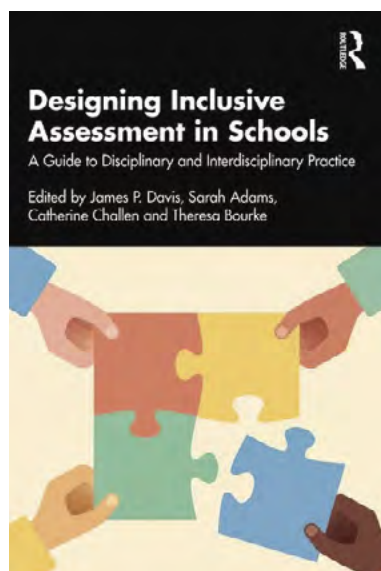


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Designing Inclusive Assessment in Schools

Edited by James P. Davis, Sarah Adams, Catherine Challen and Theresa Bourke

Routledge, October 2024

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Reviewed by Ben Lawless, Aitken College

This collection of short articles about inclusive assessment design is billed as being 'for teachers, by teachers'. However, of the 31 authors listed, only three are currently classroom teachers, and two of them are in their first year. The inclusion of more current classroom practitioners would have made a considerable difference, especially given the lack of attention to the crippling workload many of the suggestions included in the book would require.

Unfortunately, the vocabulary is overly academic. It is not written in busy teacher-friendly language, so while the stated target audience is teacher trainees, I question how many

teacher trainees would use densely worded books such as this.

The editors state that the book is not aligned centrally or ideologically, although the main focus of the book is on the inclusive design of assessment. It's strange that there is no philosophical discussion arguing the case for a new way of thinking about assessment. Much ideology is assumed. Despite claiming there is not an ideological bent in the book, there clearly is—teaching as a form of social justice.

A number of controversial, or even completely debunked, things are mentioned in the book. There's a huge focus on differentiation and personalised learning without attending to the problem of workload if this pedagogy is used. Many of the chapters believe in changing assessment so it better serves inquiry and project learning. Many modern educationalists would question whether these forms of learning are best for novices—as school students generally are. The chapter co-authored by a student teacher even discusses learning styles. There appears to be no mention of more modern beliefs about education, particularly the seismic shift in Australian education towards explicit instruction.

The chapter devoted to History teaching says we should focus on 'source-based inquiry'. One could argue this makes the same mistake as project-based learning—is the best method of teaching History the way professional academic historians do it? It's debatable whether expert historians learned vast stores of content knowledge through primary source analysis at age 12.

The History teaching chapter has a pre-service teacher planning an entire

unit from scratch by themselves. I'm not sure we could consider this best practice. An example from one lesson should suffice—in one lesson the teacher is required to provide all historical source material to students as hard copy, projected onto the wall, read aloud, and online. In this lesson, it is recommended to allow students to show what they know through verbal means, handwriting, typing, PowerPoint, a poster or collage. Getting new teachers to develop the tools to measure achievement across these varied formats would be a huge challenge.

The History chapter also had a list of 24 individual adjustments made for only five students in one class. The only reference I could find to workload was the bland statement, 'considered by some to be challenging for teachers'.

There appears to be no knowledge of developmental rubrics. Developmental rubric writing is about objective written descriptions of observations, but the one discussion about rubrics in this book makes the opposite claim, advocating for qualifiers such as 'cohesive', 'incisive' and 'excellent'. Any teacher who has tried to mark using a rubric with these vague, ambiguous terms will know they are confusing and don't provide advice to learners about where to go next.

Scattered throughout are a number of inclusive design approaches that we know are successful (e.g. attention to fonts, visuals, white space, spacing, and using a more representative sample of people in assignment examples). It's a cliché to say it, but what's right in this book isn't new, and what's new isn't right.

If inclusive assessment is your passion, I have no doubt you'll find something to pique your interest, but as a guide for new teachers, it's slightly impractical.