

## Inclusive Assessment Practice

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Opportunities abound to make assessment practices more inclusive in each element of the assessment cycle (Maki, 2010), the double looped assessment cycle (Kennedy, 2016), and the assessment spiral (Wehlburg, 2007). There have been positive contributions in this thread including the notion of disaggregating data to determine if students are served equitably by our programs and services. We contend there are ample opportunities to cultivate inclusive assessment practices well before data analysis. Maki (2010) captures the idea students learn in ways that are as diverse and nuanced as the students themselves. Why shouldn't our assessment efforts evolve in a way that empower students to share and demonstrate their learning, which can be evaluated with competency-based rubrics, in ways that are practical and meaningful to the students? To continue the conversation on designing and implementing inclusive assessment approaches towards the advancement of equity, assessment practitioners in higher education are at a considerable advantage because we have the opportunity to stand on the shoulders of giants. In the field of evaluation, there is a body of literature on Culturally Responsive Evaluation which serves as a great resource for assessment professionals in education. Culturally responsive evaluation (CRE) is inclusive and representative of culture throughout the evaluation including preparing for the evaluation, engaging stakeholders, identifying the purpose of the evaluation, considering methods, and collecting, analyzing and reporting the data (Frierson, Hood, & Hughes, 2002). This response to the Equity article aims to build on prior responses, provide additional thoughts on building an inclusive assessment practice, and build a bridge to the works of Culturally Responsive Evaluation.

### Include More Perspectives

With a critical lens, institutions should examine their approach for assessment practices, processes, and resources (Heiser, Prince, & Levy, 2017). Engaging stakeholders in the assessment processes can reinforce belonging and acceptance – for faculty, staff, and students. Positionality and agency are critical concepts to consider when engaging stakeholders. Culture, identity, and positionality have a compounded impact on assessment work because respondents, practitioners, and other stakeholders all make decisions grounded in their sense of self. Stakeholders engaging in the assessment provide perspectives and data which are influenced by their lived experiences, identities, and sense of culture. The assessment practitioner also approaches the work situated in their own positionality. Consider who is part of efforts, what perspectives are present, why that is, and what might be gained by involving

other parties. Adding additional voices to the table creates a space for stakeholders to operationalize their agency and inform the assessment process with diverse perspectives and lived experiences. For example, articulating learning outcomes can be an activity with which students can be better engaged. Their involvement not only clarifies learning outcomes and assessment for them, making them active contributors in the process, it also tests whether language is easily understood and realistic for them, as opposed to being written for faculty, staff, or administrators. It also provides the opportunity for students to share what they think they should or could gain from an experience. When designing instruments and questions, talk to different cultural populations to see if the construct measured means the same thing across groups (conceptual equivalence). Solicit student feedback on how to best frame the question; what language resonates with different groups?

Involving additional perspectives can help reduce assumptions and bias of assessment leaders (Heiser, Prince, & Levy, 2017). Like articulating outcomes, involving more perspectives can aid planning or instrument creation to be sensitive to ways with which people are likely to share information or engage in the process. Having multiple perspectives included with data interpretation and use of results helps challenge any bias or positionality of assessment leaders. While identities are not monoliths, having multiple identities involved helps inclusionary and member checking efforts here. Incorporating more voices around the table also increases collaborative efforts and fosters the development of a culture of evidence.

### **Consider Institutional Needs**

Because there are multiple identities, student populations, and unique perspectives to consider, an institution may be overwhelmed where to start. Guiding factors are institutional needs: strategic plan, goals, and key stakeholder populations. Utilize institutional initiatives to prioritize where to dig in or how to infuse more critical theory in assessment approaches (Heiser, Prince, & Levy, 2017). This way, not only will you be connecting and contributing area efforts to the institutional picture, you're more likely to solicit support from other areas aligned to similar goals, initiatives, or strategy.

Institutional needs can also frame data collection, analysis, and action (Heiser, Prince, & Levy, 2017). Institutions are often not value neutral and this is an important consideration when engaging in the assessment practice for equity. In reviewing instruments, how will data collected support area goals and inform on institutional priorities. How can area efforts add narrative or value to an existing story - and for whom? In this way, disaggregation of data can become more purposeful. When conducting statistical analysis and looking for differences across populations, do not hold white students as the bar for comparison. In addition, move the analysis beyond between group analysis and towards within-group analysis honoring the notion that not all students in one predefined, oversimplified, cultural placeholder designating group belonging have the same experience. In addition, the concept of statistical significance is different than finding data that is significant to a program or population.

Providing additional details on methods in CRE, Hood, Hopson, and Kirkhart (2015) explain that, “closely related to the framing of questions or statements of desired learning is the matter of what will be accepted as trustworthy evidence in formulating answer” (p. 294). Assessment professionals should recognize the multitude of applicable data sources and not limit by convention or unnecessarily hold assessment to a standard of research when it is not research. Connection to a larger framework situates area data with alignment to other data sets for triangulation opportunities. In addition, literature in CRE would suggest

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that practitioners must be responsive to cultural context, as well as identify and examine any underlying assumptions present in the construction, implementation, and analysis of methods (Hood et al., 2015; Hughes, Seidman, & Williams, 1993). Culture influences what we learn, how we learn, and how we demonstrate learning and methods, the question to perpetually consider is how to attend to these nuances. Bringing diverse stakeholders to the table as collaborative partners throughout the assessment process creates the opportunity for these partners to validate the data collected.

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### **Include Reflection with Process**

Make sure process reflection is part of practice (Heiser, Prince, & Levy, 2017). Sometimes there is such a results focus, assessment actors forget to reflect on efficacy of efforts. What perspectives and stakeholders were included in which processes? What challenges prevented further inclusion? What limitations and bias do you bring to the process? What steps did or could you take to mitigate these? These are important questions to ask given higher education still privileges dominant identities in learners (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017), as well as with staff and faculty by not incorporating more efforts to account for positionality and bias in everyday work (Heiser, Prince, & Levy, 2017). Institutions may want to create a meta-assessment rubric or checklist to help ensure assessment practice is following proper process as intended by the institution in accordance with institutional goals and values.

Learning is a complex, multifaceted process and assessment should reflect this process (Maki, 2010). This includes making the effort to account for different cultures, backgrounds, and preparation of students. Multifaceted assessment is called for given the nature of learning. Moreover, if meaningfully engaging in the assessment process and coming from a place of inquiry or desire for quality improvement, there are likely to be multiple data sources required. Adhering to this concept can help advance practice and ensure multiple instruments, methods, and more importantly, experiences are considered in assessment efforts.

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# Equity Response

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