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Epistemological Challenges of a Psychologist in Indigenous contexts

Katerin Arias-Ortega[I]
Natalia Díaz Alvarado[I]

[I]Universidad Católica de Temuco (UCT), Araucanía/Temuco – Chile

ABSTRACT – Epistemological Challenges of a Psychologist in Indigenous contexts. The article discusses the epistemological challenges faced by an educational psychologist for developing their professional work in indigenous territories from an intercultural educational approach. In the Chilean school system, an educational psychologist has to deal with the denial and invisibilization of other ways of knowing, understanding, behaving, and valuing of other forms of development, namely the ways of indigenous education. We conclude on the urgency of incorporating the knowledge of indigenous psychology into the professional training of psychologists to advance the decolonization of Western Eurocentric psychology from an intercultural epistemological pluralism.
Keywords: **Educational Psychology. Indigenous Psychology. Intercultural Education.**

RESUMEN – Desafíos Epistemológicos del Psicólogo en Contextos Indígenas. El artículo discute los desafíos epistemológicos que enfrenta un psicólogo educacional en contextos indígenas para desarrollar su trabajo profesional desde un enfoque educativo intercultural. En la educación escolar, el trabajo del psicopedagogo está marcado por la negación y la invisibilización de otras formas de conocer, comprender, comportarse y valorar el desarrollo de los sujetos desde la lógica de la educación indígena. Concluimos sobre la urgencia de incorporar los saberes de las psicologías indígenas en la formación profesional de los psicólogos para avanzar en la descolonización de la psicología eurocéntrica occidental desde un pluralismo epistemológico intercultural.
Palabras-clave: **Psicología Educacional. Psicología Indígena. Educación Intercultural.**

Introduction

Indigenous communities worldwide share experiences of colonization that have left indelible traces in their lives, as well as social (Paillalef, 2018), cultural (Wiscutie-Crépeau, 2022), and psychological (Campeau, 2021) consequences that have impacted the sociocultural development and well-being of these peoples (González et al., 2022; Silva, 2022). This is evidenced globally by statistics indicating that indigenous populations experience higher poverty rates (Commission de Vérité et Réconciliation [CVR], 2015; Socioeconomic Characterization Survey [CASEN], 2017), lower levels of access to education and diminished educational quality (Arias-Ortega et al., 2023), and increased incidences of mental health issues, as well as higher rates of suicide, alcoholism, and abandonment of treatment (González et al., 2022). This has generated low levels of self-esteem and an epistemicide of their own knowledge and traditions by the hegemonic society and the institutions that represent them. For example, in the case of Chile, regarding the health diagnosis of the indigenous peoples recognized by the State (*Kawésqar, Atacameño, Aymara, Colla, Diaguita, Mapuche, Quechua, Rapa Nui, Yámana*), the results of the Ministry of Health (MINSAL, 2020) show that there is a national indigenous population of approximately 2.185.732, 79.8% of which belong to the Mapuche people. It also reports significant health disparities between indigenous and non-indigenous populations, highlighting elevated rates of common infections, chronic degenerative diseases, and injuries among indigenous individuals (MINSAL, 2020). This ministry assumes that the health problems experienced by indigenous populations are related to their high rates of social and economic vulnerability as well as low levels of schooling, which generates that indigenous people are more prone to comorbidities (MINSAL, 2020). This situation arises from concerning environmental sanitation conditions in indigenous territories and communities, where many rural areas lack basic services, thereby exacerbating social vulnerability.

In Chile, there are also health gaps between immigrants and the Chilean population. In general, the migrant population does not necessarily have support networks. This situation gets worse due to the lack of mastery of the local language, sporadic jobs and, on many occasions, irregular migration status, which limits their access to public health services (MINSAL, 2020). The challenges encountered by historically marginalized indigenous and migrant populations significantly impact their access to healthcare. This situation is particularly complex for school-age children and adolescents, who face compounded discrimination due to their identities as both indigenous and migrants. Such dual marginalization adversely affects their educational success, as diversity is often perceived as a problem to be addressed rather than a resource to be valued. Research conducted by Arias-Ortega et al. (2022) and Arias-Ortega and Valenzuela (2023) highlights that health professionals and educators generally lack the necessary knowledge and skills to provide education from an intercultural perspective. Their

pedagogical and social support practices predominantly rely on bio-medical frameworks (Arias-Ortega; Valenzuela, 2023; Arias-Ortega et al., 2023).

Historically, attention to social and cultural diversity of children and young people in health and education systems educational space has been characterized by approaches of integration based on the cultural deficit theory (López et al., 2014; Martins, 2022). For example, in the field of health, the cultural deficit theory is expressed, in relation to the denial of indigenous epistemic frameworks (ancestral medicine) to treat health problems. Consequently, indigenous knowledge is often regarded as inferior or deficient when compared to Western standards (Arias-Ortega; Valenzuela, 2023). This perspective has led to the establishment of a reductionist view within health systems, which overlooks the richness and efficacy of indigenous health practices, such as indigenous psychology and the holistic human-nature relationship, essential for achieving physical and spiritual balance and well-being (Macaulay, 2009). Furthermore, cultural deficit theory elucidates how interventions have been predicated on the assumption that Indigenous populations must conform to dominant biomedical models (Langdon; Garnelo, 2017). This approach not only undermines the legitimacy of their cultural practices but also perpetuates inequalities and barriers regarding access to and the quality of healthcare services they receive.

In the educational system, cultural deficit theory posits that the learning difficulties faced by indigenous children and youth stem from inadequate stimulation during their family upbringing (Jung, 2021). This framework further suggests that the academic struggles of these individuals can be attributed to a perceived parental inheritance of "incapacity," implying that the cultural capital of indigenous parents and their biological background adversely affect their children's intellectual development, thereby placing them on a lower social scale (Smith et al., 2018). In this context, Sánchez-Arteaga et al. (2013) argue that a form of scientific racism has become institutionalized within society, and particularly in educational settings, manifesting as an implicit reliance on the 'biological concept of race' to categorize individuals and forecast their academic outcomes. Consequently, the expectations that educators hold for their indigenous students and families play a critical role in determining educational success. High expectations are likely to foster academic achievement, whereas low expectations contribute to the educational failure of these children and their families.

In the same sense, from the Western Eurocentric logic, it is assumed that children should behave and develop according to the norms and models established by the West, which do not necessarily adjust to other social and cultural realities (Batista; Silva, 2021). From the dominant knowledge it is assumed that children develop certain conditions, in general, from an individual point of view, which does not consider the sociocultural reality, the economic and territorial factors of which indigenous children and youth are part, in which some behaviors and ways of acting are highly desirable and do not conform to the western Eurocentric model. For example, the development of the art of

listening and observing that is required of indigenous children and youth in front of their elders is a principle of indigenous pedagogy, which allows the acquisition of their own sociocultural heritage, thus ensuring the preservation of indigenous epistemic practices, which it is assumed that children and youth must reproduce in adulthood. Another behavior that departs from the norms established by western Eurocentric psychology is related to play and learning by doing in collectivity as a form of reciprocity and co-construction of bonds and affectivity among the members of the extended family in indigenous territorialities. Thus, we argue that indigenous children do not necessarily conform to the development of these evolutionary stages. In addition, factors such as monolingualism in their vernacular language or the monolingualism of their parents will affect their learning and mastery of the hegemonic language, which from the logic of the dominant society will be assumed as a language problem, without considering their own linguistic aspects. And, trying to reduce indigenous bilingualism to a subtractive one until eliminating the use of the vernacular language, under the 'assumption' that it hinders the teaching and learning processes. In this sense, those children and young people who do not conform to the model of person, behavior and forms of learning expected from the Western Eurocentric logic are overrepresented in school integration programs and categorized according to denominations such as 'children with learning disabilities', 'children and young people with special educational needs' (Gutiérrez; Riquelme, 2020). Indeed, this approach to social and cultural diversity in school education has been one of the facto-res that has increased power relations and discrimination towards cultural differences that have been socially minorized, such as the indigenous, peasant and migrant populations that share and coexist in the educational scenario (Arias-Ortega et al., 2023).

From this perspective, understanding the development of indigenous children and youth within school education through a singular lens has adversely affected their social, cultural, and emotional development (González et al., 2022). This issue is particularly evident in school integration programs, where the roles of differential educators and psychologists are often framed within the social and cultural paradigms of the hegemonic society. These frameworks do not necessarily align with the contexts of social and cultural diversity inherent to indigenous populations (Gutiérrez; Riquelme, 2020). Furthermore, a psychological perspective rooted in Western Eurocentric logic often highlights various forms of both implicit and explicit violence against the subjectivities of indigenous individuals and their rights to self-determination, as they are evaluated through incompatible sociocultural frameworks (Martins, 2022). Consequently, educational psychologists operating in indigenous territories encounter significant epistemological challenges in addressing the social, cultural, and linguistic diversity that influences the development of children and youth, particularly as these young individuals relate to their own frames of reference. This challenge is compounded by the historical training of psychologists, which has predominantly emphasized approaches that overlook and

dismiss alternative psychological frameworks, including indigenous psychologies.

The objective of this article is to examine the epistemological challenges faced by educational psychologists working in indigenous territories. It aims to reframe their professional practice through an intercultural educational approach, which facilitates the conceptualization of psychology within a framework of epistemological pluralism. This framework promotes interaction, tension, negotiation, and mediation between Western and indigenous forms of knowledge.

The methodology employed in this study involves a documentary-descriptive theoretical reflection, enabling the examination, analysis, and interpretation of knowledge related to the object of study as presented in the scientific literature. This approach adopts a hermeneutic-interpretative method, which emphasizes the theory-practice relationship in text interpretation. Such a method facilitates the understanding of a text within its contextual framework, allowing for the identification of the author's knowledge, intentions, and the intended message through a detailed analysis of both the explicit and latent content related to the object of study (Creswell, 2014). The analysis of the corpus is grounded in the methodology proposed by Creswell (2014), who asserts that the scientific validity of textual analysis is achieved through rigor, systematic organization, and careful reading of the texts. This approach fosters the generation of new knowledge and positions the researcher as an interpreter of the analyzed reality. Consequently, it becomes possible to synthesize and integrate findings from various studies addressing the challenges faced by psychologists in the educational field, particularly within indigenous territories.

A Look at School Education and its Linkage to Educational Psychology

Western education has undergone significant restructuring and transformation over the years, influenced by the historical and political contexts in which it has evolved. For instance, from a historical standpoint, the development of education during the Middle Ages, marked by the establishment of schools in the eighth century under Charlemagne, primarily aimed to instill moral education grounded in Christian principles (Demers et al., 2015; Durkheim, 1977). Subsequently, during the Crusades, Western and Christian thinkers revisited Plato's original ideas, seeking to provide a rational foundation for the Christian faith through the framework of scholasticism. However, this period did not represent a genuine transformation in educational relationships; rather, its ultimate goal was to cultivate a sense of love and fear of God in children (Bowen, 2009; Gauthier; Tardif, 2017).

In this context, education was situated within the "school," conceptualized as an organized moral environment that historically marginalized and rendered invisible diverse perspectives. Durkheim (1977) further posits that school education constitutes a social reality, encompassing a set of practices framed within a social institution, specifically

the Western Eurocentric education system. This system tends to deny alternative forms of knowledge, understanding, and behavior that diverge from the norms imposed by dominant societies, thus establishing vertical and asymmetrical relationships between teachers and students with limited emotional development. During the Renaissance, education transitioned to a humanistic and rational framework, moving away from scholasticism while still maintaining elements of Christian thought (Bowen, 2009). In this model, the role of the teacher became associated with an occupational activity centered around a curriculum that, much like in antiquity, focused on the instruction of the seven liberal arts. These arts were categorized into two groups: 1) *trivium*, which encompassed grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics; and 2) *quadrivium*, which included arithmetic, astronomy, music, and geometry (Gauthier; Tardif, 2017).

Consequently, school education has historically been marked by a lack of effective pedagogy and insufficient awareness of the content being taught, as well as its relevance to the sociocultural and territorial realities of the populations served. These shortcomings are not taken into account in the intellectual development processes of students, resulting in low relevance of teaching practices (Demers et al., 2015). Throughout periods of reform, counter-reform, urban development, and the emergence of new citizenship, many students gained access to education. However, the enduring irrelevance of school content, coupled with inadequate resources and capacity to effectively serve students, led to a crisis in education during the seventeenth century. In response to these challenges, the concept of 'pedagogy' emerged as a new teaching methodology (Gauthier; Tardif, 2017). This pedagogical approach aims to reduce the amount of direct instruction from teachers while significantly enhancing student learning outcomes.

This new pedagogy is characterized by five principles: 1) Group control through simultaneous teaching, wherein the teacher organizes the classroom to ensure all students are visible for effective supervision; 2) Time management, which involves planning teaching activities to minimize student distraction; 3) Space management, where students are arranged in isolation from external stimuli; 4) Management of students' behavior, focusing on their conduct, attire, and interpersonal relationships from a moral perspective; and 5) Organization of knowledge, closely tied to the seven liberal arts and informed by a rational logic linked to Christian education (Bergerons, 2015; Demers et al., 2015). Thus, an educational relationship is established between teachers and students, predicated on collective and functional teaching methods that seek to maintain absolute order among students throughout the instructional process.

From this perspective, the pedagogy of the seventeenth century positioned students within a common space, utilizing classification criteria based on age and sex. Concurrently, the notion of the school as the sole "official" space designated for educating children—tailored to the needs deemed appropriate by hegemonic society—became widely accepted. According to Gauthier and Tardif (2017), education during

this period was characterized by a system that subjected students to humiliation and physical punishment, with a clear lack of any affective expression or proximity between teachers and students. Thus, the educational relationship established within this framework was defined by a closed and formal pedagogy, grounded in mechanistic and universal teaching processes. Within this context, it was assumed that students should be formed according to an objective system that must be assimilated without question. Consequently, the school emerged as an artificial environment, focusing solely on imparting knowledge necessary to conform to the prevailing values of society and Christianity.

This form of pedagogy persisted until the 19th century, characterized by educational relationships grounded in authority and distance from the student, neglecting their personality and aspirations. This mechanistic and decontextualized approach overlooked the interests and motivations of students. In reaction to this traditional pedagogy, a new, science-based pedagogy emerged. Notably, in the 18th century, the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau proposed a model of education centered on student interests in his work Emile (Gauthier; Tardif, 2017). This marked a significant shift in the conception of education, aligning with the rise of modern educational practices and the foundational research conducted by Piaget (1975; 1977) to establish theoretical bases for developmental education (Bergerons, 2015).

This new focus of study gave rise to the field of Educational Sciences, an umbrella term that refers to the formal, critical examination of school educational processes addressing the challenges faced by teachers, and the motivational factors influencing student learning (Papalia; Feldman, 2015; Vienneau, 2017). Educational Sciences are recognized as a field of study that facilitates an understanding of the school educational system through the integration of various disciplines, which have fostered the development of distinct areas such as pedagogy, didactics, andragogy, and pedagogical design. In this "new pedagogy," teaching emphasizes the motivations and interests of students, placing their learning experiences at the center of the educational project. This approach has led to the incorporation of additional professionals into the educational landscape, such as educational psychologists, who are expected to contribute to the holistic development of children by considering their individualities and specific needs. However, this integration also presents challenges, as it often perpetuates a singular understanding of children and youth through the lens of the dominant sociocultural framework.

The Educational Psychologist in the Monocultural School

Psychology, as a profession and academic discipline, has historically been grounded in hegemonic approaches that often overlook the subjectivities and epistemologies of individuals during intervention processes in the fields of education, health, and justice (Silva, 2022). Within the educational domain, this connection has been shaped from

the outset by the intersection of cognition and learning within a monodisciplinary framework (Fuentes et al., 2021). This framework assumes that knowledge is constructed exclusively from a Western Eurocentric perspective, relying on the scientific method as the singular and valid means of knowing, understanding, and explaining reality. Consequently, the role of the psychologist in education has underscored the necessity of establishing a close relationship between cognitive sciences and education, which has become central to the educational discourse aimed at ensuring the academic success of children and youth, irrespective of their social, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds (Fuentes et al., 2021). The role of the school psychologist has evolved through four distinct phases: 1) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the focus was on understanding and addressing how individuals learn academic content through the diagnosis and treatment of children with mental and behavioral challenges; 2) in the mid-20th century, the scope expanded to include emotional, affective, and social dimensions, addressing not only the needs of girls and boys but all students, with an emphasis on diagnosing and treating learning difficulties both within and outside the school environment; 3) from the mid-20th century to the early 1980s, the emphasis shifted to training teachers in psychological principles; and 4) from the 1980s to the present, attention has increasingly focused on conflicts as individual phenomena, taking into account the contextual and interactional dynamics of the various elements within the educational system (Barraza, 2015).

These discussions have prompted actions in higher education, including the integration of developmental psychology content into the training programs for future educators. This knowledge is anticipated to enhance the professional competencies of new teachers, ultimately contributing to the academic success of their students. Theoretically, this entails a thorough understanding of the developmental stages of children and youth, allowing for the design of teaching and learning activities aligned with their developmental frameworks and expected competencies based on their age. However, this understanding remains anchored in a Eurocentric paradigm that neglects the sociocultural contexts of the students. In the context of schools located in colonized indigenous territories, educational psychologists have emerged as significant actors. Nonetheless, there remains a lack of clarity within educational institutions regarding the specific roles and functions that these professionals should fulfill. This observation aligns with the findings of Barraza (2015), who argues that, generally, there are no clear definitions of the roles and responsibilities of school psychologists beyond indigenous educational settings. The author identifies three perspectives that have traditionally confined the role of the school psychologist, advocating for a transformation and redefinition of this role within indigenous and intercultural educational contexts (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Assumptions on the role of the school psychologist in the monocultural school

ASSUMPTIONS	DESCRIPTION
Paradigmatic	It assumes that the role of the school psychologist is that of an expert and executor of monocultural psychoeducational interventions, characterized by the biomedical approach. This poses the challenge of understanding the problems of education from a contextualized, socialized, value-based and integrated perspective, focused on the complex networks built in indigenous and intercultural contexts. It implies sharing visions and experiences with the family-school and community, to co-evaluate, co-help, and co-solve the problems of teaching and learning from intercultural educational interventions.
Political-technical	It grants a political and technical role to the school psychologist, supported by decrees and laws that enable him/her to join the school. In Chile, it is assumed that the school needs the diagnosis of experts to corroborate the existence of potential problems with monocultural standardized tests, referring the action of the psychologist to a role of diagnostician, from a biomedical discourse.
Academic-training	It assumes that there is inadequate training of psychologists as there are some who are unaware of the sociocultural reality in which they will work. It is based on hegemonic and monocultural approaches that limit the learning of indigenous psychology to favor culturally relevant interventions.

Source: Own elaboration based on Barraza (2015).

Having these assumptions in mind , it is evident that the role of the school psychologist has generally been situated within a monocultural biomedical paradigm. This presents a challenge to adopt a complexity-oriented paradigm that acknowledges sociocultural diversity, thereby enabling psychologists to support pedagogical practices that address this diversity effectively. In the context of Chile, particularly in indigenous educational settings, the school psychologist's role primarily involves enhancing school coexistence and addressing learning challenges among students through a biomedical lens (Da Rocha; Correa, 2022). In the Chilean educational system, the attention to diversity is primarily approached from three perspectives: 1) supporting children and youth with special educational needs within 'traditional' classrooms by facilitating the integration of 'inclusive' students into the school curriculum (Gutiérrez; Riquelme, 2020); 2) focusing on the needs of children and youth with disabilities in special education institutions; and 3) in recent years, educational psychologists have taken on the responsibility of addressing issues related to school coexistence and mental health, particularly in preventing bullying among students. However, this approach often overlooks critical factors such as racism and discrimination, which contribute to institutionalized violence within the classroom.

Indeed, these perspectives highlight the dominance of the biomedical approach in educational institutions' efforts to address diversity, which is culturally legitimized by educational policies grounded in diagnostic regulations (Blanchet, 2018). However, the social and cultural diversity of the educational environment is often inadequately considered. Intercultural relations within these settings remain fraught with tension, stemming from epistemic frameworks that influence the interactions of socially and culturally diverse individuals. These frameworks simultaneously shape learning modalities and behavioral expectations according to the sociocultural norms of their respective communities, which do not necessarily align with the dominant school culture.

In this context, school classrooms in Chile, particularly in La Araucanía, are characterized by significant social and cultural diversity, as evidenced by the presence of indigenous children within the educational system. A critical issue is that these children are diagnosed and evaluated through Eurocentric sociocultural frameworks that do not align with their unique ways of learning, developing, and behaving, nor with the ideals of personal formation derived from indigenous familial upbringing. These ideals encompass respect for both tangible and intangible beings inhabiting divine and earthly realms (Campeau, 2021); honoring elders and adhering to their own sociocultural norms and values (Smith et al., 2018); and embodying wisdom and correctness at both individual and collective levels, reflecting the moral values imparted through family education (Arias-Ortega et al., 2023). Moreover, illness is conceptualized as a disruption of personal balance and spirituality, a notion that is incompatible with the biomedical paradigm. The preservation of certain roles within indigenous communities is intrinsically linked to spiritual matters, which are often overlooked within Eurocentric epistemologies. For instance, in Mapuche culture, the machis – individuals who work with medicinal herbs and forge connections with the spiritual forces of the universe – assume their roles through dreams and visions. Such experiences, viewed through a Western lens, may be misinterpreted as psychiatric issues. Consequently, children exhibiting inclinations toward this role may be referred to psychologists or other specialists to address this "problem," neglecting the fact that, from an indigenous perspective, this function is essential for the preservation of epistemic practices that have been handed down through generations.

In this context, the invisibility of alternative models of personal development, which are distinct from Western Eurocentric approaches, highlights how their denial adversely affects the growth of children and youth during their formal education. Research conducted by Gutiérrez and Riquelme (2020) indicates that the evaluation of Mapuche children in La Araucanía relies on criteria and assessments that are decontextualized from the indigenous frame of reference. This includes the use of medical manuals, such as the DSM-V, as well as standardized evaluative instruments validated by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) (Abadie, 2013). Such practices disregard indigenous epistemic frameworks, thereby limiting the diagnosis of children and youth

in contexts marked by social and cultural diversity (Gutiérrez; Riquelme, 2020). Consequently, this approach poses significant challenges within school environments characterized by such diversity, as it employs diagnostic categories that are disconnected from the sociocultural realities of indigenous communities, ultimately reinforcing segregation and discrimination in educational settings (Martins, 2022; Silva et al., 2022).

In this context, the issue of hegemonic psychology, which seeks to address the subjectivities and behaviors of socioculturally diverse individuals on a global scale, has resulted in significant negative consequences and discrimination against indigenous populations. A review of the literature on colonized territories has uncovered the following findings: 1) an overdiagnosis of special educational needs among students of indigenous descent, leading to their referral to special education programs (Silva, 2022); 2) a higher rate of school dropout among indigenous students (Maheux et al., 2020); 3) prevalent issues related to self-esteem and low self-concept (Becerra, 2011); 4) a neglect of sociocultural identity (Martins, 2022); and 5) a disproportionate number of indigenous students identified with intellectual disabilities and emotional disorders (Silva et al., 2022). In summary, the design and evaluation of learning challenges faced by indigenous students reveal significant tensions and contradictions, particularly when standardized tests are employed that are not appropriately adapted to the diverse social and cultural contexts of indigenous territories.

In this context, several issues related to the professional role of psychologists in addressing diversity emerge, including the following: a) the predominance of a psychomedical discourse that attributes the causes of learning problems to students and their families, framing these issues as failures to adapt to dominant social and cultural paradigms (Bursztyn; Korn-Bursztyn, 2017; Mehan, 2014; Tindle et al., 2022); b) the perception of diversity as a deviation, characterized by hierarchies linked to the idealized conception of a person dictated by prevailing norms, resulting in the categorization of children and youth who do not conform to the Eurocentric cultural model as "deficient" (Gutiérrez; Riquelme, 2020); c) the sociocultural distance and communication barriers between indigenous families and professionals, which can adversely affect the diagnosis of indigenous children and youth (Campeau, 2021); d) the training of professionals rooted in a monocultural framework, which limits their understanding of indigenous realities and hampers effective communication with families and communities, thereby leading to evaluative and diagnostic processes that are disconnected from the sociocultural contexts of children and youth in the educational system (Gutiérrez; Riquelme, 2020); e) the dominance of monolingual theories within educational settings regarding literacy acquisition, which may skew assessments of bilingual children, often labeling them as potential students with language and writing difficulties (Escamilla et al., 2014); f) prevalent misconceptions regarding disability and the pervasive influence of deficit theories

within the psychomedical discourse of most professionals, which negatively affects the family-school-community dynamic (Paniagua, 2017; Sundararajan, 2019). Collectively, these challenges underscore the necessity of exploring alternative psychological frameworks, such as indigenous psychologies, which may enhance the understanding and resolution of educational difficulties within the school system from a perspective that values social, cultural, and territorial relevance.

Indigenous Psychology

Indigenous psychology emerges as a counterproposal to the hegemony of Western Eurocentric psychology, which has historically neglected the cultural frameworks surrounding individuals and their sociocultural contexts (Dudgeon et al., 2014). In this regard, Shams (2021) argues that understanding the behavior and development of indigenous children and youth through their own epistemic frameworks challenges us to conceive human behavior from an integrated perspective that encompasses social, cultural, spiritual, and territorial dimensions, independent of Western influences. This approach aims to revitalize psychological practice and advance its decolonization by deconstructing the processes of racialization that have historically permeated the field of psychology.

When it comes to indigenous psychology, Ciofalo (2019) identifies key principles that contribute to the development of a counter-hegemonic praxis, emphasizing localized knowledge and diverse ways of being and acting in the world to construct decolonial epistemologies. Specifically, two principles emerge: 1) the necessity of building knowledge based on the unique characteristics of each culture. It is essential to recognize and validate multiple epistemologies, allowing for the existence of various indigenous psychologies that enable an understanding of human behavior grounded in the socio-cultural norms established by specific groups within their historical and social contexts (Silva et al., 2022); and 2) the promotion of epistemological pluralism, acknowledging the diverse cultures represented by indigenous psychologies worldwide (Martin, 2018). This approach stands in stark contrast to the normative frameworks of Western Eurocentric psychology, which often neglects the individual's social and ecological context and is characterized by an individualistic, isolated perspective. Additionally, 3) there is a rejection of the universality and decontextualization of psychological phenomena, as this perspective excludes critical elements such as meanings, values, beliefs, and the locality of social, cultural, territorial, and affective relevance. This exclusion hampers the understanding and explanation of social phenomena from an intercultural knowledge construction perspective (Ciofalo, 2019; Tindle et al., 2022).

In this context, Bolaños and Tattay (2012), Watkins et al. (2018), and Ciofalo et al. (2022) identify several components of indigenous psychologies rooted in their own epistemological frameworks, which include: 1) self-growth and self-worth, grounded in vernacular knowledge of a spiritual, natural, social, and cultural nature, which fosters self-determination and the preservation of indigenous identity. In

this regard, the behavior of indigenous individuals is situated within a specific sociohistorical context, shaped by their unique frames of reference (Ciofalo et al., 2022); 2) the emergence of a renewed appreciation for indigenous identity that resists the imposition of Western values and lifestyles, as well as the colonization of thought and behavior (Bolaños; Tattay, 2012). This resurgence acknowledges that indigenous subjectivities and intersubjectivities facilitate the construction of languages, signs, and meanings that establish guidelines for coexistence, as well as relational and behavioral norms between individuals and their natural, social, cultural, and spiritual environments, thereby promoting the development and balance between the individual, their spiritual essence, and their surroundings (Watkins et al., 2018); and 3) the growing recognition and appreciation of the role of indigenous cosmogony and cosmovision as fundamental determinants of human behavior, aligned with vernacular sociocultural norms and patterns transmitted across generations through indigenous family education (Ciofalo et al., 2022).

In this context, diagnostic evaluations conducted within educational settings characterized by social and cultural diversity must take into account the specific needs and educational goals of indigenous communities. This approach aims to respond effectively from an intercultural educational perspective. Such a reality presents a challenge for educational psychologists to embrace epistemological and phenomenological pluralism in research grounded in indigenous psychologies. This shift is essential for fostering a holistic understanding of the world, thereby countering the prevailing view of objective, deterministic, and mechanistic knowledge that often marginalizes alternative epistemologies. Ultimately, it is crucial to understand indigenous children and youth from a contextualized perspective that recognizes individuals as interactive and proactive agents of their own actions.

Therefore, to grasp the significance of this new approach, it is essential to recognize that the application of Western psychology within culturally diverse contexts leads to a decontextualization of the realities experienced by indigenous peoples, who have historically suffered from ethnocentric biases. When individuals from other cultures engage with Western psychological frameworks, their identities are often called into question, rendering their conceptual repertoires inadequate (Martin, 2018). In this context, the influence of ecopsychology on indigenous psychology becomes particularly relevant, as it emphasizes the importance of small groups and community interactions in fostering behavioral change. This perspective highlights an intrinsic network of relationships with the environment and the tangible and intangible beings that inhabit it, facilitating a sense of spiritual balance (Shams, 2021). Ultimately, this approach underscores the necessity of considering context in the construction of reality for indigenous communities, while also challenging practices rooted in ethnocentrism and European paradigms, such as the universal standardization of psychological research and evaluation methods.

Careful literature review reveals several critical aspects that must be considered for developing culturally relevant psychological interventions in school contexts. These include: 1)The Importance of relationality: Interventions should be grounded in the principles of indigenous education, emphasizing respect and reciprocity in relationships. This approach acknowledges that teaching and learning are reciprocal processes, where both the teacher and learner contribute to each other's growth (Arias-Ortega et al., 2023); 2) Experiential learning: Interventions should incorporate activities that foster experiential learning through interpersonal relationships and epistemic practices rooted in the land and artistic expression. Such activities facilitate the achievement of spiritual balance for the individuals involved (Day, 2023); 3) Incorporation of socioculturally relevant subjects: It is essential to include individuals who are culturally knowledgeable to support the role of school psychologists in indigenous contexts. This will enhance the integration of epistemic knowledge from both Western and indigenous psychological frameworks, enabling a more effective intercultural approach to addressing issues; and 4) Cultural humility: Practitioners should embrace cultural humility, recognizing the limitations of their own perspectives and the value of learning from the cultural contexts of the individuals they serve. These findings are pertinent to the future practices of school, educational, counseling, and clinical psychologists, as well as to pedagogical and curricular changes across multiple educational levels (Day, 2023).

Concluding remarks

Rethinking the role of the educational psychologist in an indigenous context necessitates the incorporation of a new epistemology that addresses the historically marginalized status of indigenous peoples, who have often developed within frameworks of cultural homogeneity. In this regard, the educational psychologist's role becomes particularly significant when schools are viewed as emancipatory institutions that recognize cultural differences as sources of stimulation and enrichment (Delmondez; Pulino, 2014).

Thus, the psychology professional is positioned as a catalyst for change, implementing culturally and territorially relevant interventions that benefit both students and their families, as well as the broader indigenous community. Thus, epistemological challenges for school psychologists in indigenous contexts primarily stem from the undergraduate training provided by universities within their curricular frameworks. Incorporating intercultural knowledge into training programs is essential for fostering greater openness to the epistemic shifts necessary to understand indigenous students and their families. As Becerra (2011) points out, existing biases and ethnic prejudices often shape perceptions of indigenous students within school contexts. Additionally, this intercultural training can facilitate improved communication and dialogue among stakeholders in the educational environment, thereby reducing cultural distances between school professionals, students, and their families. It is crucial to consider the cultural frameworks surrounding indigenous students when

conducting psychological assessments and diagnoses. Doing so will help prevent the overrepresentation of indigenous students in school integration programs, thereby avoiding the reinforcement of narratives that depict indigenous individuals as cognitively deficient (Gutiérrez; Riquelme, 2020).

Consequently, the theoretical discussion presented thus far underscores the urgent need to reframe psychologist training through an intercultural educational approach. This paradigm enables psychologists to engage in attentive and respectful communication with indigenous users, recognizing and valuing the diverse epistemes that interact within these contexts. Research indicates that a robust development of ethnic identity among children and youth correlates positively with their overall socio-emotional well-being (González et al., 2022). This highlights the necessity of revitalizing and maintaining the intergenerational transmission of cultural values, as such continuity is theorized to have beneficial effects on the well-being and development of indigenous peoples and their future generations (Dockery, 2020). By fostering socio-emotional growth rooted in indigenous epistemic frameworks, the interconnectedness of children and youth with their norms, customs, territory, and environment serves as protective factors that enhance the resilience of indigenous students within the educational system (González et al., 2022).

Thus, we assert that psychologists operating in indigenous and intercultural contexts bear a social, ethical, political, and epistemic responsibility to ground their professional practice in the recognition of sociocultural diversity. This entails acknowledging the historical influences of colonialism that have impacted vulnerable and marginalized populations, including indigenous, migrant, and peasant communities, particularly within educational and community settings. To fulfill this responsibility, psychologists must provide professional support to teachers as well as indigenous families and communities, facilitating intercultural psychosocial interventions that foster healthy relationships and environments. We contend that within the educational context of indigenous and intercultural territories, school psychologists must be equipped to address, with competence and respect, the intergenerational tensions and traumas perpetuated by colonialism. Such issues have left lasting scars on the socio-emotional well-being of indigenous peoples (Dockery, 2020).

It is crucial to recognize that, in indigenous and intercultural educational contexts, epistemological tensions may arise that impact educational environments. These tensions can lead to challenges in intercultural relationships and the persistence of monocultural pedagogical practices, which create cultural discord between the school curriculum and professional practices. Furthermore, pedagogical and didactic issues often emerge that do not align with indigenous knowledge, coupled with the omission and invisibility of the principles, values, and epistemic practices of indigenous pedagogy. Behavioral differences observed between indigenous and non-indigenous students frequently stem from intergenerational traumas, which must be

acknowledged in socioculturally diverse educational settings. This underscores the necessity for school psychologists to be equipped to address the complex emotional experiences that indigenous students often navigate as a result of their marginalized identities within a Western Eurocentric educational system (Day, 2023). Ultimately, the integration of educational psychologists into schools characterized by sociocultural diversity presents ethical, epistemic, and political challenges in engaging with the families and communities they serve. This necessitates a holistic approach grounded in intercultural education that respects and values the various epistemic frameworks of those involved in the ongoing pursuit of the common good[1].

Note

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Katerin Arias-Ortega is an associate professor at the Catholic University of Temuco. She holds a PhD in Educational Sciences. Research line: education and interculturality.
ORCID: http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8099-0670
E-mail: karias@uct.cl

Natalia Díaz Alvarado is a psychologist, studying the Master's Degree in Psychosocial Intervention for Mental Health at the Catholic University of Temuco. Research Line: Educational Psychology in Contexts of Social and Cultural Diversity.
ORCID: http://orcid.org/ 0000-0001-6838-8345
E-mail: nataliadiazalv@gmail.com

Editor in charge: Lodenir Karnopp