and psychotherapy, the *multicultural movement* has historically developed the first - primarily in the United States and Canada within the context of civil rights movement (Heppner et al., 2009; Ponterotto, 2008). It has emphasized the necessity of developing multicultural competencies in order to respond ethically and effectively to society's cultural diversity (Sue et al., 1982; Sue et al., 1992).

Beginning especially in the 1980s, there was a trend to implement popular Western psychotherapy training modules to "psychotherapy less supplied" countries. Psychotherapy experts (e.g., in the Operationalized Psychodynamic Diagnostics, Emotion-Focused Therapy, Gestalt Therapy, short-term Psychodynamic Therapy, etc.) from central Europe, the United States and Canada were invited to train psychologists and counselors in the metropolitan areas of Russia, China, Taiwan, Japan, the Middle East, and Central and South America. Exporting specific therapy packages in rapid and time-limited trainings led to special challenges. The *indigenous movement* in psychology and

[1] In our article we will not focus on earlier international psychotherapy developments. Both world wars have led to a vast migration of the intelligentsia, especially through the forceful prosecution and expulsion of Jewish psychoanalysts before and during World War II. The specific aspects of this development of internationalization of psychotherapy need a more elaborate historical analysis.

psychotherapy arose in response to the difficulties experienced by these quickly trained health experts and also by Western-trained psychologists upon return to their home countries (Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006). This movement has challenged the universality of psychological and psychotherapy theories and has emphasized the need to understand people in their local terms, including their ecological, historical, philosophical and religious contexts (Alwood & Berry, 2006; Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006).

The evolving *international movement* builds on multicultural and indigenous movements and reminds mental-health professionals that our basic assumptions of theories and practices are cultural constructions (Heppner et al., 2009; Leung et al., 2009; Ægisdóttir & Gerstein, 2010). It invites the reconsideration of these assumptions through collaboration with international colleagues around the world, with the aim of becoming more inclusive and embracing an international perspective and the global community (e.g., Marsella, 1998, 2007; Leong & Ponterotto, 2003; Leung et al., 2009). The development of the Internet, which created new possibilities of communication, such as long-term online supervision and regular long-distance training sessions, took the international movement to its next level.

These movements brought to the fore the fact that psychology and modern psychotherapies, as developed in Europe and North America, are embedded in a "Western worldview" – and, more specifically, in a Western, white, male and middle-class worldview (Heppner et al., 2009; Pedersen, 1991, 2007; Sue , 2001).When mental-health professionals unwittingly impose their standards of normality and abnormality without regard to differences in culture, race, gender and sexual orientation, they may be engaging in cultural oppression (Pedersen, 1991, 2007; Sue, 2001). As a corrective, cultural movements recognize the sociopolitical nature of psychotherapy, motivated by the aims of human rights, social justice and equality (Manis, 2012; Sue, 2001). However, efforts to translate these ideals into psychotherapy theory, research, training and practice have so far been less fruitful (e.g., Heppner et al., 2009; Manis, 2012; Odegard & Vereen, 2010; Pieterse, Evans, Risner-Butner, Collins, & Mason, 2009; Ponterotto, 1997; Smith, Constantine, Dinehart, & Montoya, 2006; Worthington, Soth-McNett, & Moreno, 2007).

## 1.2 State of the art of cultural movements in psychotherapy training

The tripartite model of multicultural competencies (Sue et al., 1982; Sue et al., 1992) dominated the conceptual and empirical literature during the rise of the multicultural movement in psychotherapy and marked the beginning of widespread institutionalization of multiculturalism in psychotherapy in the United States and Canada (Ponterotto, 2008). Multicultural competencies became a professional training standard for North American psychology and psychotherapy education (Manis, 2012; Ponterotto, 2008); these competencies include: cultural awareness (awareness of one's own assumptions, values and biases), knowledge (understanding the worldview of culturally diverse cli-

ents), and skills (developing culturally appropriate intervention strategies and techniques) (Sue et al., 1992). In the subsequent period, a tripartite model was further developed into the multidimensional model of multicultural competencies to include professional, organizational and societal level of competencies (Sue, 2001). However, the model of multicultural competencies proved to be more aspirational, lacking guidance to translate the objectives of multiculturalism and social justice into practice (e.g., Manis, 2012; Mollen, Ridley, & Hill, 2003).

A review of the literature reveals the lack of theory in the field on the conceptualization of culture in psychotherapy; conceptual frameworks vary (e.g., traditional/generic, etic, emic and idiographic approaches) (Pedersen, 1991; Ridley, Mendoza, & Kanitz, 1994). There is a lack of consensus on the meaning of multicultural(ism), and under its guise many approaches in education actually carry the hidden message of assimilation and separation (e.g., Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Spajic-Vrkas, 2004). Furthermore, the methodologies in the multicultural field have been overwhelmingly quantitative: they use mostly self-report measures based on the model of multicultural competencies, and they fail to clarify the meaning of multiculturalism (e.g., Worthington et al., 2007). The perception of teachers and their process of teaching in multicultural psychotherapy education were not examined in empirical studies (Odegard & Vereen, 2010). As a result, 30 years since the establishment of multiculturalism in psychotherapy in North America, "it is a mystery" how teachers actually teach the concepts of multicultural competencies and social justice orientation (Odegard & Vereen, 2010, p. 145), and the incorporation of these concepts on a programmatic level is more rhetorical than substantive and genuine (e.g., Leach & Carlton 1997; Ponterotto, 1997).

The process of the internationalization of higher education in general has prompted a vast number of empirical studies about international students' acculturation and adaptation. However, these empirical studies have relied mostly on the deficient conceptual framework of "culture shock," have offered problem-laden depictions of international students as a homogeneous group, and have lacked the use of diverse methodologies and attention to student-teacher relationships and resources (Pedersen, 1991; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Reid & Dixon, 2012; Rice et al., 2009). Attention to international perspectives in psychotherapy education and the specific issues of international psychotherapy trainees is fairly new. Few empirical studies have exposed additional difficulties specific to international psychotherapy trainees with respect to academic, clinical and supervision experience; language barriers (especially in the clinical setting); and career and employment opportunities (Mittal & Wieling, 2006; Ng & Smith, 2009; Smith & Ng, 2009; Reid & Dixon, 2012; Wedding, MCCartney, & Currey 2009).

International psychotherapy students in host countries constitute minorities, sojourners and/or immigrants (Berry & Sam, 1996). Thus, the extent and quality of a given institution's multicultural competencies, policies and procedures, together with the immigration law and attitudes of the host

country, are highly relevant for these students (Berry 1997; Berry & Sam, 1996). If they return to their home countries (or move to third destinations), they will have to consider the transfer and indigenization of the knowledge they have gained in the host country (Alwood & Berry, 2006; Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006). Naturally, the international perspective is the most relevant for them, and they may be the ones who feel the most urgent need for the internationalization of psychotherapy. At the same time, psychotherapy education encompasses all aspects of psychotherapy – theory, practice and research, and pedagogies. Thus, the encounter between international student and psychotherapy teacher is influenced by most of the issues raised by the multicultural, indigenous and international movements in psychotherapy, regardless of students'/teachers' awareness of them. This is a relationship with various degrees of asymmetry, where the teacher usually assumes the position of more power.

For these reasons, the relationship between the psychotherapy teacher and international student is pregnant with a wide spectrum of challenges and possibilities – it presents the main source for the internationalization of psychotherapy and poses a challenge to its effectiveness. Furthermore, both psychotherapy teachers and international students are "left alone" to navigate such complexities, given the fact that the cultural movements in psychotherapy have opened so many questions and ethical considerations and have so far failed to offer comprehensive, substantive answers and/or guidance. It is the intent of this study to provide some "good practice" guidance for translating the aims of cultural movements in psychotherapy training to practice.

## 1.3 The context and the purpose of the study

In 2008, the newly established Sigmund Freud Private University (SFU) in Vienna launched a bachelor's and master's program within its International Psychotherapy Programme[2] in the English language. SFU is the first university in the world to offer an academic program for psychotherapy as an independent profession and science beginning at the bachelor's level. The University Outpatient Clinic offers services in various languages and attracts an international clientele.

The English-language International Psychotherapy Programme provides a unique setting in which classrooms contain no minority or majority. Instead, there is a real diversity of international students from four continents (at the time of the research), and students and professors use English as their primary second language. For these reasons, it can be seen as a prototype for multicultural teaching and learning that provides a broad setting for specific international training challenges.

The purpose of this study is to describe, on an empirical basis, the good-practice training philosophy employed by SFU's favorite teachers among the international psychotherapy students. The training philosophy is understood in this study in its

[2] The SFU Programme uses British English; SFU style will be retained when this entity is named in full; elsewhere, American usage will apply.

broadest sense – to address the underlying assumptions about teaching, in relation to: why, what, how, whom, where, and with what objectives one teaches. Although the research is situated in a specific university, the main assumption is that the sample of a diverse body of students from four continents in one place resembles a small sample of the "global community," which can stimulate the international perspective in psychotherapy and inform audiences interested in developing an international perspective in various contexts and settings.

## 2 Method

The research presented in this article represents the second phase of a two-phase, transformative sequential mixed-methods research design, which was conducted as a doctoral thesis of the first author under the supervision of the co-authors. The first phase of the study queried 37 SFU international bachelor's and master's candidates who were willing to participate; the mixed-method design combined quantitative and qualitative strands of data in a students' survey in order to describe the context of the program from the students' point of view, to describe their adaptation to the university, and to define who their favorite teachers were and why. In the second phase, a narrative interview strategy was used to explore the training philosophy of three chosen favorite teachers and analyze it with grounded theory.

*Participant's selection.* Participants were chosen on the basis of the results from the first phase, during which the students were asked to name up to three favorite teachers if they had any. Four teachers with the significantly highest frequencies of choice by students were invited to participate, and three of them accepted.

All the teachers were born in Austria, and all of them graduated psychology first, then engaged in psychotherapy trainings, and hold PhDs. In addition, all of them have been international students and have taught internationally before their engagements at SFU. In this text they will be referred as Teacher 1, 2 and 3. *Teacher 1* is a man in his sixties. He is a psychoanalyst and organizational consultant. At the time of research he was engaged at SFU in general courses (group dynamics) and method-specific courses (psychoanalysis) in both the German- and English-language programs at SFU. *Teacher 2* is a woman in her early thirties. She is a psychologist and psychotherapy researcher with expertise in qualitative methodologies. She earned her PhD in Germany (at a medical faculty) and conducted postdoctoral studies in Canada, where she was taught in the clinical program. At SFU she is a general courses lecturer (methodologies of psychotherapy research, psychosomatics) and a research supervisor in the English program. *Teacher 3* is a woman in her late fifties. She is a systemic family therapy trainer and supervisor, mediator and clinical psychologist. At SFU she is a coordinator, lecturer and supervisor for systemic family training in both the German and English programs.

*Narrative interview strategy.* Teachers were invited for an interview via email. The email contained a very brief description of the

purpose of the research and the way they had been chosen. In addition, the subject of the interview was stated so that they could have the time to prepare or reflect on the topic before our meeting.

The initial interview prompt was: "How do you describe and explain your training philosophy (approach to teaching) at the International Psychotherapy Programme at SFU, especially in terms of your experience so far and its international relevance?" The intention was to create a very open and broad question to allow the space for participants to share what was important to them about international psychotherapy training, without imposing predefined constructions.

Interviews were conducted in June and July 2012 and took about 90 minutes.

*Data analysis.* Transcribed interviews were analyzed with grounded theory using Atlas.ti 6 software (www.atlasti.com) as computer-assisted qualitative research software. Open, axial and selective coding was conducted (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) with a constructivist approach to meaning (Charmaz, 2006), supplemented with situational analysis (Clarke, 2005) and resulting in the visual representation of the "good practice" training philosophy.

*Data interpretation.* Grounded theory findings were compared and discussed with respect to the relevant literature. Results of the first phase and findings of the second phase were further triangulated in order to compare the perspectives of students and teachers and to offer a more integrated, comprehensive and valid description of the context and findings.

*Quality criteria.* The quality criteria included many elements for the complete mixed-methods project. In this article we will recapitulate the main steps that were taken for providing credibility checks for the grounded theory findings only (Elliott, Fisher, & Rennie, 1999).

The first author conducted the first stage of open coding together with a peer colleague, who was also using grounded theory in her research. Concretely, they initially coded together the first transcripts from both projects and discussed the process until they reached a consensus on how to label the open codes. Other interviews they coded alone and then sent to each other for verification. During the main analysis phase, the primary researcher discussed the concepts with her supervisors and checked for clarity and consistency.

In the concluding analysis phase, additional individual meetings with all three teacher-participants were organized for "member checks" and discussion of final concepts – including detailed findings (list of containing initial codes, properties, subcategories and categories) and visually integrated categories. One teacher suggested improvements to conceptual labels for some of the constituents (those recommendations were incorporated in the final concept) and validated all other concepts. The other two teachers fully validated the final concepts after detailed review.

Finally, in the interpretation phase, grounded theory findings were triangulated with the relevant findings and results from the international students' survey, which further increased credibility of the findings.

## 3 Findings

The first iteration of open coding resulted in approximately 300 codes from three interviews. During selective coding, some initial

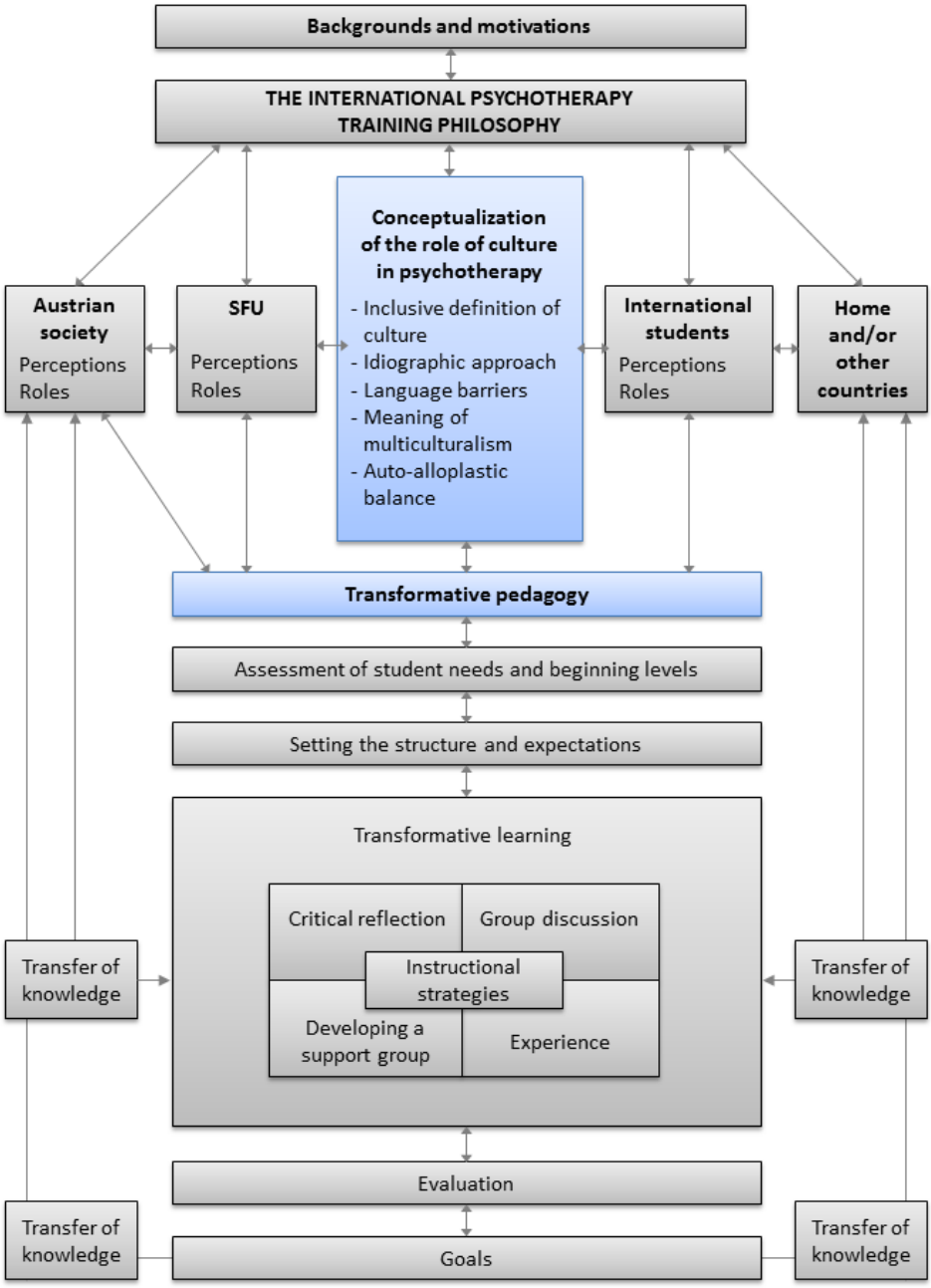


*Figure 1:* Visual presentation of the "good practice" training philosophy

codes were expanded and renamed. This resulted in the final 202 codes, which were grouped into six main categories (see Figure 1) with a total of 21 subcategories; some of the more complex subcategories were further described through several constituents.

### 3.1 The favorite teachers in the context

Four main categories describe the favorite teachers' experiences within specific context: (a) their personal backgrounds and motivations; (b) their roles and perceptions in relation to Austrian society; (c) their roles and perceptions in relation to the university; and (d) their roles and perceptions in relation to the international psychotherapy students. Figure 1 includes just the titles of those four categories, which are elaborated in the PhD dissertation. In this article we will briefly mention just the main message of context-specific findings and focus on presenting the findings on two other categories ("conceptualization of the role of culture in psychotherapy" and "transformative pedagogy"). These two categories, we believe, can offer the guidance for the process of internalization of psychotherapy training in different contexts and settings. These two categories are highlighted in blue in Figure 1.

The most interesting and relevant context-specific finding is that all favorite teachers have been international students themselves, and they have all taught internationally. Those experiences have had a major influence on the development of their cultural sensitivity and their understanding of the acculturation and adaptation processes that international students experience.

Furthermore, they have shown that their interest in international perspectives in psychotherapy is powerfully driven by humanitarian motives and an interest in diversity. They all said they were attracted to SFU's International Programme because of its novelty, the greater freedom it offers and the challenges to develop something new. The common characteristics of the favorite teachers in this study are that they are all very proactive and engaged, and they take great responsibility in "practicing of what they teach" regarding many aspects of the inclusive approach: individual, professional, organizational, societal and international.

### 3.2 Theoretical conceptualization of the role of culture in psychotherapy

Within this category, codes were grouped into five subcategories, as Figure 1 shows. Two subcategories – "idiographic approach" and "meaning of multiculturalism" - contain several constituents and will be further elaborated below.

#### 3.2.1 Inclusive definition of culture

All teachers said that they considered culture in a broad and inclusive way. They refer to "culture" as to embeddedness and the influence of various groups we belong to, or they explain it in a way that does not relate only to national or racial/ethnical identity. The following example is an illustration of this:

> Culture is not only about national identity, like: "is it Russian, Korean, Canadian, German…?", but it is about the specific culture of that person: "is it a rich person, or is it a student…?" (Teacher 2).

### 3.2.2 Idiographic approach

Related to the inclusive views of culture, teachers shared views that were coded and grouped as an idiographic approach to clients/patients in psychotherapy. However, this subcategory is more complex and involves several constituents that revealed some individual variations among the three teachers.

*People have an individual cultural profile.* All teachers shared an emphasis on the importance of individual cultural profile in psychotherapy. Teachers 2 and 3 further stressed the dangers of overemphasizing the cultural attributes that could lead to prejudices and stereotypes. In the words of Teacher 3:

> With psychotherapy training, we are individuals more, and I think when we talk a lot about culture, it is more difficult, because the individual is disappearing. The Japanese student, the Chinese student…no, it is Peilian, and Peilian is different than Li! (…) We have to be open to meet the students where he or she is as an individual, and not as a cultural representative.

*Teaching psychotherapy includes universal elements.* All teachers emphasized some commonalities or general/etic elements of the psychotherapy process, although they did so from different perspectives. Teacher 1 offered the view from a psychoanalytic perspective, stressing the role of unconsciousness and the relationship to the therapist. Teacher 2 emphasized the usefulness and commonalities of the clinical categories as a helpful way to test "hunches" in forming individual diagnostic profiles. Teacher 3 underlined commonalities on individual and societal levels of the purpose of psychotherapy:

> Psychotherapy is important for society, but the shape in how it looks like is a different thing. The purpose of psychotherapy is to help clients to find harmony in themselves and with those around. I think that is something very general.

*Teaching psychotherapy includes culturally specific elements.* Universal elements of psychotherapy are connected to culturally specific elements. Teacher 1 described them in terms of different cultural values, norms and/or practices that influence the lives of individuals. Teacher 3 emphasized the cultural specifics that can influence the process and style of psychotherapy:

> Psychotherapy is a matter of trust, and that trust has to be worked out locally, and there a culture plays a role.

*Obtaining cultural information.* Teacher 2 emphasized the need to "have a sharp awareness that cultural background might need a space", but not to force it or impose it if the client is not giving it importance. Furthermore, she expressed the need to have the cultural knowledge that is relevant

for understanding the client, as well as the two ways of obtaining cultural information – from the client directly and from the literature and/or other available sources.

*Teaching psychotherapy includes understanding specific context.* The teachers emphasized the importance of understanding the context in which psychotherapy and/ or teaching takes place. They stressed that besides cultural influence, it is important to understand historical, political and economic developments of relevant societies. According to Teacher 3, political and economic factors have the most significant impact on the existence, development, general acceptance and preferable modalities of psychotherapy in a society. She emphasized that in teaching psychotherapy internationally, what matters always is a specific context, which includes particular expectations of participants:

> If I teach in Moscow or in Serbia, or wherever, I have to fit there, then cultures clash. But, it is also not true, because they expect to hear some foreigner talk. So in a way, it is always a special context.

### 3.2.3 Language barriers

Another issue on which all teachers agreed is that language barriers present a major obstacle in international psychotherapy training. Each of the teachers offered a perspective about different aspects of language barriers. Teacher 1 has emphasized the problems of having a "feeling" for the vocabulary of English as second language and understanding meanings and experiences in connection to the words. Teacher 3 stressed the limitations of expressing knowledge and personality in the second language, so that:

> [p]erhaps the trainer only understands what the others know to say in their English performance, and that it is not necessarily their personality or their knowledge…

Teacher 2 stressed the danger of misattributing cultural aspects in the situations to actual language barriers. All three teachers shared some active strategies for "bridging" those barriers. These strategies are intertwined with their approaches to teaching; some will be illustrated in the next category, "transformative pedagogy".

### 3.2.4 Meaning of multiculturalism

The subcategory meaning of multiculturalism contains two constituents:

*Tolerating individual differences.* Teacher 3 brought into the conversation the discussion about intercultural or diversity competencies, stating that there is no "inter" but that we need a lot of tolerance for individual differences:

> People cannot compromise on eating habits, some don't eat pork, they just don't eat it, and some people just go to Church on Sunday morning, so no seminar at that time. So in a way we have to deal with this with different limits for different values in the group, but there is no "inter," we need a lot of tolerance (…) Cultures don't fight, people fight.

> Cultures cannot fight; it is only the people who are doing all those nasty things.

*Preferring interaction (friction).* Another aspect is the preference for the interaction among the culturally different, even if that means friction and conflict:

> …When there is a friction and conflict you are not usually on a very adult intellectual level, but there is something here that I see as so much potential - because there are many different people here in Vienna, and they are in touch, when you look at subcultures. The youth seen on concerts or whole radio station FM 4 reflects for me the beauty and power of multiculturalism lived in "one pot," rather than ten parallel "pots" that don't touch each other. (Teacher 2)

### 3.2.5 Auto-alloplastic balance

The last subcategory within theoretical conceptualization of the role of culture in psychotherapy is the position of psychotherapist between the autoplastic and alloplastic orientations. In other words, the subcategory depicts the desired position between helping the patient to change him/herself in order to "fit" into the environment and empowering the patient to influence his/her circumstances. All three teachers said it was important to find the balance between the two extremes, as the following quotation shows:

> The individual has to take back his desires, so that the whole group can survive. That doesn't matter if we are in China or in India or in Africa or in Austria… We have a saying, "Where Id is, Ego should be." That means, although it is difficult in the society to get my satisfaction, we try that you get the most of it, but you can't get all of it. It is not just impossible, but you cannot have infantile wishes fulfilled. You have to recognize who you are in the society with others and that sets the limits. (Teacher 1)

## 3.3 Transformative pedagogy

"Transformative pedagogy" is the final category of grounded theory findings. It consists of six subcategories. Three more complex subcategories are described through several constituents.

### 3.3.1 Assessment of students' needs and beginning levels

All three teachers said that the first point in their approach to teaching is the assessment of students' beginning levels and needs. Teachers 1 and 3 described their approach on a group level, which can be a challenging process. As Teacher 3 observes:

> Everybody needs a different beginning because they come from different levels, different understanding of life, different understanding of psychotherapy, and what psychotherapy could be. And to come together, that is a very sensible process.

Teacher 2 described her approach on the individual level at the start of the supervision process.

### 3.3.2 Setting the structure and expectations

As the second step of their approach to teaching, all the teachers described the process of setting the structure and expectations with students. This process is further described through the constituents of this subcategory:

*Clarifying expectations.* All teachers spoke about the process of clarifying mutual expectations with the students. However, they brought up different aspects of this process. Teacher 3 raised the question of different expectations that students have from the role of a teacher. Her belief is that she is there to help them, and that it is more important to understand what students need than the method she thinks one should teach. Teacher 1 stressed that he does not start with too high expectations; rather, he tries "to find where they are and then tr[ies] to bring them to the place they should be - which is a challenge." And this place, where they should be, is the place of internalized motivation for learning, curiosity and discovery – which he tries to inspire, he said. Teacher 2 mentioned the expectation that the students, as they move from the bachelor's to doctoral level, should gradually gain independence in their studies and research.

*Setting the structure.* The next step is offering students the structure or clear path toward meeting expectations and requirements. Teacher 3 described why there is a need for a clear path, and that it has to be worked out until a mutual understanding of it is achieved - where goals and standards present structure at the same time:

> If everything in another country is flexible, it is too much flexibility. So there must be something very clear and straightforward. But, what is the clear path? That has to be worked out. Because what is clear for me is not necessarily clear for other people. And we have to be very open for misunderstandings…And then to still have goals and standards, and you have to reach them, and I think that is also necessary, and that these standards, could be somehow, a structure.

*Offering support.* All the teachers cited another aspect in the process of setting the structure and expectations: the supporting role of the teacher in the learning process. Teacher 1 has emphasized the importance of:

> …being along the developmental line of support and using the energies that these young students bring along with them, not destroying them. Yes, that is very, very important: never destroy the energy of a student, and give them more push.

Teacher 3 mentioned the importance of making students "comfortable with learning process, which is very complicated because everybody needs a different adaptation." She described this process as looking for little steps that make the learning process easier. An example of one of such step is writing down on a flipchart the main points

that students make in discussion in order to increase mutual understanding. She has realized that international students do not understand one another very well because of very different English accents.

*Balancing support and standards.* Finally, teachers stressed the importance of finding the right balance between offering support and reaching the expected standards and requirements. Teacher 3 said:

> [A]lways compromising is not good also; they have to follow standards, not only me helping them.

Teacher 2 discussed this balance between openness, support and creating a lot of space, on the one hand, and the need for rules and standards, on the other hand, drawing a parallel between teaching and psychotherapy.

### 3.3.3 Transformative learning

This next subcategory of "transformative pedagogy" is the transformative learning that is common for all three teachers. It is the process that is described through five constituents (with all five common for all teachers):

*Instructional strategies.* Instructional strategies include all techniques that teachers use in their teaching, with a combination of strategies that are experiential or cognitive/didactic in nature. Teachers use various strategies, and some of the common strategies are: didactic methods, experiential exercises, reading assignments, writing assignments, participatory learning, modeling/observational learning, and technology-supported learning. However there are some more distinctive and innovative instructional strategies that are specific to each of the teachers. Teacher 1, besides games and role playing that students enact, uses a lot of illustrative technology tools that he has himself developed. One of the most distinctive features is the "movie databank," which contains movie excerpts and interactive media for discussing various psychological phenomena. Teacher 2 has organized a "Qualitative Research Lab," where she gathers the students who are under her individual supervision. The "Lab" is also open to other students interested and involved in qualitative research. In this way, she provides a space for, and facilitates the process of, networking, discussions and support among peers. Teacher 3 has a distinctive approach involving "live supervision," "reflecting teams" and "video analysis." It is a process that gets a whole group of students to work with clients "in vivo."

*Group discussions.* Described instructional strategies are set as a framework to provoke group discussions, to bring in many different perspectives and to make for a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. For all teachers, group discussions and active participation of students are an essential part of the learning process.

*Connecting with experience.* Another aspect of the learning process is that the instructional strategies are designed to provoke new experiences and/or to connect what it is taught with students' previous experiences. Again, all teachers agree on the crucial

importance of experiential learning. Teacher 1 offered an example:

> Well, for example, I try to give a lecture on borderline. At the end of a lecture or a seminar, the students ideally could "smell" the borderline. I would like them to be able to say a few main features, not from a textbook, but from their own experiences…I want them to be able to say, "Oh, I know a borderline; this person I know, she does this and that like this." So, getting them to have knowledge that is connected to their experiences is the main important thing, and then building upon that.

*Critical reflections.* An additional inseparable and crucial aspect of transformative learning is "critical reflections" about the content and the process of learning. The phrase "to reflect on" occurred frequently in the interviews. Teacher 3 addressed the process of reflection with respect to the whole process of practice, learning and teaching, during which the teacher also reflects together with students:

> So, one of the teaching philosophies could be that it is an evolving process where the teacher reflects, the students reflect the teaching together, for maximizing the benefit of it.

*Developing group support.* The final aspect of transformative learning is the development of group support and a safe environment in which students can ask questions and feel free to share their experiences, opinions and perspectives. This is an approach all the teachers share, and it is carried out mostly through a respectful attitude toward every participant; it provides room for dialogue, so the students themselves undertake this mode of communication. It means fostering the development of shared meanings within a group, as well as development of group resonance and feelings, as described by Teacher 1:

> The topic swings also from one person to the next, and I try to show that. And in that way I develop also a group feeling.

### 3.3.4 Transfer of knowledge

The fourth subcategory is the transferring of knowledge between home and host countries. This is an issue that is very specific to international students, and the teachers have made a lot of effort and shown a great deal of awareness and sensitivity to make this process easier. It has three constituents:

*Transfer during training.* Teacher 2 and 3 said that they were oriented toward the transfer of knowledge in two directions: (a) how students acquire knowledge about how psychotherapy and research is done in Austrian society; and (b) how students transfer this knowledge back to their home countries, already during the training. Teacher 2 encourages students to do empirical research in their language and country, and she shared her experiences with several students who have done so. Teacher 3 also encourages students to do their clinical practicum or part of it in their own countries. In this way, the transfer of knowledge can start during training. She made some

changes in her requirements for semester papers, introducing new topic that invite students to reflect on how systemic family therapy resonates with their language, culture and home country. The fact that the main practicum at the International Outpatient Clinic at SFU involves many international clients provides many opportunities for this. Teacher 3 reported that there was naturally a preference among both clients and therapists to work in their native language, so whenever it is possible, students are engaged with clients with whom they share countries or regions of origin. In addition, in earlier stages of training they work as interpreters in therapies where it is not possible to find a language match.

*Transfer challenges.* In general the process of transferring knowledge is challenging, and Teachers 2 and 3 shared their views of this process and their handling of related issues. Teacher 2, though expressing confidence that students would be able to apply the knowledge gained in Austria to another context, acknowledged that there would be aspects that they would not want to apply. Regardless, in order to transfer knowledge to another context, they have to learn how to "translate the concepts." In her words:

> I try to translate the concept, like "Oh, so that is how it is here, would you say what I have said before, would it be like this in your culture?" So the translation work is what they need to learn here.

Teacher 3 said that in her view, international students come to Austria to learn how psychotherapy is done here. For the transfer to another context, teachers can help to some degree, but in general it is the responsibility of students, especially in terms of building their own reputation as a necessity for gaining trust.

*Prospects after the training.* Teachers also spoke about how they viewed the professional prospects of international students after training and their readiness to support them to meet the challenges of their future professional plans, whether during practice in their home countries, in Austria or in some third countries.

### 3.3.5 Evaluation

The next subcategory of "transformative pedagogy" is evaluation. All three teachers said that they preferred semester papers, with an emphasis on critical reflections as a form of evaluation. At the same time, all of them viewed essays, not only as a form of evaluation, but also as a form of additional learning and teaching methods. For example, Teacher 2 said that through her extensive feedback on semester papers students had learned how to structure an academic paper. Teacher 3 said semester papers served as feedback about the teaching method.

### 3.3.6 Goals of training

The last subcategory presents the goals of training. The goals are directly linked to official teaching roles. Teacher 1, as a lecturer (of both general and psychoanalytic lectures) mentioned his focus on motivating students to engage in a discovery process of

knowledge by themselves, to raise the "appetite" for learning, to learn how to learn, and to connect knowledge to experience and to build upon that knowledge.

Teacher 2, as a lecturer and research supervisor, described how she teaches students to "translate" concepts and to navigate various stages of education (from the bachelor's degree to the PhD). Her aim is to turn them into independent researchers who know how to argue for different approaches and can "break some rules" if necessary. Teacher 3, as a lecturer, supervisor and coordinator of systemic family training, described her approach to training a good psychotherapist:

> To be flexible, to have many different roles, to be able to listen to what the clients want and need and question that at the same time. The goal is that they can practice with all kinds of people in all kinds of situations. Perhaps from the interview I have another idea - how to gain the trust, how to approach and meet people in different situations. That could be another goal. Like, we talked about how the trust could be different, and how to get this trust, perhaps we should think about it even more. It is a good goal, also. And another goal is how to stay healthy while doing psychotherapy - and with supervision to learn how to reflect constantly, so that you don't just help, and help and help, and then end up forgetting about yourself, and being more and more like a container, like feeling heavily other people emotions. So, we learn how to deal with these situations, like when we feel threatened by people, or feel sorry for them. How to stay healthy yourself, that is another goal - I think very important.

## 4 Discussion

The most interesting and general finding is that the favorite teachers' approaches are much more similar and have much more common than might be expected, given the teachers' different theoretical backgrounds, ages, life events and formal roles at the university. What they have in common regarding their personal background is that they have all been international students themselves and all have taught internationally. This fact in itself can explain a lot about their sensitivity and understanding for international students' issues. It also reinforces the argument that international psychotherapy students are the major force for the internationalization of psychotherapy (e.g., Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004).

During the interviews the favorite teachers addressed many issues that have been raised by the literature in the multicultural, indigenous and more recent international movements in psychotherapy, which have essentially recommended the use of multicultural models as a foundation for international models. They also offered a more comprehensive and clearer set of assumptions and approaches for addressing cultural issues in psychotherapy education.

## 4.1 Theoretical conceptualization of the role of culture in psychotherapy and multicultural/international competencies

The teachers in this study did not use the concept of cultural, multicultural or international competencies (one of the teachers even considers them misleading); yet their descriptions of their understanding and roles in the specific context, together with the findings about students' perceptions of them and the transformative effects they have on them, show clearly *their cultural competencies on multidimensional level*.

Multidimensional cultural competence was defined by Sue (2001), the main proponent of the multicultural movement, to describe the culturally competent psychotherapist as an agent of social justice at individual, professional, organizational and societal levels. However, Sue's (2001) model focused exclusively on the U.S. context and the issues that different minority groups have there. The teachers in this study have shown the understanding of the interplay between the specific context of Austrian society and SFU with the issues of international students from various countries worldwide. Thus they have *broadened their scope from the national to international level.*

There is an ongoing debate among proponents of multicultural/international training in psychotherapy about the meaning and definition of the term multicultural (Ridley et al, 1994) – and essentially the definition of culture. Ridley et al. (1994) has distinguished definitions by their degree of inclusiveness or exclusiveness, and by their focus on intranational or international issues. Besides their clearly demonstrated international scope, the teachers in this study promote the *understanding of culture in the most inclusive way,* which involves many different cultural characteristics, such as racial/ethnic identity, national identity, religious affiliation, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, socioeconomic status, geographical location, lifestyles, etc.

Furthermore, on the basis of the teachers' description of the need to understand individual cultural profile of every person and to take into consideration political, economic and historical aspects of the specific context and its influence on the individual, *their understanding of individual development resembles Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model of development*. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), a person's development is influenced by five different systems and their inter-relations: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. Heppner et al. (2008) proposed a preliminary conceptual framework for international competencies on the basis of the recommendations of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model of development as a guiding framework for psychotherapy professionals working in international settings. Therefore, their understanding of culture is *in accord with Heppner et al.'s (2008) proposal for international competencies in psychotherapy*.

Moreover, the teachers explicated appropriate strategies for multicultural/international training philosophy among various approaches found in the literature.

Theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing culture in psychotherapy were explicated in Ridley et al.'s (1994) seminal work as the part of the five-level pyramid multicultural training model. However, Ridley et al. (1994) discussed the pros and cons of several approaches found in the literature (generic, etic, emic and idiographic) regarding the conceptualization of the role of culture in psychotherapy theory, leaving educators to choose the appropriate approach for themselves. Atkinson (1994) argued that in the absence of an explicit critical analysis of which is appropriate or inappropriate, this discussion implies that each type of approach is equally reasonable and acceptable, even though some of the approaches contradict multicultural aims and support the status quo. The favorite teachers in this study have clearly taken the stand for the *idiographic approach* and *the need for balancing the autoplastic and alloplastic orientations in psychotherapy*.

They have also raised the *issue of language barriers*, which presents the usual topic in the literature about international students. However, the literature usually emphasizes the importance of international students second-language competencies (typically English), and discusses it as an important adjustment factor on which international students have to work for improvement (e.g., Andrade, 2006). Besides stressing difficulties due to language barriers, teachers in this study have focused on the strategies and activities that *they* can take to "bridge" those barriers.

Finally, they explicated *the meaning of multiculturalism* as the need for having a great deal of tolerance for individual differences; at the same time, they expressed the preference and need for enhancing interactions between those who are culturally different, which can be more easily fostered and nurtured in an inclusive society. In this way, they reflect the perspective of critical/transformative pedagogy, which values individual differences as social strength and aims toward developing cultural pluralism (e.g., Spajic- Vrkas, 2004).

### 4.2. Transformative pedagogy's potential for translating objectives of social justice into practice and for the internationalization of psychotherapy education

The findings about the favorite teachers' approach to teaching correspond closely to Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning in adult education and overall transformative (critical) pedagogy by Freire (1970). Mezirow (2000) defines transformative learning as a process whereby "we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (p. 214). It involves profound personal change or a fundamental shift in one's world view - "meanings perspective" or "frame of reference" (Mezirow, 1997, 2000), and it emerges from dialectic engagement among a group of learners with diverse perspectives (Mezirow, 1997).

Although critical/transformative pedagogy has a long history, at least in pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1991), it was not brought to the fore by cultural move-

ments in psychotherapy until very recently. Manis' (2012) review of multidisciplinary literature across humanities addressing multicultural education, advocacy and social justice (mostly published in the past few years) supports the efficacy of critical theory in social-justice pedagogy and in developing cultural competencies. She argues that the models of multicultural competencies are more aspirational, lacking guidance to translate the objectives of multiculturalism and social justice into practice, and recommends integration of critical pedagogy into psychotherapy education to address those issues (Manis, 2012). The findings in this study fill a gap in research on the perceptions of psychotherapy teachers and their process of teaching, and they *confirm that transformative/critical pedagogy is the crucial "ingredient" for translating the ideals of multiculturalism and social justice into practice*.

In addition, a review of the literature on the internationalization of education reveals that critical pedagogy and transformative learning receives increased multidisciplinary attention at international conferences, recognizing its *potential for the internationalization of education* (e.g., Kokkos & Tsimboukli, 2011; McEwen, Strachan, & Lynch, 2011). However, the adjectives used to describe transformative learning are mainly "promising," "potential," "challenging." This is because its application and research into it are lacking. An exception is Hanson's (2010) study, which confirms the potential of transformative pedagogies for personal transformation and global citizenship; it stresses that internationalization for social transformation reveals links and synergies among philosophical, institutional and pedagogical issues, which in turn suggest some necessary shifts in the role of educator – to one of "facilitator of epistemic reasoning" and of "citizen-activist" (p. 85).

Recurrent themes in the literature include the challenging nature of transformative learning, how it can be facilitated at the institutional level and whether the assessment is antithetic to its nature (McEwen et al., 2011). One of *the main challenges of transformative learning is the role of emotions and resistance in its process* (Kokkos & Tsimboukli, 2011; Servage, 2008). Consequently, many questions arise, including queries about: commonalities and differences between the emotional learning process and psychotherapy; functional ways and settings for transformative adult education; risks in exploring psychic dynamics; and competencies required for adult educators to get involved in this process (Kokkos & Tsimboukli, 2011). Mezirow (1991) is especially cautious about the exploration of highly personal matters, stating that those processes require psychotherapeutic skills and underlining the fact that adult educators are not qualified to treat psychological ailments. Whereas these issues reveal ethical dilemmas for adult educators in general, *in the realm of psychotherapy education, psychological and psychotherapy, knowledge and the skills of educators should not pose the problem*; and psychotherapy educators could naturally embrace transformative learning while respecting the boundaries between what and how is explored in an educational setting, on the one hand, and a therapy room, on the other.

Moreover, other models of transformative education that have been developed, like Boyds' (Boyd 1991; Boyd and Myers 1988) analytical model and emancipatory model of the "pedagogy of oppressed" (Freire, 1970), are especially relevant for psychotherapy education and *offer a wider spectrum of transformation that can include various psychotherapy schools and modalities*.

## 4.3 Step-by-step guidance for applying transformative pedagogy in different contexts

The findings of this study have not only *confirmed the critical importance of transformative pedagogy* for translating the objectives of multiculturalism and social justice into practice and for the internationalization of psychotherapy education; they have *also explicated the concrete steps* in applying transformative pedagogy from the international perspective. Although the following steps are derived as the "best practice" in the unique international setting of this study, we firmly believe that they can also be transferred to more typical psychotherapy training settings: where international students and/or minorities representatives are joining "domestic" programs, or when teachers are going to other countries to develop psychotherapy trainings. These steps are:

Step 1: *Establishment of good working alliance*

This is accomplished through the circular process of assessing students' beginning levels and needs, setting the structure and clarifying mutual expectations, offering support, and providing continuous evaluation.

Step 2: *Transformative learning strategies*

These are formulated through the innovative diverse instructional strategies that are designed to connect the knowledge with experience, provoke group discussions and critical reflections, and foster the development of a safe group atmosphere, where students feel free to engage in dialectic exchange of different perspectives.

Step 3: *Preparation of students for the transfer of knowledge to other contexts*

This is achieved through the understanding of students' professional intentions, prospects and challenges; encouragement of the opportunities for the transfer of knowledge during training (e.g., clinical practicum and/or research in different contexts and with different populations); and teaching students how to "translate" and adapt concepts to specific settings and contexts.

Taken together, these steps offer guidance for the creation of a learning environment where all participants have "equal voices" and opportunities to learn and contribute to teaching; they remind us that our knowledge is socially and culturally constructed. This environment can further foster the transformation of our "taken for granted" assumptions toward more inclusive and flexible perspectives, and steer the personal and professional development of

psychotherapists in the direction of becoming the agents of social justice globally. Therefore, we believe that these steps are not only applicable to typical psychotherapy training settings in various contexts, but are essential as a corrective to well-documented instances of cultural oppressions and marginalization.

## 5 Conclusion

This study has offered interplay of very specific findings relevant to the concrete context of the International Psychotherapy Programme at SFU Vienna and very general implications that we believe are relevant for many who are interested in the internationalization of psychotherapy. At the same time, the interplay of very specific idiosyncratic elements and universal principles in psychotherapy is the main message of this study.

The favorite teachers' training philosophy has emphasized the need for developing an *individual cultural profile* of each student. This profile implies a wide spectrum of variables relevant to their personal histories and specific contexts, including their various personal affiliations and values, as well as political, social and economic influences. They approach each unique individual in an *idiographic manner*, searching and constantly verifying the understanding of their personal meanings and needs, while trying to establish a trustful relationship through which they can help students (and clients/patients) to find harmony within themselves and their environment. The way to teach students to accomplish this approach in psychotherapy is through *transformative pedagogy*. There has recently been a call among pedagogues for gaining more psychological and psychotherapeutic knowledge in order to be able to apply transformative pedagogy in practice (Kokkos & Tsimboukli, 2011). At the same time, there has been a call among psychotherapists to involve critical pedagogy and transformative learning in psychotherapy education as a crucial approach for translating ideals of true cultural pluralism and social justice in practice (Manis, 2012). Moreover, transformative learning has been recognized for its potential in the internationalization of higher education (Kokkos & Tsimboukli, 2011; McEwen et al., 2011).

Because of the nature of transformative learning, which involves an emotionally charged and challenging transformative journey, psychotherapists are not only in advantageous and unique position due to their knowledge - but they have ethical responsibility to become leaders in the field of transformative pedagogy. In this way, they can become transformative protagonists in the development of global citizenships and a more just globalized world.

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