

Assessment for inclusion: are we all heading in the same direction?



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Rethinking Assessment:
Inclusive Assessment & Standards
in a Dynamic and Changing World

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practitioners, others



Outline



The present day situation

What assessment does



What we could aim for

Assessment for inclusion



How might we get there?

Things we can do

Higher education is changing

“higher education assessment is changing because the needs of higher education are changing. These needs are changing because technology is dramatically transforming not only modes of assessment but also modes of learning and problem solving.

The overarching concerns for equity in education and fairness in assessment become paramount in this era of societal flux, especially as they intersect with issues of access, equality, diversity, and accountability in higher education.”

Messick, 1998, p.7

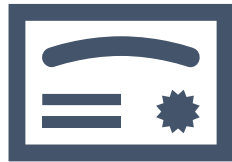
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What are your
hopes for
inclusive
assessment?

+
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Assessment has multiple purposes

Assessment **of**
learning



Certification: Ensure
learning outcomes
are met

Assessment **for**
learning



Learning: Develop
students' capabilities

Assessment **as**
learning



Sustainability:
Prepare students
beyond the current
task

Assessment is incredibly influential

“Students can, with difficulty, escape from the effects of poor teaching, they cannot (by definition, if they want to graduate) escape the effects of poor assessment.”

(Boud 1995, p35)

The backwash effect (Biggs, 1999)



Our obligations in assessment

Legal

- Disability Act 2005 (Ireland), Higher Education Authority Act 2022 (Ireland), Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Australia), Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Australia), Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold) 2021 (Australia)

Ethical & moral

- The opportunity costs of study (and failure) (Ajjawi et al 2020)
- More than just making sure students get the “right mark” (McArthur 2018)

Why should we be concerned about inclusion in assessment?

Adjustments don't fully meet diverse student needs

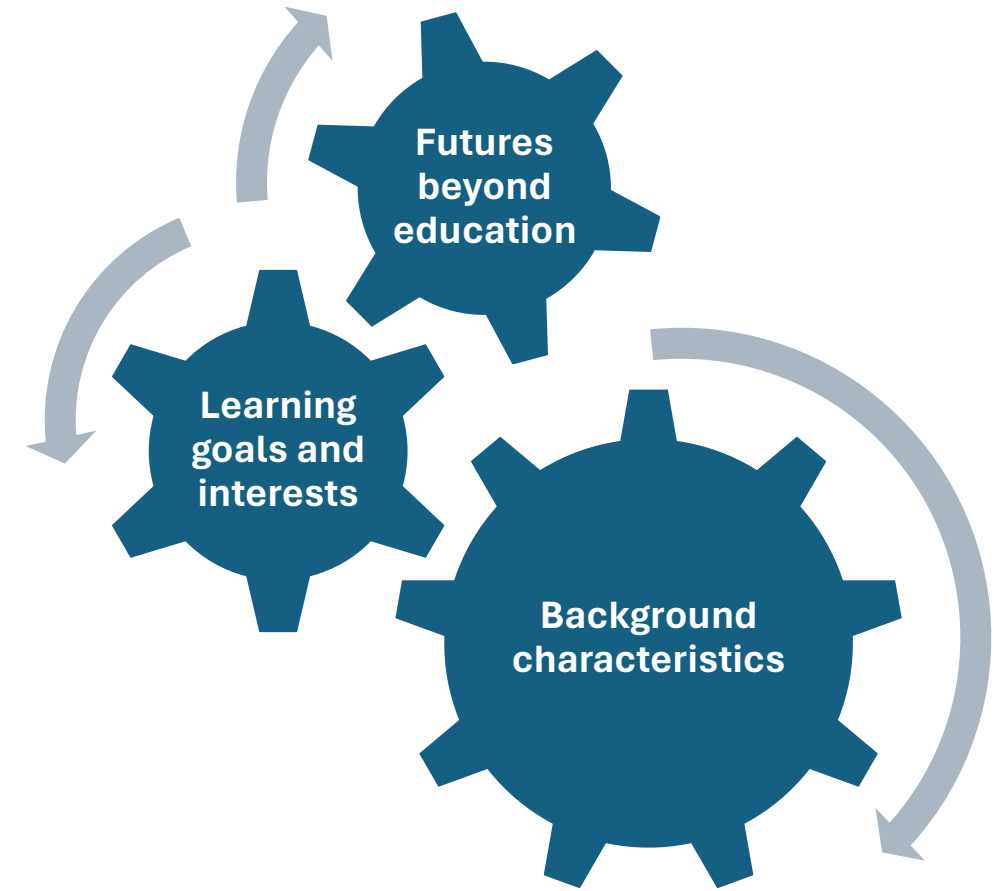
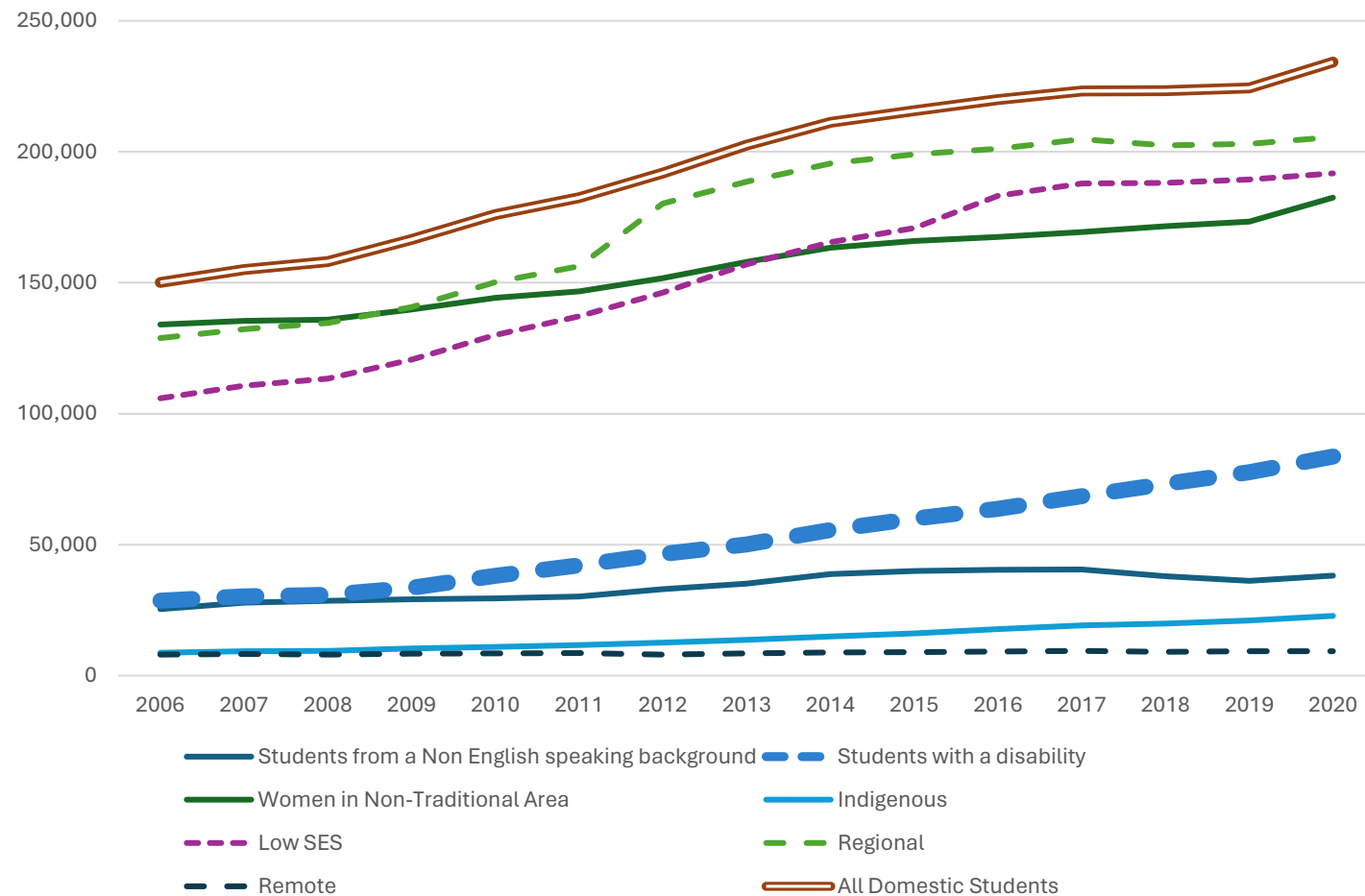
- While 67% of students surveyed were satisfied with special arrangements, 18% were not, and 14% were ambivalent (Waterfield & West 2006)
- Offering students with ADHD or learning disabilities a separate room for exams did not result in better performance (Weis & Beauchemin 2019)

Students don't necessarily want to declare their diversity

- Of students with a diagnosis, almost 50% did not disclose their condition despite reporting an impact on learning (Grimes et al. 2017)

There are many ways to consider student diversity

The Australian context: all enrolled domestic students by equity group



(DESE 2020, Mercer-Mapstone & Bovill 2020, Willems 2010)

Assessment ... an inclusive experience?



Positive relationships with faculty and support staff were important for students



Technology was helpful, but not always (e.g. internet connection/speed, screen reader incompatible with exam platforms)

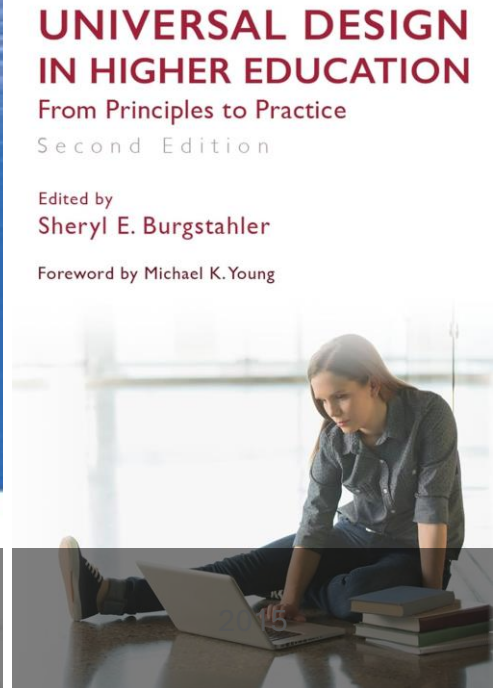
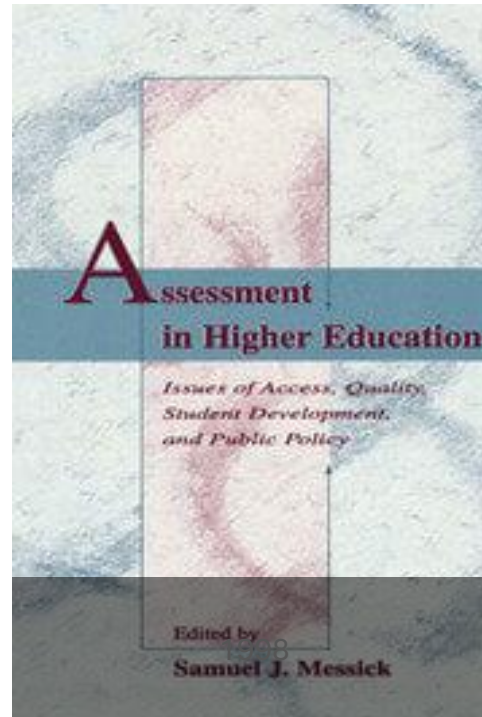


Spaces and timing were important for students with physical disability and medical conditions



Task requirements (e.g. memory recall) had implications for those with fatigue and learning differences

These
aren't
new
problems



Assessment for inclusion



“assessment should recognise diversity in student learning and endeavour to ensure that no student is discriminated against by virtue of features other than their ability to meet appropriate standards”

Tai, Ajjawi et al 2023, p. 10

Reasons to shift our perspective

- The medical model of disability is flawed
- Need to recognise the biopsychosocial factors which contribute to individuals' disadvantage in higher education
- Reasonable adjustments are ableist

(Dollinger et al 2023)

- Frequently focus only on procedural aspects of fairness
- The underlying constructs of assessment are left unquestioned
- The lived experience and outcomes of students is ignored

(McArthur 2018)

Continuing to only focus on learning access plans isn't enough

- The sheer number of access plans will become overwhelming (we analysed 2860)
- Students with access plans made up 4.7% of the total student population
- Exams required adjustments for 71% of students with access plans;
 - Online tests: 36%
 - Group work: 11%
 - In-class participation: 9%
 - Oral presentations: 8%

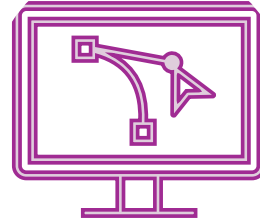
(Tai 2023)



Towards assessment for inclusion



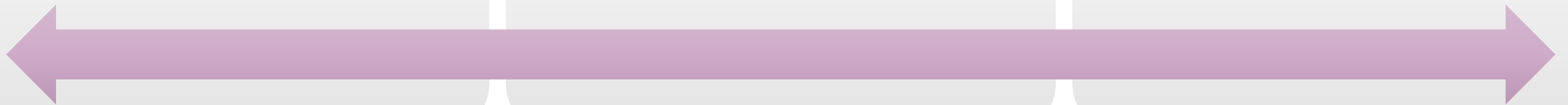
Student
experience



Assessment and
course design



Leadership and
policy



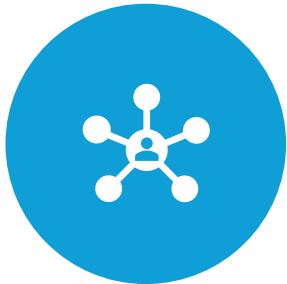
Students' responses: what should teachers consider when designing or implementing inclusive assessment?



“Be **passionate** in what they [academics] do and **interested** in having a **real dialogue** with the students”



“[avoid] Making the assignment too narrow- so students can't put any of their **own views** into it”

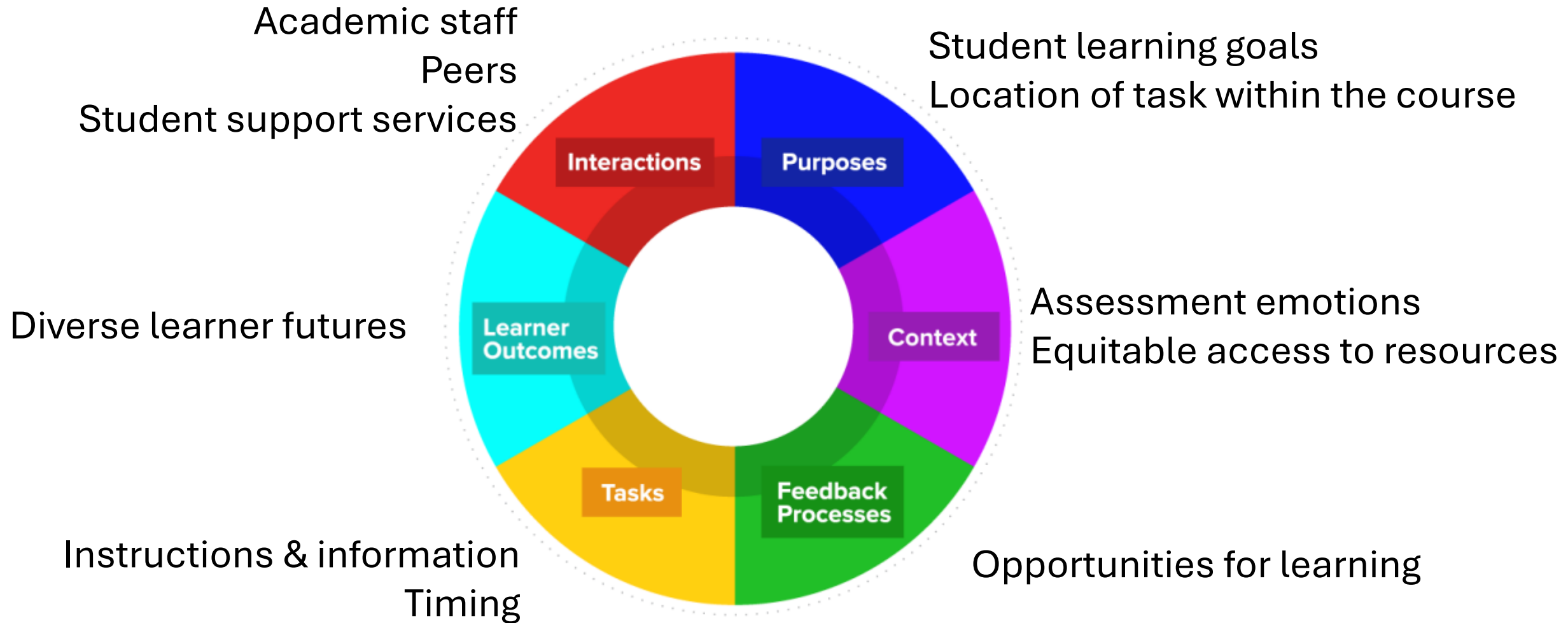


“relatable assignments that students can **connect** to”



“Have them more applicable to our **future careers** e.g. allow more realistic assignments which are things we would be **expected to do in our jobs**”

Assessment is more than just the task



(Bearman et al 2014, Tai, Dollinger et al 2023)

Assessment and course design for inclusion

Designing assessment for inclusion is an ongoing *process* involving many stakeholders, at multiple levels (task design, conditions, student interactions, policy)

(Tai, Mahoney et al 2023)

Strategies for inclusive assessment design:

- Authenticity in assessment
- Programmatic assessment
- Assessment for distinctiveness

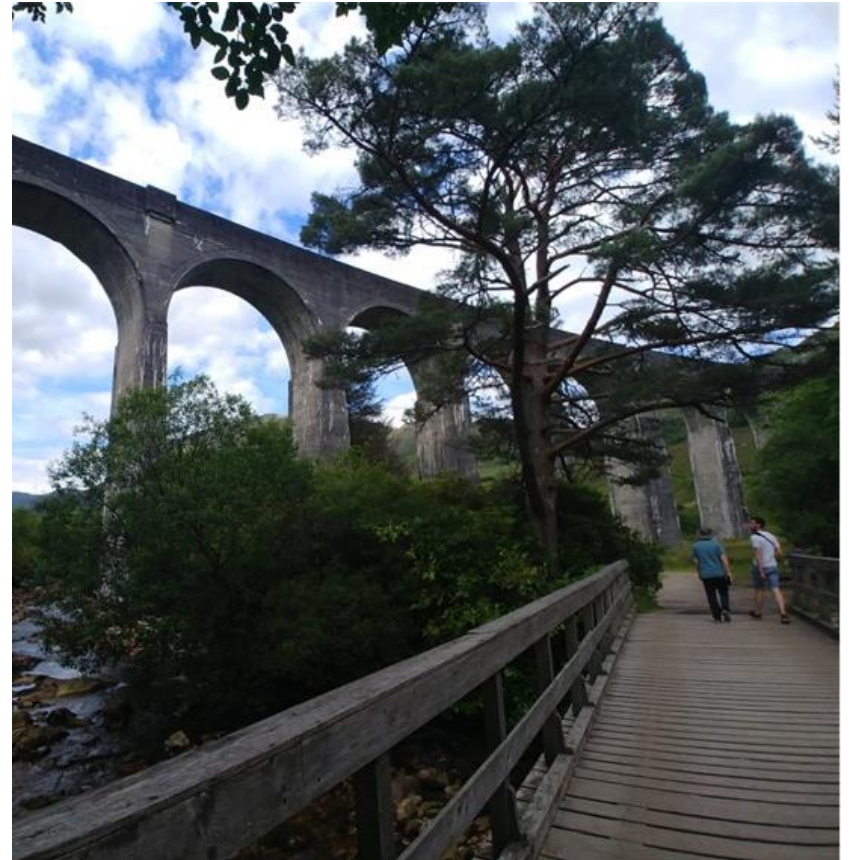


Authenticity in assessment

Designed vs perceived authenticity: we cannot fully control what happens in ‘learn time’

- Authenticity to self: integrate students’ values, capabilities, and future aspirations
- Authenticity of task: expectations about acceptable support or restrictions in completing work
- Authenticity in our values: involving diverse students in assessment design

(Ajjawi et al 2023)



Programmatic assessment

- Take a programme-level perspective on required outcomes
- Not everything has to be assessed at every occasion
- Consider how tasks are linked or related
- Scaffold students' capabilities over time





Assessment for distinctiveness

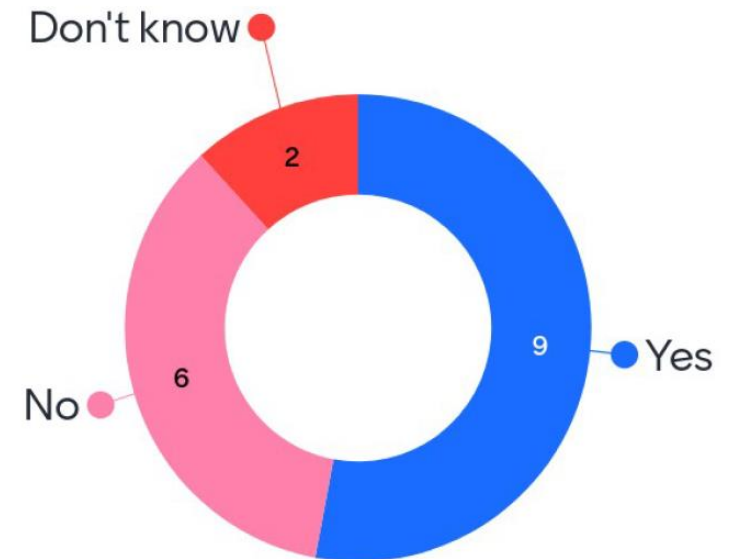
- Graduates should be prepared for their unique destinations
- Open-ended tasks could support students to develop their distinct capabilities
- Offering a variety of ways to demonstrate learning aligns with Universal Design for Learning (CAST 2018)

Leadership & policy for inclusion

Perceived conflicts with:

- Upholding academic standards
- Concerns about academic integrity
- Meeting industry accreditation requirements

(Kneale & Collings 2018, Tai, Ajjawi et al 2022)



Does your institution have a policy on inclusion in assessment?

(8) Assessment design is inclusive and reflects the diversity of the communities Deakin serves:

a. Assessment tasks will be designed in accordance with Deakin's [Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) and including:

- i. bias (eg, gender, racial, disability or cultural) is avoided in the setting and description of assessment tasks
- ii. assessment tasks are designed to be understood by, and are physically and/or digitally accessible to, all students regardless of diversity in background or identity

b. An assessment task that is delivered across different times or in different settings will be standardised to ensure comparable student experiences. If alternative assessment tasks are required, the comparability of the different tasks will be verified by the Unit Assessment Panel.

What about feedback for inclusion?

- Consider feedback as a process involving the active engagement of students and others
- Promote students' capability to engage in feedback, i.e. student feedback literacy
- Recognise the possibilities of different modes and processes for feedback (e.g. video feedback; feedback coversheets)

(Boud & Molloy 2013, Carless & Boud 2018, Mahoney et al. 2019, Ajjawi, Kent et al. 2021)



So... what now?

In practice, what things could we do:

- Tomorrow / for next semester / in a year's time / ...and further down the track
- Individually / with our teams / at an institutional level / at a sectoral level / internationally
- Targeting students / academics / systems / industry / accreditation bodies

Further research is *always* needed:

- Diverse student experiences of assessment
- How technology can make a difference to inclusion
- Validity of assessment designs
- The impact of inclusive assessment and feedback on student success

How can we head in the same direction?

- Collaborate: agree on a destination
- Value diversity: recognise multiple routes to get there
- Monitor progress: identify when we are working at cross purposes



“Assessment for inclusion is a perpetual endeavour requiring robust conversation”

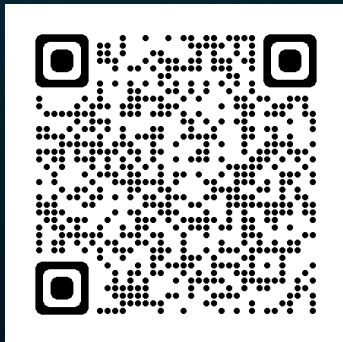
(Tai et al 2023, p. 493)

- Supporting inclusion is a worthy goal
- The problems with [poor] assessment design are amplified for diverse students.
- Need to shift away from a deficit discourse to consider how students can demonstrate capabilities in various ways: this is important for validity as well as inclusion (Tai, Ajjawi et al 2023)
- Assessment always involves compromise; choices in assessment are never neutral
- Each of us can contribute to the aspiration of assessment for inclusion



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