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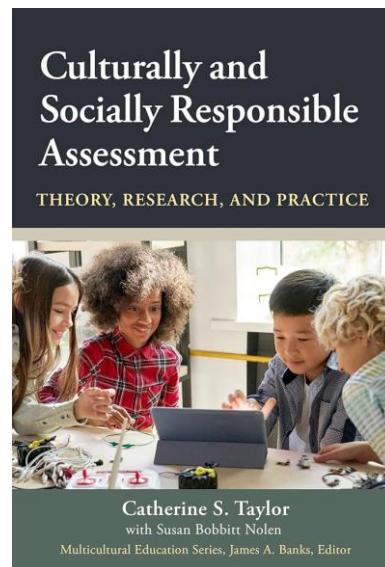
Taylor, C. S., & Nolen, S. B. (2022). *Culturally and socially responsible assessment: Theory, research, and practice*. Teachers College Press.

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Culturally and Socially Responsible Assessment comes at a time when diversity in U.S. schools and in many nations is on the rise and when assessments are currently under the oppressive influence of large-scale testing encouraged by policies such as No Child Left Behind (Feldman, 2018; Hess & Petrilli, 2006; Ravitch, 2016). Consider also movements for racial equality like Black Lives Matter, a heightening awareness of police brutality, and unique challenges experienced by educators to provide equitable learning opportunities during COVID-19. Within this broader context, Catherine Taylor (primary author) and Susan Nolen (contributing author, Chapters 4 and 5) emphasize a growing awareness in the United States of social injustices, and subsequently, the current moment is an opportune time to address the inequities of assessment in education.



Educators working with assessment at any level who want to move in a “distinctly different and transformative direction” (p. xviii) to better support student learning would benefit from reading this book. Classroom teachers, principals, and school administrators—especially those working with multicultural student populations—would find value in the concrete theory-based resources and tools offered in this volume. Specifically, Taylor provides a clear step-by-step plan for the development of culturally and socially responsible assessment tools for reading, social studies, the sciences, and mathematics, and several other resources applicable to all topics (see Chapters 6–7 and Appendices). Also included are ideas for implementation

within teacher and principal preparation and professional development programs, such as situating assessment improvement efforts in the framework of a community and not as an isolated effort. Although the text is not explicitly written for educational researchers, they (and other educators generally) may be interested in research gaps that the authors identify. One such gap involves countering a common “teach, test, move on” (p. 82) mentality and utilizing assessment effectively year-round rather than solely at the end of a school year.

Throughout the book, Taylor does not suggest a mere adaptation to approaching assessment. Rather, the author firmly believes if changes are to occur, it must be a school-wide effort to defy the status quo of assessments. The core of this book is about how to facilitate that dramatic change at different levels of the education system.

To encourage this change, Taylor concisely articulates many issues plaguing assessment in education. The author personally witnessed the effects of educational oppression from the beginning of her career in 1973 as a teacher in a segregated school in the Midwest. Now, a professor emerita at Washington University, her major areas of research all revolve around issues of assessment. The author argues in this book that “traditional methods of assessment . . . undermine the capacity of schools to serve students with diverse cultural and social background and identities” (p. xv). In short, given the cultural and social diversity of today’s students a one-size-fits all approach to assessment is simply ill-advised.

Taylor shares existing research to argue that one major reason conventional assessment methods, tools, processes, practices, and standards are inadequate is because they primarily reflect the knowledge and skills that are valued by the dominant culture. She also identifies how “for generations, the goal of schooling in the United States was to assimilate students into a ‘monocultural and monolingual society’” (p. 54) as efficiently as possible rather than prioritize student learning. Looking ahead, she proffers a culturally relevant, responsible, and sustaining vision for pedagogy and assessment that views education as something that should maintain high academic expectations while still honoring learner diversity (see Chapter 3).

An attractive feature of this book is that it offers a masterful blend of theory informed arguments, grounded in research, that are laced with descriptions of how to apply the theory to practice. Regarding theory, Taylor begins by looking at assessment through the lens of validity theory which is concerned with the degree that assessments are valid or accurately represent student learning. Then for practicality, a handy rubric and set of guiding questions based on principles of validity theory are provided to help educators analyze the level of validity in their assessments. Frustrated educators will resonate with the multiple threats to validity discussed throughout the book, including the problem of bias, current grading practices, and pressure to raise test scores.

One of the most effective culturally and socially responsible tools for enhancing assessment validity that Taylor recommends and describes in some detail is performance-based assessments. Among other benefits, performance-based assessments provide an authentic way for learners to engage with materials that represent real-world practice. This approach utilizes project-based learning theory which incorporates assessment as part of the learning process and not just as a singular culminating event. In Chapter 6, several detailed examples of performance tasks coincide with state academic standards for math, science, social studies, and reading and demonstrate how this book could be applied to specific classroom situations.

Taylor and Nolen also draw on sociocultural learning theory in Chapter 5 to show that education takes place in multiple layers of systems such as a classroom, within a school, within a district, within a local community, and so on. The implication being, first, that wherever possible educators should “explore assessment practices in the context of local meanings, identities, learning, or engagement as well as larger societal frameworks” (p. 105). Second, educators may not have as much control over assessment as they would like, which further underscores the need to collaborate with parents, students, colleagues, and administrators. As such, this book would most likely be best utilized as a collective effort within a community of practice to reform assessment, but would still benefit individual educators working in different positions within education systems.

Taylor and Nolen identify enhancing student engagement with the assessment process (see Chapter 4) as important in making culturally and socially responsible assessment more successful. Several strategies (e.g., incorporating feedback, or infusing authenticity and autonomy into assessment experiences) are detailed with examples, which can be helpful for busy educators with limited time. One approach to augment student engagement that Taylor and Nolen emphasize is designing assessments that are as relevant as possible to the students’ lives.

Taylor notes that most “of the writing and thinking about how to make assessment more culturally relevant was written in the 1990s” (p. 82). Therefore, this book aptly brings together some of the best available thinking on the topic while offering clear actionable directions for the future. The cohesive use of headings, subheadings, and numbered lists throughout the book is very inviting, especially to novice readers. The author also offers many additional resources and appendices for readers who want to go further in their exploration. For example, tools for effectively facilitating culturally and socially responsible assessment within communities of practice are described. These tools include how to develop culturally relevant performance tasks, such as “bias and sensitivity reviews...language complexity reviews, and accessibility reviews” (p. 171).

The goals described in this book are quite lofty, and to the everyday worker in education, they may seem a bit idealistic or daunting. This is because to truly facilitate socially and culturally responsible assessment as

explained in this book, it would involve a multi-faceted approach, extensive changes, frequent personalized adjustments to the diverse needs of numerous students, and sustained collaborative efforts. Notwithstanding, this book offers a clear, concise, and credible path forward for anyone serious about implementing such an approach.

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About the Reviewer

Bradley Dutson is currently a third-year doctoral student in teacher education and leadership at Utah State University. His academic interests include researching concepts and methods related to building classroom community and collective efficacy.



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