Reinvigorating psychoeducational assessment with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Youth

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Australia's increasing population includes Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) communities and educational psychology has the potential to promote inclusion and social justice with these groups. Culturally competent engagement is integral to this task. In particular, the capacity to deliver non-discriminatory assessments. Australian research exploring the learning experiences of CaLD students is limited, and there are presently no definitive professional guidelines for practitioners to follow when assessing CaLD students. To address this matter, educational psychologists have begun to formulate best practice assessment protocols (APS, 2023; Khawaja & Howard, 2020). However, consensus on what constitutes fair and just assessment is yet to be agreed. This paper contributes to current debates by examining CaLD assessment practices through the principles of ecologics (Corcoran, 2024). Specifically, it considers how ecologics support practitioners to think differently about learning and teaching and the need for culturally competent psychoeducational assessment to advance pedagogies of excellence and equity within Australia's schools.

Keywords: culturally and linguistically diverse students; psychoeducational assessment; ecologics; ethics; process

Introduction

Within Australia, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) populations include people migrating in search of new educational and economic opportunities, refugees and asylum seekers who have been forced to flee their country because of war, violence and persecution, and also people of Indigenous descent (Pham et al., 2021). The United Nations Human Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR; 2024) reported that over 117.3 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide and that an estimated 47 million are children under the age of 18. Australia currently hosts approximately 60,000 refugees and 80,000 asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2024). Minors comprise 52% of the world's refugee population (UNHCR, 2018). Of CaLD populations migrating to Australia between 2017 and 2018, approximately 50% were minors (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Children and young people from CaLD communities are legally required to attend school within Australia. While this paper acknowledges and draws on indigenous ways of knowing/being, the discussion below focuses on assessment practices with refugee and migrant populations.

Meeting the learning needs of all students and providing tailored and equitable education is a complex task. This complexity is increased and becomes more evident when working with CaLD students, given cultural and language diversity and the impact migration-related challenges and stressors can have on learning, well-being and academic achievement (Kaplan, 2009; Khawaja & Wotherspoon, 2022; Leon & Campbell, 2020). While most CaLD students coming from overseas prosper within Australian schools, a small minority experience learning difficulties and academic challenges. Ensuring CaLD students have equitable opportunities to learn and meaningfully participate alongside their peers is of the utmost importance to our schools and communities (Slee, 2018; Thrift & Sugarman, 2018). Given the impact learning difficulties have on students' identity and wellbeing, disengagement from school, either physically or psychologically, can have profound and disturbing consequences for student lives (AUSPELD, 2018; Khawaja & Wotherspoon, 2020; Whitburn, 2016).

Developing best practice protocols supports practitioners in designing fair and valid assessment batteries. However, a study by Leo and Campbell (2020) suggests that Australian practitioners face significant challenges, particularly due to difficulty finding appropriate assessment tools and gathering accurate and comprehensive background information when working with CaLD populations. Ecologics (Corcoran, 2024) reinvigorates our thinking about what constitutes equity and excellence within psychological practices, assessment included.

Through process-oriented and relational ways of knowing/being, ecologics encourage practitioners to view assessment as primarily a matter of psychosocial justice (Corcoran & Vassallo, 2021). Through this framework, renewed attention is brought to the risks inherent within CaLD assessment, particularly the paradoxes and contradictions generated by the continued dominance of traditional assessment practices and psychometric tests. The discussion begins with a brief overview of current psychoeducational assessment practice in Australia. We then consider several paradoxical and contradictory conditions present in such practice. The final section

introduces ecologics, outlining its five prospective conditions relative to aspects of educational psychology practice.

Current practice in Australia

Although Australian research into the lived experience of psychoeducational assessment is limited (Leon & Campbell, 2020; Lindelauf, 2022), the knowledge and expertise of educational/school psychologists suggest they are well-placed to support schools in understanding and providing for the learning needs of CaLD students. It should be acknowledged that the terms used to describe learning difficulties are subject to considerable debate. Here, the terms 'learning difficulties' and 'students with learning difficulties' are used in keeping with those preferred by self-advocacy movements (Goodley, 2001; Stalker, 2019). They refer to learning difficulties as complex, dynamic, and multi-dimensional phenomena. Students who experience learning difficulties in Australian schools initially receive additional support and intervention within the classroom. If difficulties persist, students are generally referred to an educational/school psychologist for a psychoeducational assessment to identify the factors potentially hindering their learning and progress at school. Through their assessment, psychologists can write reports providing diagnostic information and specific recommendations for further intervention, including how a student and their learning needs can be accommodated within the classroom.

Competency 7 of The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) states that psychologists 'intentionally work towards providing equitable, accessible, sustainable, timely and culturally responsive care within their scope of practice' (p.2). Existing models and frameworks provide guidance on how educational/school psychologists can administer culturally competent and culturally sensitive assessments when working with CaLD populations (e.g., APS, 2023; Khawaja & Wotherspoon, 2020). Broadly, these frameworks provide guidance within three domains relating to the knowledge and expertise, self-awareness and communication skills of the assessing psychologist (APS, 2023; Khawaja & Howard, 2020). By way of example, this includes the assessing psychologist's capacity for self-reflection on their own culture and associated traditions, values, biases and privilege, as well as the promotion of cultural humility and curiosity about the diverse backgrounds and developmental history of each student undertaking assessments with them (APS, 2023). It requires detailed knowledge about the psychometric properties of the assessment tools they use and ongoing vigilance to ensure the within-paradigm validity and meaning of the test results generated. Additionally, the assessing psychologist must grapple with the complexity of learning as a biosocial and fluid phenomenon (Yodel & Lindley, 2018) and education as a performative matter deeply embedded and embodied within the ecology of classrooms, schools and communities (Hickey & Riddell, 2023).

The diversity and complexity of CaLD student populations highlight the importance and benefit of an assessment approach that is 'flexible, culturally sensitive and ideographic' (Khawaja & Howard, 2020, p. 99). It necessitates using both quantitative and qualitative assessment methods and the generation of variable hypotheses as to why a student is struggling with their learning (APS, 2023). It requires the ability to work collaboratively with various stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, English as an Additional Language (EAL) specialists and translators during the assessment process. It also requires the ability to clearly communicate assessment results within the restrictions of a psychoeducational report.

Whilst practice guidelines address many of the key issues that educational/school psychologists should consider when working with CaLD populations, training in culturally competent assessment is limited within Australia (Leon & Campbell, 2020; Ortiz & Seymour, 2017), and there is no universally agreed-upon definition of culturally competent assessment (APS, 2023). This is of particular concern, given that research suggests inappropriate assessment practices are one of the most common factors that contribute to inappropriate labelling of learning differences as intellectual disability amongst CaLD students (Leon & Campbell, 2020; Vega, Lasser, & Afifi, 2016). Disproportional representation of racially and ethnically minority students within special education (Ortiz & Franquiz, 2016; Sabnis & Proctor, 2021; Vega et al., 2016) and underrepresentation in gifted programs (Grant et al., 2022) is also documented within research. Misunderstanding how trauma, missed schooling, and language barriers impact learning and academic achievement are additional factors that contribute to inappropriate learning support amongst CaLD populations (Oritz & Seymour, 2017).

Best practice frameworks have begun exploring the limitations of current CaLD assessment practices and how they may contribute to educational discrimination. This includes the challenge of finding and using fair and non-discriminatory assessment tools (APS, 2023). Nonetheless, most psychometric tests maintain cultural bias, given that they are often highly dependent on language skills, speeded responses, and crystallised (i.e., acquired) knowledge of the Global North (Fraine & McDade, 2009), and few are developed, validated, or normed on CaLD populations (APS, 2023). Even the cultural appropriateness of tests developed to reduce language demands, such as the

Universal Nonverbal Intelligence Test (UNIT), has not been rigorously investigated or normed on CaLD or refugee populations (APS, 2023). Several strategies to identify the cultural bias of standardised testing have been suggested. Leo and Campbell (2020) note how cross-battery assessment (XBA; Flanagan, Ortiz & Alfonso, 2013) supports practitioners in administering standardised measures while determining subtests' cultural and language weighting within the assessment battery. Whilst subject to considerable debate, using translators is also proposed as an approach that may offset the cultural bias of assessment tools (Leo & Campbell, 2020). Despite these advances, cultural bias remains, and psychoeducational assessment continues to be delivered within reductionist and mechanistic frameworks that other and disempower students through essentialist and ableist discourse (Billington, 2017; Goodley, 2021).

Paradoxes and contradictions in psychoeducational assessment

Educational/school psychologists' knowledge of human development and the cognitive abilities that support learning and academic achievement have long supported teachers in providing tailored instruction for students experiencing learning difficulties. Contemporary psychoeducational assessment reflects these advances, shifting away from the traditional function of providing summative information in the form of IQ scores, to a formative one where learning ability and academic achievement are determined as complex and fluid phenomena (Youdell & Lindley, 2018). Nonetheless, the formative function of contemporary assessment practices is curtailed by the demand for rational and conclusive explanations about students and how they learn, as well as the competitive funding arrangements that continue to depend on the provision of summative scores and classifications.

The continued use of psychometric tests with CaLD populations necessitates normative and classificatory language derived from the colonial practices of the Global North that maintain ideologies of radical individualism, psychological reductionism, and deficit-based explanations of learning. Assumptions about psychometric tests and their capacity to objectively measure innate or even culturally and socially determined abilities, independent of the apparatus and theory employed, are rarely debated but necessitate assessment narratives of essentialist and ableist identities (Grant et al., 2022; Krammer, 2023). Moreover, as argued by Feely (2016), the ranking and classification of individuals by IQ tests fix identity in ways that readily 'come to be accepted as objective and accurate' (p. 865). These practices generate totalising and hierarchical discourse that masks the situated and relational processes of

learning and education (Billington, 2017; Ceder, 2018). In addition to the assumption that psychometric tests can independently and objectively measure the psychological world of the student (Vassallo, 2017), assessment practices are also determined by the assumption that the construction and representation of a student within the confines of a psychoeducational report can enact educational realities that are helpful for the assessed student.

The effect of an assessment is ultimately dependent on how it is understood, translated, and enacted. Within Australia and internationally, the communication of assessment results traditionally occurs within the format of a psychoeducation report (Fletcher et al., 2016). How people respond to meanings communicated therein is unlikely to occur in a direct and linear manner. As such, psychoeducational assessment's practical meaning, value and effect are never pre-determined and fixed. Instead, its utility is relational and dependent on context-specific conditions and how psychologists and others respond within these conditions (Lindelauf, 2022). This is illustrated by Michaels (2006), who suggested that while some ethical decisions, such as gaining informed consent and assent for psychoeducational assessment are relatively straightforward, others are more complex and nuanced. For example, reporting test results directly influences a student's sense of self and who they are as a learner, but also indirectly by modifying how they are understood and treated by others. Importantly, Michaels (2006) argues that the potential harm generated by standardised assessment is intensified by the technical language and jargon of standardised assessment, the reified nature of diagnostic statements and IQ scores that are particularly vulnerable to misinterpretation, both in the immediate and distant future. Similarly, Wilcox and Schroeder (2015) demonstrated how simple thinking errors such as anchoring heuristics, framing effects and confirmation biases of psychologists can result in errors of judgment when analysing and making decisions about assessment data.

Attard et al., (2016a, 2016b) highlighted how ethical dilemmas such as those noted by Michaels (2006) repeatedly confront psychologists when trying to communicate the complexity and uncertainty of assessment information within the restricted form and content of a written report. Nonetheless, few studies explore the impact assessment and psychoeducational reports have on pedagogy and students' lives (Lindelauf, 2022). Additionally, the Australian Psychological Society's Code of Ethics does not delineate responsibility for the effects and realities enacted from the translation reports within local settings. Terminology such as 'take reasonable steps' (APS, 2024, p. 144) and 'reasonably foreseeable consequences' (APS, 2024, p. 147) are ambiguous and provide leeway that safeguards the needs of psychologists and institutions over those of students.

Critical writers such as Bennet (2017) suggest that whilst supportive of ethical conduct, the provision of generalised statements and universal principles alone risks the 'fossilisation' of ethical codes (p. 83). They fail to address the 'microethics' and 'power relations' of everyday practice, such as the uncertainty and ambiguity that pervades assessment practices and the linear communication of complex data within the written format of a report (Devlin, 2017, p. 89). They pass over the entangled and complex socio-political processes that inhabit the intersection of psychology and education, as well as the contingent meaning and mattering of reports within these networks, such as the making and interpreting diagnostic statements. For Attard et al. (2016b), the epistemological doubt inherent to the measurement of human function and the challenge of communicating this indeterminacy within a written report is an 'impossible gift' where psychologists endeavour to balance the holistic and long-term needs of students with the economic logic and diagnostic requirements of institutions and funding arrangements. It follows that the enactment and effect of an assessment are never assured but paradoxical and uncertain.

To enable ethical assessment practice, we must bring ongoing attention to the paradoxes and uncertainties of CaLD assessment and its complicated role in ensuring social justice within education. We now turn to ecologics (Corcoran, 2024) as a means to reinvigorate recognition of the complexity and relationality of psychoeducational assessment. In doing so, we consider new possibilities and openings for how educational psychologists can proceed towards greater equity and excellence in supporting the education of CaLD students.

Ecologics and CaLD assessment

Reinvigorating CaLD assessment practices via ecologics enables a critically minded and justice-orientated educational/school psychology. It invites us to imagine new and affirmative possibilities within our existing practice and those supporting its future re-arrangement. Educational/school psychology applications have become increasingly sophisticated over time (Gergen & Gill, 2020), confirmed by the many adaptations over the 135 years since intelligence tests were first used within schools. Ecologics promotes trans-paradigmatic engagement, explicitly recognising how psychology has historically been a theoretical and methodologically diverse discipline (Danziger, 1990; Teo, 2015). Alongside existing hegemonic knowledge provided by scientism and the continued use of psychometric tests (Mazur, 2021), ecologics encourage researchers and practitioners to draw on innovative theories such as critical disability studies, critical psychology and process-orientated ways of knowing/being. Accordingly, whilst seeking innovative ways to promote non-discriminatory and inclusive practice, ecologics remain responsive to the testimonies of people who have struggled with school-based learning and how psychometric and diagnostic information has enabled understanding and provision for their difficulties in a school context.

Within this trans-paradigmatic orientation to complexity, ecologics is an inherently political and ethical project that invites educational/school psychologists to consider and debate more fully how it is what we do and the impact and enactment this has within local communities and everyday lives. Applied to our discussions above, ecologics offers five key prospects that assist in grappling with the relationality of education and the paradoxes of CaLD assessment noted earlier. These five prospects will now be considered.

Within and across forms of knowledge

Among various forms of knowing/being, ecologics draws on 'life-minded' and 'process' oriented knowledges passed down through the traditions of Indigenous peoples dating back more than 40,000 years (Mika, 2017). In doing so, we are reminded of the benefits and limitations of our sensemaking practices. Introna (2019, p. 759) explains:

> Sense is always and already, in some sense, made prior to individual or collective sensemaking practices, however we might understand that. Differently stated, every attempt at framing is always and already enframed...subjects are always and already affected, an affectedness that moves – it colours in advance what matters and how it matters (or not).

Psychoeducational assessment is a pertinent example of a particular kind of sensemaking practice. But as discussed throughout this paper, people belonging to different cultures, CaLD communities included, carry with them their own frames of reference to determine ways of knowing/being. It is for this reason that ecologics encourage practitioners to be diligent in their recognition of what matters and how it matters.

Ecologics directly ally with decolonial approaches to psychology (Dudgeon & Walker, 2015) and education (Canagarajah, 2023) in promoting transparadigmatic engagement with people and their communities. In contrast to hegemonic Global North-oriented ways of knowing/being, where scientism dominates and where ideologies supporting individualism and self-sufficiency are valued, Indigenous knowledge offers alternate means to understanding life and living. For example, an equivalent term to the concept of 'disability' as understood in Global North contexts (i.e., from medical and deficit-based

explanations), does not easily translate into the over 250 First Nations languages in Australia (Puszka et al., 2022). Instead, Indigenous communities often regard such conditions as unremarkable aspects of human diversity. Within communities where kinship and collective responsibility are the cultural norm, ableism struggles to make sense.

Ecologics highlights the paradoxes and contradictions that inhabit our ways of knowing/being to inspire and reinvigorate fixed and dominant paradigms within educational/school psychology. It does not claim one way of knowing the world but extends our thinking and worldview through process-orientated orientations that highlight the psychosocial and material complexity of our lives. Applied to assessment practices, it invites orientations of uncertainty and curiosity that enrich how we may understand the uniqueness of student learning. It supports psychologists in finding an orientation that goes beyond the limitations of rationalism and quantification without getting lost in channels of subjectivity and relativism. It seeks to inspire others to remain open to who students are and who they could be as learners in life and in living whilst moving forward with existing practices of fidelity and care.

Identifying and traversing a pathway between the dualistic and paradoxical assumptions of scientism and process-oriented sensemaking is a complex task. However, through committed and collective action, practitioners are empowered to think critically about how and what they do and what is enacted from this doing and being. Such practices contribute to forging transparadigmatic pathways within existing systems in ways that challenge neuronormativity and other embedded structures of power and discrimination whilst opening to new possibilities for psychosocial justice, diversity and self-determination within the practices of psychoeducational assessment.

The inseparability of all things

Ecologics seek to understand how assessment becomes useful in local practice settings. That is, through process-oriented thinking, it aims to account for the complexity of the world and how psychosocial and material processes, events, and assumptions shape our ways of being (i.e., ontology) and knowing (i.e., epistemology). This orientation contrasts with the philosophical underpinnings of most educational/school psychology. As noted above, existing guidelines for culturally responsive assessment go some way to acknowledging the ecological and embedded nature of learning. However, the ableist and reductive assumptions that continue to inhabit CaLD assessment remain implicit and are maintained through the ongoing use of standardised and normative measurement, as well as the representative and restrictive characteristics of psychoeducational reports.

In addition to the inherent risks of norm-based data discussed earlier, the formal spaces of assessment settings and the implied status of the assessing psychologist generate a power differential that potentially position the student as a passive object upon which the assessment is practised. This positioning is reinforced by the pre-determined and manualised testing protocols that maintain an inter-subjective assumption whereby a psychologist can claim to legitimately enter into a transitory but meaningful relationship to determine the psychological capacities of the observed student. The power effects contained within this hegemonic relationality are intensified for some CaLD students and psychologists when there are entanglements within existing cultures of authoritarianism and hierarchy (APS, 2023).

In comparison, ecologics orients educational/school psychologists towards the intra-subjectivity of knowing/being and the psychosocial and material networks of local communities. Humanistic notions of independent subjects and objects become untenable, and the complexity of our being and the relationality of education are necessarily examined (Ceder, 2018). Likewise, learning can never be understood by any one factor because, as noted by Massumi (2018), 'what it spins off from is how multiple factors come together: it is an irreducibly relational effect that comes to more than the sum of its contributory parts' (p. 26). As suggested by Summayyah Sadiq-Ojibara (2023), the assessment of CaLD students may easily become a form of discrimination when summative scores and the restrictive narrative of psychoeducational reports fail to account for intersectional concerns.

Rather than place an individualised human subject at the centre of the assessment process, ecologics consider how entanglements of material and non-material features of local communities, e.g., furniture, books, technology, food, walls, floors, humans and nonhumans, work together to shape student learning and well-being. Ecologics sensitise practitioners to bias and prejudice and the variable flows of affect – vulnerability, despair, resilience and resistance - that pervade the contemporary arrangements of education and those that continue to reverberate from its heritage. It follows that within the worldview of ecologics, cultural humility and relationality is a necessity. The student is not the sole or central focus and CaLD assessment is not a one-off event but a procedural and relational practice that occurs in and over time. It is a performative matter generated by tangible and intangible processes and events that generate and become entangled with local and global ecologies of assessment practices Likewise, within the framework of ecologics, the ontology of reports, what they are and do within a practice, is not pre-determined but performed and emergent. They are no longer fixed and stable objects but

are 'becoming objects-in-practice' (Rhodes and Lancaster, 2019, p. 4) that are made mutable by their entanglement within networks of psychosocial and material elements and forces specific and unique to each practice setting.

The inseparability of all things suggests there is always 'more than' to be considered when working within education (Corcoran & Vassallo, 2021) and that paradox and contradiction are inevitable and necessary to knowledge-making (Mazur, 2021). In addition to the knowledge and skills highlighted by existing guidelines, CaLD assessment requires an orientation that keeps the assessing psychologist's knowing/being open and attuned to complexity and uncertainty. This brings the 'how' of assessment to the fore, and, from this orientation, practitioners recognise that assessment can only be practised and understood through its mattering. That is, from its enactment and practical meaning, value, and effect within people's lives and in the life we endeavour to create through education. This includes how learning diversity is understood and valued.

Working with difference differently

Concerned with the dynamic and complex movement and process of learning and education, ecologics seeks to disrupt the division and simplification of learning ability into discrete components generated by quantification. Given the significant challenges many CaLD students experience due to migration and acculturation (APS, 2023; Gill & Gergen, 2020), the prioritising of learning as a fluid, biopsychosocial and political phenomenon is also paramount within the framework of ecologics. Influenced by critical disability studies (Whitburn & Goodley, 2022) and decolonising movements within school psychology (Grant et al., 2022), learning is always a situated and contextual matter rather than something bounded and internal within the individual (Youdell & Lindely, 2018). Understood this way, representing a student's cognitive ability using classificatory and normative language remains a requirement of most psychoeducational reports, but a task that is problematic if not untenable. Rather than seeking reductive and conclusive explanations about students, practitioners come to prioritise uncertainty and doubt as a necessary component of assessment and report writing.

Whilst psychometric testing remains a requirement of many CaLD assessments within Australian schools, ecologics seek to counter normative expectations and reductive descriptions. Understanding and meeting a student's learning difficulty, such as reading or mathematics, can only be determined and enacted relationally. That is, considering the ecological entanglements of which the student is a part and how these entanglements 'work together as a whole' to enable learning and inclusion (Feely, 2016, p. 871). The traditional assessment task of categorising and ascribing fixed identities becomes redundant and is replaced with a more curious and creative one of 'discovering more and more context-dependent capacities' (Feely, 2016, p. 871). Rather than providing descriptions of deficit, the task for the educational/school psychologist is to work collaboratively and relationally 'through creative thought and ongoing experimentation' to discover what a student can do rather than what they cannot (Feely, 2016, p. 871). It recognises that all things are forever in entangled states of flow and becoming (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010) and that differentials of power mask the ontological networks of learning difficulties.

What is enacted from the application of psychology to education and how we respond within these networks of production are always the main concerns for critical educational psychologists (Corcoran, 2022). Within this orientation of response-ability (Barad, 2007), notions of emotionally neutral and disembodied practitioners and clients become unworkable and must be replaced with concepts of interbeing and relationality (Devlin, 2017; Li, 2021; McNamee, 2018). Rather than psychoeducational assessment having a therapeutic purpose, it becomes an emancipatory matter (Billington, 2017). That is, its function is to generate and maintain not only the conditions that facilitate educational equity and psychosocial justice but also to disrupt those that discriminate, dis/able and oppress the lives of students who experience discrimination and inequity at school.

The imperative of (not) knowing

The administration of psychoeducational assessment to provide summative information and linear explanations about who students are as learners is a task in keeping with what Vassallo (2017) describes as psychology's 'imperative of knowing' students (p. 15). When practitioners orientate to the practice of 'not knowing', the expert status of psychologists and their role as gatekeepers to additional resourcing within schools is challenged. Although uncertainty and doubt are essential components of the scientific process (Simmons, 2023), the orientations of 'not knowing' are not readily accepted within the eurocentric and colonial frameworks that continue to inhabit contemporary educational/school psychology. For ecologics, the complexity and uncertainty of CaLD assessment practice demand a shift away from the assumed role of expert to one of partnership and collaboration. Rather than working with humanistic and clinical notions of knowing, ecologics challenge notions of certainty and unequivocal meaning. Assessment is then tasked with understanding not only what is brought to the fore by psychometric tests and the scientific method but also what is left behind and what is yet to be known.

The risk associated with misinterpreting assessment results, along with the experiences of trauma and adverse childhood experiences within CaLD communities, further suggests that orientations of 'not knowing' are critical to safeguarding the intended meaning of psychoeducational reports and, in turn, the dignity and autonomy of participating students. As discussed above, the conditions associated with ecologics suggest that sense-making and translation are always equivocal and uncertain. As noted by Edwards (2012) '[k]nowing is not separate from doing but emerges from the very matter-ings in which we engage' (p. 532). It follows that not working relationally would be a mistake and an error that undermines the scientific and professional integrity of educational/school psychology and its application to assessment practices.

The variability and uncertainty of report translation and enactment have been an ongoing matter of concern for Joanne (first author) within her role as an educational psychologist, particularly the risk this has in perpetuating summative and essentialised meanings that imprison students within fixed and limited narratives about who they are and who they could become as learners. In working with a CaLD student she refers to as Nia, Joanne described how uncertainty is critical not only to the assessment process but also to the task of report writing. She writes:

> I want my report to encourage the reader to be cautious and uncertain in using the standardised results and classifications to characterise Nia and her learning potential. I want them to regard my report as just one event in a flow of events and to assume that everything written is already in flux. But more than anything, I want the reader to know that I am not describing the individuality of Nia's cognitive ability, but rather the multiple intra-actions between the networks of psychosocial and material factors and events that affect and are affected by her cognition – her family; her migration to Australia; her shyness and the variable ways in which that is met by those around her; her teachers; her peers; me; the room we are working in; the traces of historical forces and ethical imperatives that reverberate in the assessment tools I am using (Yanchar, 2016). This tangle of mediating and intermediating intra-actions is infinite and repeating. It emerges and re-emerges in ways I can identify and understand and ways I cannot (Lindelauf, 2022, p.117)

As with the participants in Attard et al. (2016a), Joanne introduces qualifying statements into her reports to highlight her epistemic doubt and prompt similar caution

and uncertainty in the reader (Shildrick, 2019). Although she has persisted in trying to value assessment and reports as a means of acknowledging and bringing learning impairment into focus, she remains concerned that this impairment, and the affirmative difference that she hopes to communicate in her reports, may also be transformed into a difference that other students as it joins essentialising networks of psychosocial and material forces already present within her community (Shildrick, 2019; Whitburn, 2017).

Conversely, the deficit-based narratives generated by psychometric tests not only risk constraints for Nia but also shape and reshape Joanne's identity as a practitioner. She goes back to Corcoran (2017, p. 252) and his question, 'How is it then possible to maintain one's preferred ethics of existence and/or align our own cycles of knowing/being when prevailing cycles continue to expound the last word regarding human nature'? From this orientation, she can begin again to try and respond ethically to the paradoxes encountered in her practice.

Returning to the many contradictions and paradoxes inherent to the practice of educational/school psychology invites practitioners to the opening of new possibilities within their everyday work context. Dewey (1938/1937, p. 46) proposed that 'there is no such thing as educational value in the abstract'. Likewise, we cannot determine the value and efficacy of assessment as a means of ensuring fairness and equity without understanding how they become meaningful and matter within local practice. Just as there is never an endpoint to becoming a culturally competent psychologist, psychoeducational assessment is always an uncertain, iterative and contextual matter.

Alternatives to hierarchy and closure

When practitioners invite not knowing into their work and recognise the complexity and relationality that constitute education and assessment, conversations about students and their learning are kept open. While ecologics is informed by lived experience and the reported benefits of diagnostic statements to the learning and wellbeing for those living with learning difficulties (e.g., Cameron, 2017; Whateley, 2021), it eschews finalisation and closure and promotes an assessment proceeding from uncertainty and ongoing curiosity. In doing so, practitioners find ways to enhance 'first nature' (i.e., reductionist) accounts of learning generated through the requirements of psychometric tests to include non-essentialised 'second nature' knowledge that addresses the embedded and relational processes that enable and support learning as a fluid phenomenon, not only its summation as an end product (Corcoran, 2009). Nonetheless, the creative prospects of ecologics suggest that to do so practitioners must not only grapple with the paradoxes inherent to the measurement and

categorisation of a student's learning ability and the equivocal meaning of assessment results within the limited and representational format of a psychoeducational report (Attard et al., 2016a; 2016b), but also what is enacted as a result of the assessment.

Accountability for what is enacted from assessment practices generates a broader ethic of process and care. An ethic that brings attention to the challenges of knowing learning difficulties and the intricate psychosocial and material webs of relationality through which the ontological prospects of assessment are generated and maintained. This includes attention to the epistemic violence that reverberates within the essentialist heritage of educational/school psychology and the ways this heritage is maintained within contemporary practices (Sabnis & Proctor, 2021).

Within ecologics there is always 'more-than' to consider in our orientation to practice as teachers, psychologists and researchers and how together we support and determine the dynamic and ethical unfolding of teaching and learning globally and within our local communities (Corcoran & Vassallo, 2021). Nonetheless, such orientations do not arise from generic and manualised guidelines but from a commitment to preferred and collective action and the courage of its enactment.

Conclusion

Culturally responsive and sensitive psychoeducational assessment of CaLD students is not facilitated by a single discipline or onto-epistemology. Instead, it requires an educational/school psychology that is transparadigmatic and oriented to explicating both the 'how' and 'what' of practice. When psychology orients to process-orientated ways of knowing/being and an ethic affirming relationality, predominantly fixed, discrete and distanced knowledges become less desirable. As Corcoran (2024, p. 447) recognised: 'The further our situatedness from events taking place, the less likely we are to understand their unique conditions of possibility and be able to then act responsively and responsibly'. Ecologics are means to reinvigorate educational psychologists' practice via five always and already situated enactments: i) affirming relationalities, ii) orienting to difference differently, iii) accepting not knowing, iv) respecting unfinalisability, and v) working transparadigmatically.

Educational/school psychology is a profession of skilled and knowledgeable practitioners dedicated to making a difference in students' lives. Geopolitical conflict is not new and vast populations continue to be displaced from their homes, seeking sanctuary in far-flung communities and schools. Ensuring educational/school psychologists' assessment practices meet students' unique learning

potential to enact affirming and diverse pedagogies of equity and excellence remains ever-important. The entangled ways in which CaLD assessment comes to be performed, and the variable effects and realities this may produce for the assessed student, demand attention to what is enacted within local communities. This includes vigilance to the epistemic violence of psychometric tests and the oppressive and discriminatory events and processes enacted from their use, but also to the conditions that enable practitioners to work towards emancipatory practice through ethical processes of collective becoming and concern.

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