Book review

Ajjawi, R., Tai, J., Boud, D. and Jorre de St Jorre, T. (Eds.). 2023. *Assessment for Inclusion in Higher Education: Promoting Equity and Social Justice in Assessment*. London: Routledge.

Universities globally have experienced a series of disruptions in the last decade that have required academics to reevaluate the central role assessment plays in student learning. The book *Assessment for Inclusion in Higher Education: Promoting Equity and Social Justice in Assessment* provides theoretical and practical approaches for deepening our understanding of social justice and inclusivity in a higher education context. With its critical and reflective chapters and evidence-led case studies, it explores how assessment can be designed and implemented to recognise and celebrate diversity. The twenty-one chapters, edited by prominent assessment scholars and underpinned by an assessment *for* learning paradigm, highlight the failure of traditional assessment approaches to promote equity and diversity. The chapters present possibilities for rethinking and redesigning inclusive assessments to ensure success for students who come with a variety of language, cultural, educational backgrounds and disabilities. The book should have resonance for anyone working in higher education and will be essential reading for educators, policy makers, students, professional bodies, academic developers, and researchers interested in alternative assessment practices in higher education.

Throughout the book, the authors are careful not to problematise "non-traditional" marginalised groups who have experienced exclusion and are required to fit with the norms and expectations in stratified systems. They reject deficit notions of failure and "disadvantage" that locate the problem within the student and that exclude students through homogenous assessment practices. They argue that diversity should be a key factor in building inclusive approaches and demonstrate the value of designing 'better assessment systems, designs and processes' (10) to address different experiences and identities. Although this argument is relevant in the global south in terms of its concern with social justice and decolonisation, the notion of inclusive assessment needs to be reconceptualised in a context where a critical mass of students has been socially and economically disadvantaged and has experienced various forms of educational discrimination. The book's focus on 'mainstream assessment for inclusion for all students' (12) is helpful in this regard as it offers a useful framework for promoting student diversity in higher education and society and for moving away from the preoccupation with obstacles to inclusive curriculum development.

The book is divided into three sections each of which focuses on a different theme related to assessment for inclusion. The first section addresses societal and cultural issues at the macro level, the second section explores community and institutional perspectives at the meso level,

and the third showcases micro level practical applications by educators and students. Drawing on transformative assessment and inclusive theory, Rola Ajjawi, in the introductory chapter, problematises traditional 'assessment regimes' that treat students 'as mostly homogenous, under the erroneous operationalisation of reliability as sameness, fairness or even equivalence' (1). This argument is a strong thread that runs through the book and challenges taken for granted assumptions about the role of assessment in excluding diverse students and thwarting social justice. Joanna Tai, Rola Ajjawi, Trina Jorre de St Jorre, and David Boud provide a scholarly synthesis of assessment for inclusion in chapter one by drawing attention to continuing inequities in education. They raise several concerns about assessment practices 'that might prove exclusionary' (13) such as closed book exams, rigid deadlines and assessment security and suggest systemic programmatic approaches in line with curriculum transformation.

Chapter 2 conceptualises the role of assessment in relation to theories of social justice. In this chapter, Jan McCarthur suggests that the inclusion of fair assessment procedures has limited potential in achieving equity without considering just assessment outcomes. She reflects on the findings of a large research project on students' beliefs and experiences of assessment, in which social justice issues emerged strongly amongst South African students. She invites higher education practitioners to challenge taken for granted assumptions about 'fair' assessment practices and to confront invisible injustices. (26). In a similar vein, Henrik Nieminen in chapter 6, critiques the 'procedural focus' of existing inclusive assessment practices informed by a meritocratic ideology that focus on individual accommodation models. The author critiques an approach that ignores broader societal and political issues and suggests inclusive authentic assessments which involve all stakeholders. This position is taken up in a later chapter by Ben Whitburn, Matthew Krehl and Edward Thomas (Chapter 7) who use an ontological framework to expand on the critique of procedural inclusive strategies and advocate 'legitimate partnerships with students' (78). The authors question how time is manifested in assessment and explore its impact on students' ways of being.

The chapter by Neera Jain (Chapter 3), based on critical disability studies, adds a practice-based and necessary dimension by questioning assessment practices for 'normalcy' (30) that ignore student experiences of disability. The author proposes critical universal design (35) as an approach to attending to intersectionality and 'treating disability as a valued resource for transformation' (35). The focus on interdependence in assessment dovetails well with the subsequent chapter by Jessamy Gleeson and Gabrielle Fletcher (Chapter 4) that posits a cultural interface from an Indigenous perspective. These authors critique the predominance of Western knowledge systems and evaluative judgment in existing assessment practices. This links to Chapter 5 by Sarah Lambert, Johanna Funk, and Taskeen Adam that explores the decolonisation of education in terms of it prioritizing *recognitive and representational justice* and designing 'two-way' inclusive assessments. The authors propose a 'Culturally Inclusive Assessment Model' (56) for integrating multiple knowledge sources in the curriculum.

In the section on meso contexts of assessment, issues of policy and validity frameworks are examined to engage with challenges and collaborative solutions at the institutional and

community level. These chapters raise important issues about how assessment is constructed in policy documents and question what assumptions and ideologies underlie the misalignment of policies at different levels. Authors in this section identify tools and frameworks for instituting stronger systems of institutional monitoring and oversight. The rise of AI in the post pandemic world has further placed the spotlight on assessment, this time highlighting its weak points. The chapter by Phillip Dawson (Chapter 10) makes a strong case for rethinking anti-cheating approaches that 'prey(s) on the disadvantaged and offer premium services to the advantaged' (113). He highlights common perceptions and myths of 'trustworthy' exams and validity and proposes well-functioning systems for supporting inclusivity and worthwhile learning. Bret Stephenson and Andrew Harvey (Chapter 11) likewise explain how technological solutions have the tendency to produce inequitable outcomes and surface broader ethical issues in AI-enabled assessments. Trina Jorre de St Jorre and David Boud (Chapter 13) offer useful insights (based on current studies) into how students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are excluded from assessments that appear to be fair, objective and culturally unbiased. The chapters in this section foreground the failure of current assessment policies and systems for promoting equitable inclusive assessment practices and diversity.

Based on practice-based approaches to inclusive assessment, the chapters in section three include an effective blend of theory and practice by providing concrete examples and strategies for more inclusive and life-long learning approaches. They reject traditional measurement mechanisms for determining whether students have met the learning outcomes and illustrate best practices of a range of diverse assessment methods for improving the way students engage. Sarah O' Shea and Janine Delahunty (Chapter 15) problematise traditional identifiers of success and rigid grading practices and propose principles for forging strong student-lecturer partnerships. Roseanna Burke (Chapter 17) provides useful examples of authentic assessments and demonstrates the value of self-assessment and meta-cognition to promote lifelong learning. Notably, in this section, Geraldine O' Neil (Chapter 18), proposes a flexible design process for providing students with assessment choices to 'empower them' in their learning by centring issues of trust and responsibility sharing.

The insights from all the authors in this book offer important ways of thinking about inclusive assessment practices now and for the future and underline the crucial role of assessment in promoting effective learning. The reformulation of programmatic and transparent learning-oriented strategies emerged largely because of collaborative innovations and paradigm shifts in assessment practices during the pandemic. The book encourages lecturers to re-think their deeply held personal beliefs about assessments from a socially situated perspective.

The editors argue that it is essential in a neoliberal higher education context to interrogate the implications of inclusivity from a transformative assessment perspective. This edited volume is an important resource and provides an impetus for higher education practitioners to reconceptualise assessment theories and practices in terms of student agency, regulatory frameworks and ethical reflexivity (chapter 8). This substantial volume will support the urgent move away from "assessment of learning" approaches to a more sustainable paradigm that will

allow a far closer scrutiny of exclusionary assessment practices and support the learning of all students.

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