Moving From Culturally Biased to Culturally Responsive Assessment Practices in Low-Resource, Multicultural Settings

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Ensuring that psychological assessments are appropriate and fair for clients from diverse cultures is challenging for most practitioners. When this challenge occurs in a poorly resourced setting against a background of social inequality, as is often the case in the South African context, practitioners need to be highly resourceful, as well as culturally sensitive and ethically aware. This article provides tangible suggestions to empower practitioners to address complex issues ranging from multilingualism, English-language proficiency, and multiculturalism to limited material and human resources. Emic assessments remain the gold standard for such contexts but are often not possible. Hence the article describes several approaches that represent departures from traditional methods of assessment, moving more toward narrative and contextual approaches to assessment. In doing so, the article advocates the creation of a set of guidelines for multicultural practice that can assist practitioners and researchers who work in low-resource, multicultural settings. Recommendations are provided in this regard.

Keywords: culture, language proficiency, multiculturalism, multilingualism, psychological assessment

Despite its classification as an upper-middle-income country, South Africa ranks among the world's most socioeconomically unequal countries (World Bank, 2014). The practice of psychological assessment is directly impacted by this inequality. The majority of South Africans have limited access to the potential benefits of such assessment due to affordability issues, poor-quality education, and high levels of illiteracy. Where psychological assessment is accessible, the practice is complicated by resource challenges. These include the following: tests are predominantly available only in English, there is limited practitioner proficiency in languages other than English, settings are unsuitable for assessments, test materials are limited, and there is a shortage of skilled expertise to develop new tests for the multicultural South African population (see Foxcroft & Davies, 2008; Johnston, 2015; Laher & Cockcroft, 2013b; Seedat & Mackenzie, 2008). Because assessment conditions are frequently neither opti-

mal nor standard in such contexts, there is often a tension between responding appropriately to diversity and compromising the assessment principles of standardized administration (Young & Edwards, 2013). These challenges are not uniquely South African. Worldwide, practitioners are increasingly engaging with individuals who are ethnically, culturally, socioeconomically, and linguistically different from themselves, as well as being required to work in contexts with limited resources (Mpofu & Ortiz, 2009; Oakland, 2009; Ogden, 2001; Suzuki & Ponterotto, 2007). This is supported by a recent survey of American Psychological Association (APA)-accredited clinical psychology programs that concluded that "Assessment coursework relevant to evidence-based practice, ethics, and multicultural issues may need more emphasis to support the development of core competencies in future generations of clinical psychologists" (Ready & Veague, 2014, p. 278).

There is little doubt that the best assessment practice for multiculturally diverse contexts is the development of emic (culturally and linguistically specific to a particular context) measures, rather than relying on adaptations of existing tests developed for other contexts and communities. However, test development is time-consuming and expensive and requires specialist psychometric skills that are not widely available in low-resource communities. Assessment practitioners working in such contexts require concrete and tangible practices that can be used within the framework of what is currently available. This article shares some of the approaches used by South African practitioners to shift from culturally biased to culturally sensitive and responsive assessment practices. The more qualitative, narrative, and contextual approaches discussed provide a useful complement to the traditional, standardized approaches used in psychological assessment. Following from this, the article also seeks to initiate a broader conversation about multicultural guidelines for psychological assessment that incorporates working within the traditional conceptualization of

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assessment, while broadening this conceptualization to include more flexible, qualitative approaches.

Emic Approaches to Assessment

Although the creation of emic measures is the ideal for highly diverse populations, such measures are rare in South Africa. Among the current measures available for use in South Africa, the only truly emic measure is the South African Personality Inventory (SAPI; Valchev et al., 2014). The SAPI project commenced 10 years ago with interviews to obtain personality descriptors from South Africans from each of the 11 official language groupings. These descriptors were analyzed, and this analysis resulted in nine personality clusters, namely extraversion, soft-heartedness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, intellect, openness, integrity, relationship harmony, and facilitating (Valchev et al., 2014). The SAPI is currently being translated into two other official languages (Afrikaans and Zulu), with the intention of a further translation into Xhosa (Deon Meiring, personal communication, November 30, 2015).

The SAPI project is important for South African psychological assessment because it illustrates the possibility of developing locally relevant instruments that are applicable to the multicultural population. The SAPI is also being validated in other African and European cultures, and it is possible that constructs that were deemed relevant to South Africans may be appropriate in other cultures, as was found with the Cross-Cultural Personality Inventory–2 (CPAI-2, see Cheung et al., 2008; Laher, 2015). For example, analysis of SAPI data yielded support for two broad and distinct clusters in the instrument, with one representing agentic or personal-growth elements (conscientiousness, extraversion, intellect, openness, emotional stability, and integrity) and the other a communal or social –relational cluster (facilitating, relationship, harmony, and soft-heartedness; Valchev et al., 2014). Similarly, Cheung and colleagues (2008) found evidence for a collectivist, Interpersonal Relatedness factor in the CPAI-2 in Chinese, Dutch, Romanian, and North American cultures. These findings suggest the importance of considering communal aspects of personality, which were not typically included in personality instruments developed in Western contexts.

Dealing With Diversity: Traditional Assessment Techniques and Beyond

In the absence of any other locally developed measures, practitioners have relied on adaptations of psychometric measures that have been developed for other populations and contexts (see Laher & Cockcroft, 2013b). Assessment practitioners take a detailed and appropriate history, attempt to obtain as much collateral information as possible, and use a broad battery of tests with multiple tests assessing the same constructs (for cross-validation purposes; Laher & Cockcroft, 2013a). Consequently, psychometric testing is regarded as one element of a broader assessment process (Edwards & Young, 2013; Suzuki & Ponterotto, 2007). Even in organizational settings, which tend to be better resourced and where testees are more familiar with the processes and constructs tapped in psychometric testing, testing forms only one part of a comprehensive selection procedure. Interviews, in-basket tasks or in-tray exercises,[1] role plays, and group activities are employed in order to ensure that challenges of language, education, and culture are adequately addressed (Moerdyk, 2009).

In occupational and higher education settings in South Africa, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL; Anderson, 2006) is a strategy that has been increasingly and successfully used. In such contexts, this entails a process of evaluating an individual's knowledge and skills, which are generally presented in the format of a portfolio of demonstrated skills and documented experience. An independent assessor evaluates the portfolio against the criteria required to achieve the formal qualification and determines whether credit can be given toward that qualification. For example, the publication of several works of fiction may give an individual credit toward a degree in creative writing. In an assessment context, RPL provides an opportunity for individuals who did not previously have access to financial or educational opportunities to have their life experiences and skills meaningfully considered in assessment situations. It is important to stress that such portfolios cannot replace psychometric assessment but could be a valuable complementary tool for understanding the individual (Anderson, 2006; Michelson, 1998; Osman, 2013).

Another example of a more flexible assessment method is the use of learning potential approaches, introduced by Feuerstein (1980); these hold considerable promise in identifying those who have the potential for occupational development, and/or educational success but who have been educationally and/or linguistically disadvantaged (Amod & Seabi, 2013; De Beer, 2013). Assessing learning potential through dynamic assessment techniques appears to be effective and valid for evaluating the cognitive functioning of socioeconomically deprived South African adolescents and young adults (Skuy & Shmukler, 1987; Skuy et al., 2002). However, dynamic assessment is time- and resource-intensive, requires specialist skills, and is not typically a part of standard training for psychologists, so it is rarely employed (Amod & Seabi, 2013).

Recent research has suggested that measures of working memory may be a relatively easy and inexpensive way of tapping learning capacity in neurotypical individuals. For example, closely related to fluid, flexible problem-solving, untimed working memory measures tend to be less influenced by socioeconomic status or access to resources, because the stimuli used to assess it tend to be equally unfamiliar to all testees or to entail well-learned stimuli, such as letters and numbers (Unsworth, Fukuda, Awh, & Vogel, 2014). Thus, working memory measures are currently being investigated as a fairer means of tapping cognitive ability in diverse South African groups (see Cockcroft, 2016; Cockcroft, Alloway, Copello, & Milligan, 2015; Cockcroft, Bloch, & Moolla, 2016).

These examples indicate that working within a less structured paradigm may be useful in multicultural, low-resource settings. This allows practitioners to work more flexibly with clients who have linguistic and educational challenges. Additionally, the culturally sensitive practitioner needs to be aware of the ways in which bilingualism and multilingualism can alter typical performance expectations. For example, semantic fluency in either of the bilingual's languages is likely to be lower than that of monolin-

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[1] A type of assessment usually employed in assessment centers in organizational settings in which testees are presented with tasks that mimic the job for which they are applying.

guals (Bialystok, Luk, Peets, & Yang, 2010). Given the varied levels of English proficiency in South Africa, where most tests exist only in English, the client's English-language proficiency should first be evaluated.

Where language proficiency in English is low and would negatively impact on performance, it is advisable to use nonverbal tests if possible, even when employing the services of an interpreter. For example, the linguistically minimized nature of the Raven's progressive matrices allows for an evaluation of fluid intelligence without substantial influence by language, educational, and cultural factors (Raven, Raven, & Court, 1998). Consequently, the Raven's matrices have been widely researched and are considered to be a less biased and fairer measure of cognitive functioning across different populations (Cockcroft & Israel, 2011; Owen, 1992; Rushton, Skuy, & Fridjhon, 2003).

Practitioners may also exceed the limits for practice trials set out in the standardized administration guidelines. This thinking has been incorporated into the third edition of the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scales, which now allow for extended practice in picture completion, vocabulary, similarities, block design, arithmetic, matrix reasoning, information, and comprehension (Nell, 2008). Certain items on the Wechsler Scales are phrased in a reversed manner. These could be administered in their normal order for a nonthreatening opportunity to ensure that testees who are not testwise (i.e., are not familiar with the general practice and experience of taking a test; Grieve & Foxcroft, 2013) understand the test demands and are prepared for the later, more difficult items. Extended practice is recommended for all testees who are not testwise, although they may have completed 12 years of schooling. Amount and extent of practice required should be carefully documented in the assessment report (American Psychological Association [APA], 2002; Nell, 2008).

Several other adapted strategies, which are tailored to a client's socioeconomic and cultural background, have been encountered. A child who is unfamiliar with paper-and-pencil work can be asked to draw a figure with a stick in wet sand or to construct a human figure from clay as an adaptation of the Draw-a-Person (DAP; Nsamenang, 2009) test. This has been found to be effective in the Zambian context with the Panga Munthu Test (Make-a-Person Test; Stemler et al., 2009). In this test, children are presented with wet clay and are asked to "make" a person. As with the DAP, the figures can be quantitatively scored for accurate representation of human physical characteristics, as well as used to elicit qualitative information about children and their circumstances (Nsamenang, 2009).

In a similar adaptation, block design tasks can be completed with beads in rural settings. Because several African cultures have a rich tradition of beadwork, this makes the task more accessible and relevant (Foxcroft & Davies, 2008). Bead patterns can also be used to informally evaluate series formation and sequential memory, whereas arithmetic problems can be represented in terms of counting heads of cattle, fruit, beads, stones, or quantities related to cooking (Foxcroft, 2011). Foxcroft (2011; Foxcroft & Davies, 2008) reported no evidence that demonstrates the efficacy of these approaches but anecdotal evidence from practitioners working in underresourced areas with illiterate or poorly educated individuals has indicated the successful use of similar materials that are familiar to the local populace (H. Dunbar-Krige, personal communication, July, 2016). Olson (1970) and Serpell (1979) made sim-

ilar arguments about the utility of culturally familiar materials and tested this premise with a sample of East African children. They found that performance on cognitive tasks was dependent on a culture's way of analyzing or representing the problem and that children performed better when problems were conceptualized in a manner that was relevant to their culture.

Building on these arguments, Zuilkowski, McCoy, Serpell, Matafwali, and Fink (2016) argued that, aside from cultural familiarity with test materials, there might also be differences in dimensionality perception between children in sub-Saharan Africa and those in Western countries. As a consequence, Zuilkowski et al. developed an emic instrument called the Object-Pattern Reasoning Assessment (OPRA). OPRA uses local materials such as beans, toothpicks, bottle caps, beads, plastic disks, wooden blocks, and stones to build patterns that would otherwise be represented as two-dimensional drawings on paper, similar to the Raven's matrices test. They found that African children performed better using the three-dimensional objects to create patterns than when tested with two-dimensional images. In the next section, the use of sand work and body mapping and other qualitative methods is discussed as further examples of using familiar materials and techniques in assessment contexts where test materials and funds are limited.

Supplementing Quantitative Data With Qualitative Information

It is evident that local psychological assessment practitioners, following good practice principles, cannot rely solely on traditional psychometric testing approaches. In dealing with diversity, practitioners often supplement the latter with alternative, more contextual approaches. In addition to possessing knowledge of a wide range of assessment techniques and being prepared to employ these in a flexible manner, the culturally responsive practitioner values the importance of cross-validating psychometric data with rich, qualitative testee information. Such qualitative techniques have been used effectively in the South African context. Theron (2013) offered a range of qualitative indicators that can be used in addition to the test scores obtained on the Junior South African Intelligence Scale (JSAIS) in order to evaluate a child's current level of functioning as part of school-readiness assessment. The JSAIS is an emic intelligence test, originally developed for White English- and Afrikaans-speaking children between the ages of 3 years and 7 years 11 months. There are currently no alternative local norms for any other internationally used tests for children of this age, such as the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scales of Intelligence. Hence, some practitioners administer the JSAIS according to the standardized administration and scoring and also interpret the testee's responses qualitatively, following Theron's (2013) guidelines.

Young and Edwards (2013) described the qualitative use of clinical self-report scales to collect information on symptom presentation and the use of this information for case formulation and treatment planning. Moreover, projective assessment techniques such as the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT; Gericke, Bain, & Amod, 2013), Children's Apperception Test (CAT; Gericke et al., 2013), Draw-a-Person (DAP; Amod et al., 2013) test, and Kinetic Family Drawing (KFD; Amod et al., 2013), which have an established tradition of qualitative interpretation, are often used in South Africa to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers. Amod et al.,

2013 and Gericke et al. (2013) provided examples of the efficacy of the qualitative use of the TAT, CAT, DAP, and KFD with South African adults and children, acknowledging the benefits of projective assessment in dealing with diversity but also demonstrating an awareness of the limitations that this diversity brings to test administration and interpretation. In an attempt to provide a more standardized approach to qualitative questioning, Matthews and Bouwer (2013) proposed the Dynamic Assessment Technique of Questioning during projective assessments using the TAT with adolescents in mono- and cross-cultural settings. They found that a more flexible approach to questioning with the TAT produced richer responses and allowed for consideration of the cultural context of the client.

More recently, South African psychologists have employed projective techniques using sand work and body mapping. Lubbe-De-Beer (2016) used an illustrative case study to demonstrate the efficacy of a sand tray in psychological assessment. The sand-play process begins with the client's creating a story or world in the first sand tray, which is considered the most important tray because it typically contains indications of the issues to be addressed in the sand-play process and is incorporated into the assessment procedure together with other psychological tests and procedures (Lubbe-De-Beer, 2016). This technique is ideally suited to low-resource settings, because it draws on materials that are readily available and may help to overcome barriers related to lack of familiarity with a client's culture and language.

As with sand work, body mapping also requires few resources. The session starts with drawing the outline of the client's body on a large area (, e.g., using chalk on a concrete playground or a marker and a large piece of paper). Once the outline has been completed, the clients add "flesh," depth, nuance, and uniqueness to their "portraits" through drawing and painting, thus expressing themselves and their intrapsychic world by means of color, pictures, words, and symbols. Body mapping has been described as a constructivist and qualitative technique that integrates components of art therapy, narrative therapy, and bodywork. This technique has been researched in the context of vocational assessment and counseling with adolescents from disadvantaged, poorly resourced backgrounds who did not have English as a first language (Ebersöhn, Ferreira, van der Walt, & Moen, 2016). Both sand work and body mapping have been recommended as suitable approaches for group and individual assessments (Ebersöhn et al., 2016; Lubbe-De-Beer, 2016).

Several other qualitative approaches have also been used successfully in the area of vocational assessment (Maree, 2011; Watson & McMahon, 2013). For example, Watson and McMahon (2013) used the My System of Career Influences (MSCI) instrument, which has its origins in Systems Theory, effectively in the South African context. The MSCI employs narrative techniques in which individuals recount their career story and reflect on systemic influences on their career. The process culminates in a summary of these reflections during which individuals construct their personal MSCI diagram. This process aids understanding about career choices, career development, and contextual influences (Watson & McMahon, 2013). Another example is Maree's (2011) use of a combination of quantitative tests, such as the locally designed Career Interest Profile, together with qualitative narrative interviews that are based on career construction theory and life design counseling (see Savickas, 2005). As with the MSCI, this approach uses both tests and narrative within the assessment to take account of intra- and interpersonal factors regarding the client. As such, the interview is core to the assessment (Maree, 2011, 2016). Maree (2016) demonstrated the efficacy of this combined approach with a case study that illustrated how this process of assessment can assist with career decisions and personal empowerment.

Qualitative approaches that include the family tend to be positively perceived in most African cultures, which possess more collectivist and inclusive notions of society and community than do many Western cultures (Human-Vogel, 2016; Mpofu & Ortiz, 2009; Nsamenang, 2009; Valchev et al., 2014). In keeping with African cultures, which tend to value relationships, discussion, and contemplation, Amod (2013) advocated the use of the Initial Assessment Consultation (IAC) approach, particularly in psychoeducational settings. The IAC is a shared problem-solving approach to child assessment, focusing on collaboration with parents, caregivers, and significant others, such as teachers, with the aim of facilitating learning and empowering clients and their families. Instead of employing a person-centered approach, which focuses on deficits within the child, practitioners working within the IAC model use a shared problem-solving approach to explore the dynamic interaction between the individual and environmental variables. Such an approach includes providing a full and detailed explanation of test procedures in a language in which testees and their family are readily conversant. Similarly, Mampane (2016) discussed the utility of family genograms in assessment and therapy with African clients, given the importance of extended family and ancestors in African cultures.

Recommendations for Practice

The alternative, qualitative, and constructivist approaches described in this article have been used successfully with a diverse South African population, because the focus is on narrative and meaning-making, with less emphasis on test scores and norms. These approaches are valuable methods of eliciting a comprehensive picture of the client's background and behavior and should be used to complement and extend the latter information (Maree, 2011). However, qualitative approaches are time-intensive and more subjective than are quantitative methodologies, which limits their broader use and applicability. Moreover the success of these techniques is dependent on practitioner experience and ethical practice. In using such procedures, practitioners need to remain sensitive to the differences in power and status between themselves and their clients, which may be understood differently on the basis of the client's cultural background (APA, 2002; Edwards & Young, 2013; Nell, 2008). Consequently, there is a need for such practice to be shared and for appropriate guidelines to be developed that could have broad relevance for practitioners working in similar contexts.

A systematic response to the challenges of working with multicultural populations by way of distinct guidelines has the potential to inform practice and policy in psychological assessment in these contexts. The documents on the websites of the International Test Commission and the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology do not directly address the practicalities of assessment with divergent multicultural populations. The APA (2002) has had guidelines for assessment with multicultural populations, but these were developed for the North American context

and are currently being revised to make them more relevant to the considerably changed circumstances of individuals, communities, and countries since their original development (APA Division 15, n.d.). Although these guidelines are largely relevant to a North American context, they provide a useful starting point for the development of a set of recommendations for practitioners working in low-resource, multicultural settings.

Issues to be addressed in the guidelines should include recommendations about using traditional assessment instruments in multicultural settings, as well as the use of adapted and contextual methods of assessment. Ad hoc adaptations to test procedures and testing embedded in qualitative, narrative frameworks need to be considered, while simultaneously protecting clients against biased and inappropriate assessment practices. The guidelines could also draw on wider input regarding practical aspects, such as access to resources and creative ways to address these. It should be acknowledged that interpreters may commonly be used when no translated instruments are available. The limitations and dangers inherent in using interpreters who are not trained in psychological testing should be highlighted.

Multicultural guidelines would also need to include recommendations for dealing with diversity and working in low-resource settings in graduate training programs (Krishnamurthy et al., 2004). Surveys of assessment training practices in graduate programs in North America found that the same traditional tests were being used in training programs and that although issues of multiculturalism were addressed, these needed to be expanded, particularly as they pertain to psychological assessment (Krishnamurthy et al., 2004). Suggestions included that assessment training should cover whether and how assessment instruments can be used with persons from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds; how to select the most appropriate measures and normative data for a particular client; and how test performance may be influenced by inequality in education and socioeconomic status, parents' educational background, proficiency in English, home language, and occupation (Ready & Veague, 2014; Stedman, Hatch, & Schoenfeld, 2001). In addition to this, South African institutions are committed to training more professionals from underrepresented groups, and this is included in their program selection mandates (see Pillay, Ahmed, & Bawa, 2013).

"Developing competency in psychological assessment is a complex, intensive, and multifaceted process that presents numerous responsibilities and challenges to . . . professional practitioners" (Krishnamurthy et al., 2004, p. 737). These responsibilities and challenges include working with clients from multicultural and multilingual contexts. Assessment practitioners may not always be aware of how their own cultural and ethnic experiences and position in society may influence their choice of tests and subsequent interpretation. Therefore, a concerted effort should be made to include individuals from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in all training and decision-making processes (Suzuki & Ponterotto, 2007).

Conclusion

This article has attempted to demonstrate that the traditional assessment model in which most assessment practitioners are trained, which stresses individualism over collectivism and is achievement-motivated, does not fit well with indigenous South African values (Nell, 2008). Thus, the need for locally developed, culturally relevant assessment measures is unequivocal, but this is a slow process that requires many resources. Adaptations to existing assessment processes have become commonplace in such a context and represent the next best option, provided that these yield valid results. Under the rubric of adapting assessment strategies, a framework for assessment that is more narrative and contextual appears to have developed. These strategies differ in the extent to which they adhere to traditional assessment instruments and practices. The development of these strategies suggests that an emic approach in low-resource, multicultural settings does not have to be a product as in the development of a test or checklist. Instead, it could take the form of a process that differs in the extent to which it uses traditional assessment products. This article has presented some examples of approaches to assessment that have been documented to work with the multicultural, multilingual South African population, often in low-resource settings. The efficacy of such narrative and contextual approaches has been demonstrated in South African contexts, but further research, development, and engagement in South Africa and other settings are necessary. Ultimately, this can contribute toward the development of guidelines for culturally sensitive assessment procedures in low-resource and/or multicultural settings.

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