

Book Review

Taylor, C. S., & Nolen, S. B. (2022). *Culturally and socially responsible assessment: theory, research, and practice*. Teachers College Press. ISBN 978-0-8077-6688-0

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ABSTRACT

Multicultural education is beginning to gain inroads into teaching practices, educational research, and teacher training programs. There is a growing list of resources to support educators in creating welcoming spaces in the classroom for marginalized students from underrepresented groups. Educational researchers and practitioners have provided frameworks for the proper integration of multicultural content and strategies into the teaching and learning process. However, a vital part of the learning process is assessment, which is majorly framed after the content of the dominant culture. Research has shown that intelligence and state-approved tests are characterized by content that is relatable to students from the dominant culture. Taylor and Nolen (2022) have combined years of experience in teaching and research to suggest ways of creating an inclusive and just assessment that showcases the diversity of the modern American classroom. This article is a review of their book, whose aim is to situate culturally and socially responsible assessment in educational theory, research, and practice.

KEYWORDS: Assessment, multiculturalism, K-12, educational research, practice.

There is an increased awareness to magnify the voice and participation of marginalized groups of students in the American educational system (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Jin, 2021). This has been portrayed in several articles, journals, and books across different subject disciplines, some of which are captured in an ongoing multicultural educational series with James A. Banks. These series aim to provide all educators with the skills needed to implement learning strategies and pedagogy for marginalized groups in mainstream education. One of the books in the series that focuses on assessment is *Culturally and Socially Responsible Assessment: Theory, Research and Practice*, where Taylor and Nolen (2022) compiled their research and that of others to dissect and proffer solutions to the problem of assessment at school, district, and state levels, limiting the schools' ability to cater to students from non-dominant cultures. The authors framed the book using the validity theory with a focus on bias, engagement, culturally responsible assessments, and contexts in which assessments take place, all of which are the foundations of equitable assessment in K-12 and higher education.

In line with positionality, identity and how it shapes the experiences of educators and educational researchers (Milner, 2007), the authors write about their background, which gave credence to their research on culturally and socially responsible assessment. In the preface, Taylor, the first author, shared her experience as a high school teacher in an apartheid school in an urban

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district with a diverse population, 60% of whom are African Americans. During this period, African American students were separated into black classes with a negligible number of low-performing white students. She noted that the educational system and the assessment put in place were a disservice to African American students. Later, she became a teacher educator focused on helping teachers with socially just assessments. This experience and the knowledge gained from becoming a teacher educator, integrated with Nolan's (second author) experience, provided the expertise needed to help educators understand what needs to be done to make assessments relative and amenable to the experiences of all students. The authors' experiences, combined with the proficiency of other references in the field, make the book a credible resource for educators, researchers, and policymakers to intensify their effort to create fair and valid assessments for all students.

The book is organized into seven Chapters, six appendices, notes, and references. These chapters give a broad detail of culturally and socially responsible assessments beginning with a theoretical perspective whose big idea is validity theory and its application to assessment. There is a deconstruction of the concept of validity as a property of assessment and a more inclusive definition that includes how students interpret tests and how teachers evaluate their responses. The authors made a case for the incorporation of communities of practice in the process of validation of assessment to reduce implicit bias that may result from teachers' and examiners' values and culture reflected in the assessment. There was an exciting reality to the concept of culturally relevant or responsive pedagogy focusing on instructional methods with less representation in assessment content or method. Bias in assessment was comprehensively explained with emphasis on assessment tools, grading, and evaluation, devoid of language complexity, explicit and implicit bias and able to demonstrate what students know and can do.

Culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy were high points of chapters 2 and 3 which focused majorly on teachers' ability to be self-aware of their biases and assumptions, getting to know their students and their families and having equally high expectations of all students regardless of their previous ideologies about their race, background or personalities. These ideas were repeated in different perspectives in chapters 3 and 4 with the focus on practical and just student engagement, assessment and situative perspective. The concept of situative perspective gives better insights into how a teacher can cultivate a relationship with communities of practice fed by socially constructed beliefs and actions contextualized by "local meanings, identities, learning and engagement" (Taylor & Nolen, 2022, p. 105). Chapters 6 and 7 were carefully written to concretize every idea in the previous chapters into recommendations for developing culturally and socially responsible assessment tools and validation. The insights on teacher-developed assessments and their tendency to miss out on vital parts of validation were emphasized. There was a high recommendation for performance-based assessments, supported by literature (Darling-Hammond, 2010) with highlights on a proper understanding of learning goals by teachers, students, parents, and other academic community members. This was cumulated into resources and tools for every solution the authors have suggested for improved assessment for students of diverse cultural, racial, ethnic, and social identities.

Throughout the book, the most common theme was fair and valid assessments made possible by tools like bias and sensitivity review process, language complexity reviews, accessibility reviews and communities of practice. The authors expanded the concept of culturally and socially relevant assessment to include people living with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+), which gave a broader definition to multiculturalism. While the initial population that became the focus of multiethnic studies was BIPOC, the authors made a case for the marginalization of disabled and LGBTQ+ members of the student population, which reflects how they are taught and assessed. One of the authors' examples of this was

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computer-administered tests which will hinder the excellent performance of students with low computer skills, little or no access to the internet or with disabled fine motor skills. Furthermore, the authors did great justice to the use of differential item functioning (DIF) analyses which allow authors and publishers of assessment tools to take into cognizance the interpretation each student gives to an assessment item or question.

Although the text was written in the form of a book, several parts of it align with the work of some researchers in the field of multicultural education on themes like the involvement of communities of practice, as expressed in Walker's (1996) ethnography on the experiences of black students in North Carolina, emphasis on high-stakes test which sidelines equity (May & Sleeter, 2010), and the efforts of the authors to breakdown social inequality (Domina et al., 2017) in schools which provided a background for the need for equitable assessment. The book takes on several approaches, chiefly qualitative methods of inquiry like an interpretive framework that included post-modern perspectives and critical, queer and disability theories. Although this was not mentioned explicitly, the validation theory and the ideas represented in the book point to these.

The book was written for teachers, teacher-educators, researchers, policymakers, district administrators, developers of assessment tools and publishers. It was a body of work with many strengths such as the use of a blend of research and everyday language, which aligned with the authors' recommendation for removing language complexity bias. The choice of language makes it accessible to its intended audience. Another strength was its extensive use of real-life examples, especially in chapter 5. An extension of this is the use of existing standards to show examples of how to transform learning goals into authentic learning, performance-based assessments, connection to the community, or scoring rules for reading standards. This is vital to teachers who may need to implement these concepts in the classroom before nationwide acceptance. Another profound strength was the extensive use of literature to situate ideas and positions the authors arrived at, this created a familiar terrain for experienced researchers, and it gave validity to the claims and recommendations of the book. The dedication of chapter 7 and appendices to resources and tools gave a new dimension to book writing. The chapter showcased recommended resources for two major themes highlighted in the book: (1) communities of practice to examine published and teacher-developed assessments, and (2) resources for teacher learning culturally responsive pedagogy and multicultural education. This fulfilled the book's aim to be as practical as possible for practitioners. Ultimately, the book provided an exhaustive compilation of resources for pre-and in-service teacher training with strategies, tasks, and recommended slides.

The major weakness of the book was the repetitiveness of concepts and ideas. While this could help retain important facts and highlights, there was an overlap of points and repetitive explanations. Also, the suggestions in the book seemed to make minimal provision for abstract concepts in science or subjects like mathematics. However, the authors used the standards in both subjects to explain how teachers and educational stakeholders could navigate this. The authors' recommendations for teaching strategies that connect abstract topics or subjects to students' real-world situations were commendable. These include having accurate content knowledge to make concepts relevant to students' lives and a careful relationship-based explanation of how this knowledge creates a foundation for relevance with future goals, careers, and aspirations.

Conclusion

Culturally and Socially Responsible Assessment: Theory, Research and Practice serves as a practical text to introduce this aspect of multiculturalism in education and policy to practitioners, researchers, teacher educators and other stakeholders interested in developing and administering fair and valid assessments that represent the current diversity in American institutions. Although

the book has recurring themes from one chapter to the next, with most examples and illustrations from American standards, it can be adapted for implementation at all levels of education within and outside the US. It is recommended for countries interested in promoting equity, diversity, and fairness in their teaching, learning and assessment approaches.

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Notes on Contributor

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