

Can and should assessment nurture an orientation to society and social justice?

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Understanding Knowledge, Curriculum and Student Agency (3.3)

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Society

Students' relationship between self and others

Long
Che

Five groups for data analysis and writing

Study Practices, Personal Projects, **Society**, Knowledge,
Curriculum



Social Justice: a critical theory perspective

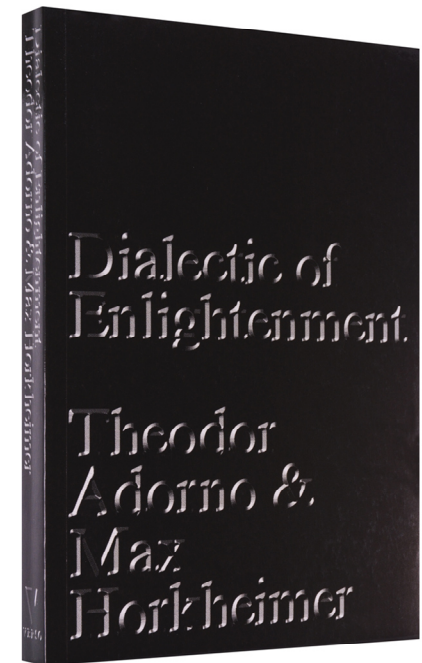
Social Justice and Critical Theory

Adorno & Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947)

Domination of nature – domination of human beings

In an objectified world, human relations do not escape objectification (Jay 1996)

Intersubjective self-actualization (Honneth 2004)



Social Justice & Critical Theory

“What is just, is that which allows the individual member of our society to realize his or her own life objectives in cooperation with others, and with the greatest possible autonomy”

(Honneth 2010, p. 13)

Mutuality of recognition

- Intimate relationships
- Legal relationships
- Esteem relationships

Knowledge, skills or dispositions that contribute to greater social wellbeing, and are recognized as such

A person who does not look beyond their own wellbeing and consider broader social wellbeing is unable to realise their own individual wellbeing.

Nancy Fraser, 2003, on Critical Theory

“peculiar dialectic of
immanence and transcendence”

“one foot in society and one
looking beyond”

affirmative and transformative
change



Martin Jay, 1996, on Frankfurt School

Purpose increasingly to think the unthinkable



Society assessment analysis

Assessment in STEM

Building blocks – foundational concepts and principles

Regular assessment first years

Building to project based in later years



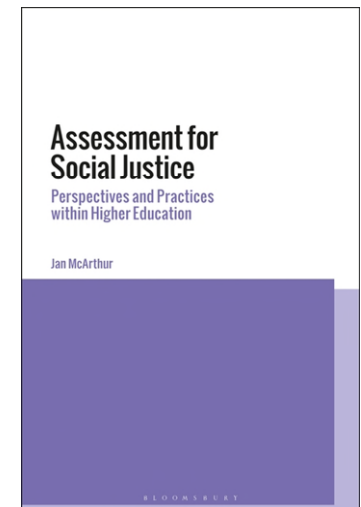
Assessment for Social Justice

(McArthur, 2016, 2018)

Not just about “fairness” or procedures

Not about injustice out there in society

Holistic sense of social justice – reflecting this connection between individual and social wellbeing.

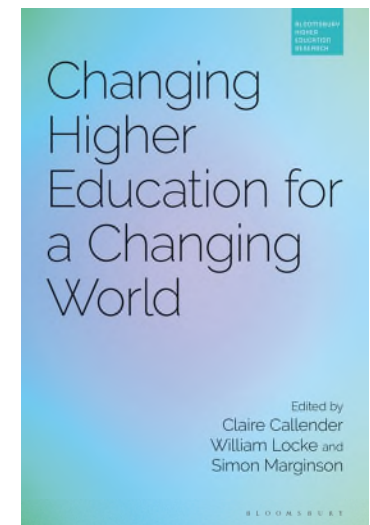


Chapter in CGHE book

Almost a pilot- first year UK data

Spectrum of different ways students relate assessment, and their achievement, to others

Mark: Learning: Application: Application in the Profession: Application for Social Good



Orientation to Self:

eg. Assessment helps me to learn

Orientation to Discipline/Profession:

eg. Assessment prepares me for working in the profession

Orientation to Society:

eg. Assessment is preparing me to make the world a better place

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews with students, supported by a piece of assessed work

First year: anything

Second year: identified by key contact as core to curriculum

Third year: larger project

Lecture recordings

Interviews key contacts and lecturers

Data Analysis

Transcripts Years 1-3 South Africa and England, 1-2
USA

Sections coded – “student experience”

Sub-coded “assessment”

We coded using our three categories – orientation when
discussing assessment

Those who had orientation to society – read full
transcripts – generated student stories (not USA)

Orientations to self: assessment

303/427

assessment and learning:

“when I was in high school, I used to think the purpose of an assessment was just to show the teachers that you can do it, look I’ll get this mark. Since I’ve come to university, I’ve seen that it’s about making the knowledge stronger in your head.”

(Rafia, Year 1, Chem. Eng. Europium University)

Orientations to discipline/profession: assessment

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Assessment tasks helped them to think or behave as a
Chemist/Chemical Engineer,

Vital preparation for going on to work in the profession.

Most changes over time: one fifth in first & second year,
double by third year

Influence of curriculum and assessment design – $\frac{3}{4}$ English
sites large 3rd year project

Orientations to society: assessment

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fleeting or tangential

Orientations to society: assessment

Rarely with purpose of assessment

Mainly first year

Same assignment – different student connections

Orientations to society: assessment

More instances in South Africa

Not linked *explicitly* to issues of race or social justice but to water scarcity

Chemical engineering at Samarium University - 8 of 21

Lecturer interview - deliberate intention to show students that a career in chemical engineering was not confined to big business alone.

Orientations to society: assessment

Institutions do build a social and environmental sensibility into the curriculum, and this is reflected in assessment tasks.

But students rarely make this explicit connection when discussing assessment, and do so even less often as their degree progresses.

Despite – strong association of assessment with learning.



Student Stories

Harrison Chemistry, Erbiun University

3rd year project – using aubergines to develop affordable medicines

Interest in drug design when making uni course choices

Evident in all three years

Harrison Chemistry, Erbium University Y2

“I think I have very strong opinions
about things and it can be
sometimes polarising.”

Harrison Chemistry, Erbium University Y3

“Even if all that I did with my life was contribute to a new haemorrhoid cream ... I think the fact that I’d potentially be making a new medicine that is going to benefit someone else in some way is nice.”

“If you’re preventing suffering with something that you can take with a glass of water, it’s pretty cool.”

“If I contribute to some kind of medicine that, even, is only used for a year, it’s not necessarily about my name being remembered but more the fact that I’ve contributed to society in some way and made my existence significant in some way.”

Harrison Chemistry, Erbium University Y3

What happened in Year 3?

Harrison came to programme with interest in drug design

Not nurtured by assessment design –but by his taking opportunities afforded by assessment

3rd year dissertation – gave strongest voice to this

Importance of assessment choice

Scarlet Chemistry, Soudum University Y1

Interest in medicine – chemistry – medicinal chemistry

Assessment link less strong – initially reflecting back on why an assignment mattered

“I want to do Medicinal Chemistry ... it could take up to 20 years just to determine whether the thing that you made will help someone ... but I think that at the end of the day, figuring something out that could help cancer, that could help HIV, would mean a lot to the whole world”

Scarlet Chemistry, Sodium University Y1

“if I want to go into research and if I want to change the world, if I want to change a problem in South Africa, I will have to study and get my degree and go further on”

“I have always wanted to help people and try and save lives ... I know that there is a lot of urban places in South Africa that don't have medical aid ... if a lot of professionals and specialists work together that there will be a solution to some of the problems that the whole world faces.”

Scarlet Chemistry, Soudum University Y2

Occasional mention of Medicinal Chemistry – in terms of lab work and not saving lives.

Career ambitions – working for a recycling company

Could be linked to social justice – but Scarlet no longer frames it as such

Chemistry is problem solving – but no longer any sense of real or urgent social problems

Scarlet Chemistry, Soudum University Y3

“I want to be able to walk out as a chemistry student that companies would like to hire.”

I want to change the world

Nina Chem Eng, Samarium University Y1

“What I enjoyed about this test was that it was looking at how engineers are making processes that help the population.”

“I don’t know if I will work in the chemical engineering industry in terms of chemical processing in plants, but I would like to do something that will help the greater South Africa in terms of putting back.”

Nina Chem Eng, Samarium University Y1

“one person presents for five minutes on chemical engineering in the news; I think that’s good because it is making you aware of what’s around you and what is happening. ... Also explaining the relevance of what we are learning and how it applies to the real world”

“I just feel that I have chosen this degree, which is very tough, and I want to use it to the people and my country as much as I can because there are so many other degrees that you could choose to do and sit back because you are just doing it for yourself. The world does need more chemical engineers.”

Nina Chem Eng, Samarium University Y2

“you need to be conscious of your environmental impact ...
Like the world around you. That’s why I also enjoy it, because
I feel like it’s very topical to what’s happening in the world.

Nina Chem Eng, Samarium University Y3

“Just the fact that we are engineers and we are finding solutions to problems that are happening every day in the world.”

“I hope to be helping people and that I can make an impact with what I’ve learnt.”

Harrison – begins and continues with social orientation: allowed to flourish through assessment in third year – but only due to procedural accident

Scarlet – starts with very strong social orientation, though only tangentially linked to assessment. Appears to lose this along the way.

Nina – consistent and strong social orientation. Very much nurtured by the course framework and ethos. Programme reinforcing rather than transformative



Scarcity of social orientation to assessment tasks

Why should assessment involve a social orientation?

Assessment cannot do everything

This is not the role of assessment

Certification means this is unreasonable to expect

Assessment shapes how and what students learn

Cannot disarticulate knowledge from its social context

Traditional assessment works against mutual recognition in its broadest sense

Transformative change – social justice – is very difficult

Why is a socially-relevant assignment not enough?

Just like trickle down economics – social orientation won't just occur because academics believe it should

Clear for academics, but less so for students shaped by competitive assessment systems

Essential is the student recognition of the social relevance of their work

Should we expect change during a degree?

Hierarchical nature of knowledge in chem/eng

Importance of solid building blocks

There is no single point at which it becomes appropriate to add a social orientation

Boud et al (2018) – evaluative judgement

Extend this to evaluative judgement of social contribution: this comes from the students

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