

# Higher Education for Good

Teaching and Learning Futures



Edited by  
Laura Czerniewicz and Catherine Cronin



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## 23. The only way is ethics: A dialogue of assessment and social good

*Tim Fawns and Juuso Nieminen,  
but not necessarily in that order<sup>1</sup>*

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Assessment is so entangled with higher education that educators rarely ask fundamental questions about it. As students enter university, they not only attend lectures, engage with academic knowledge, and conduct group work, but are measured and assessed against academic standards. Similarly, teachers are measured through performance and achievement metrics that characterise the academic work in the “measured university” (Peseta et al., 2017). While assessment research has noted its potential for learning and sustainability (Boud, 2000; Carless, 2007; Hounsell et al., 2007), less attention has been given to questions of ethics, such as: what is *assessment for good* in the current higher education landscape?

We are two scholars of assessment and education from different fields, brought together by a sense of urgency to question and reshape assessment cultures. Assessment does not just “drive learning”, as is often said. It also shapes students’ orientations towards future learning, beyond any course, and beyond graduation. It shapes what is valued by students, teachers, and institutions — the kinds of knowledge and identity that hold legitimate status in disciplines and communities. It shapes power and trust relationships between junior and senior members of organisations, between those with different roles, between educational institutions and wider society.

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1 Order of authorship is just one more example of the pervasive rank ordering of people that we argue against in our chapter.

Our different backgrounds of medical (Tim) and mathematics (Juuso) education form a basis for challenging each other about how assessment could be developed towards greater contribution to societal good. In both fields, disciplinary assessment cultures are steeped in traditions of individualism (Bleakley, Bligh & Browne, 2011; Nieminen & Atjonen, 2021). In medical education, strict accreditation of practitioners by professional bodies and academic structures is aligned with closely specified learning outcomes and tightly regimented methods of testing individual competence (Hodges, 2013). Yet, medical education also values authenticity, interdisciplinary teamwork, and immersion in complex clinical settings (Bleakley, 2010; Fawns et al., 2021; Hodges, 2013). Therefore, medical education is caught between abstract and standardised assessment, and structured observation of messy, situated practice (Rethans et al., 2002). Like medical education, post-secondary mathematics education has been characterised as exam driven (Iannone & Simpson, 2021), but this only reflects part of the reality. The authentic and messy forms of learning in this context, and the unpredictable outcomes that might follow, have received little interest in mathematics assessment research (Nieminen & Lahdenperä, 2021). Nonetheless, they have important implications for the assessment process and how it informs learning.

Although medical education is already focused on preparing future practitioners to contribute to social good (e.g. through healing others) in ethically sound ways, Tim's perspective brings an opportunity to reflect on broader considerations of "good-ness". Juuso's experience provides opportunities to rethink the role of assessment in test-driven STEM environments towards a more collective, societal benefit.

## The rationale of our chapter

Assessment is an important and complex topic for research. It is disappointing that with some important exceptions (Govaerts & van der Vleuten, 2013; Henning et al., 2022; Hodges, 2013; McArthur, 2016; Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020; Nieminen, 2022), it is often insufficiently theorised, narrowly conceived, and focused on short-term, individual outcomes, technical methods, and objectivity in the form of validity, reliability, psychometrics and quantified measurement

(Biesta, 2009). We aim to build on more socially oriented studies that have supplemented and challenged the “measurement paradigm” by framing assessment as a social practice (McArthur, 2022), to exploring broader ethics of assessment, widening the focus beyond specific courses to social and future-oriented concerns.

We present an edited dialogue that explores how ethics are tightly interwoven into all assessments, whether implicitly or explicitly. Bringing the theme of the book into the field of assessment, we ask: how could we define “assessment for good”? What might this look like in practice? Our purpose is not to offer practical solutions, but to map out fruitful avenues for future exploration. Thus, we see our dialogue as part of a much broader conversation with multiple voices beyond our own.

We have organised our dialogue according to three key themes that formulate our idea of assessment for good as intrinsically communal, reflexive, and transformative.

## Theme I: Communal

The first theme concerns how assessment for good cannot rely solely on the assessment of individual students. We discuss how assessment steers higher education toward individualistic values instead of communal ones.

### Assessment and the communal purpose of Higher Education

**Tim:** Given global problems such as climate change, war, and poverty, it no longer seems tenable to avoid connecting what we do in education to ideas of societal good. A lot of “good” is needed, quite urgently, at a global level. Nobody is going to sort out everything for us, we need to work collectively to contribute in whatever ways we can. Higher education seems like an important place to try to foster good and, within that, assessment is important because it shapes practices and orientations to learning. It shapes how we teach, how students perceive their subjects and disciplines, and what is valued.

**Juuso:** Assessment is a huge factor in education that causes barriers for producing social good, by focusing on individual students at the expense of collective endeavours. Educators and institutions need to consider the communal purposes of higher education, and how assessment either reflects those purposes or contradicts them. Currently, assessment in post-secondary mathematics and medical education is primarily focused on certifying individual students' skills and knowledge. This is an important but insufficient main purpose for something as important as assessment. Universities are significant actors in solving huge global problems — what is the role of assessment practice and research here? We need ways of helping students and educators realise that assessment is about more than individual skills certification: that it also prepares students to tackle the issues of today and the future. This work is never done only by individuals, but also by communities, and for the purposes of those communities. Assessment tasks that connect with real world issues can meaningfully provide *good* for communities in higher education and beyond (McArthur, 2022).

**Tim:** I have become increasingly frustrated by our emphasis on *heroic individualism* (Bleakley, 2010) which is deeply embedded in assessment cultures and practices, and in society, more generally. We base regimes of reward and recognition around individuals. But if we look at the COVID-19 pandemic, war, political unrest, climate change, poverty — these are collective problems that involve people working as communities. For these challenges, we need to find ways to value the combined efforts of people; that type of valuing is alien to systems of assessment predicated on individual achievement and contribution, and a culture of compliance over improvement (Ewell, 2009; Nieminen & Atjonen, 2022). Instead, higher education tends to emphasise ideas of heroic individuals who are very efficient and effective learners, assuming that their learning can be optimised and tested on an individual basis and that individuals are in competition. This implies assessment instruments can be fine-tuned to measure learning, as if each individual's thinking and contribution is independent of other people, and the cultures in which education and practice take place (Montenegro and Jankowski, 2017).

## What about group assessment? Toward communal epistemologies

**Juuso:** It's fascinating how deeply individualistic assessment research is, even when it focuses on peer and group assessment. Both assessment research and practice predominantly deal with how to improve individual student outcomes. It's rarely about ideas such as "communal knowledge" or "shared cognition". After all, higher education provides grades and certificates for individual students, not for groups!

**Tim:** And if assessment research is based on individualism, the evidence base is likely to keep pinning us back to individualistic practices, thereby reinforcing the current system?

**Juuso:** Exactly! When knowing is considered an individual practice, and not a communal one. For example, the purpose of peer assessment might be seen as boosting the learning of individuals. This approach is limited if you think about the broader picture of what education is for: providing tools for both individuals and communities to *use* for various social purposes. While the main purpose of higher education is currently shifting towards economic rationales, another purpose of universities in providing *good* for societies is still mandated in the legislation of many countries (Yang, 2022). Assessment plays a role here by focusing on the individual rather than the social and the political. For example, educators and educational policymakers tend to demonstrate a widely accepted belief that mathematical skills reside in individuals. It is then possible to analyse, measure and track these skills in individualistic ways, as we often do. Mathematics skills are widely measured in testing regimes in most developed countries! It now seems radical to think about mathematical knowledge residing in groups and communities, or about how that knowledge might be wielded by groups of people. However, mathematical knowledge surely resides in cultures, and is passed from one generation to another. Why else would we see it as important to be taught in schools around the world? It is often stated that assessing groups is tricky, but I think this is mainly because we only approach this idea through the individualistic understanding of (mathematical) knowledge (Nieminen & Lahdenperä, 2021).

**Tim:** We might talk about epistemology here: what is considered knowledge, and how could that knowledge be learned? At the moment, when it comes to assessment in higher education, the dominant epistemology is that people only think or know as individuals. After all, we do not offer degrees or grades for groups or communities. This view of knowledge is quite limiting. For example, it makes it difficult to operationalise summative group assessment. You cannot extract an individual's contribution to group work as if it's independent of everything else. Every group work situation is, in a way, a complex system, with different individuals, their features and characteristics, working in a specific time and context — it can never be repeated! And, of course, neither individuals nor groups operate in isolation. There is an important difference between a view of humans as individual agents that are networked together, and a view of learning as beyond a given person or their "immediate network" to the "rich, complex, and meaningful ways that we belong to and contribute to multiple interlocking and distributed cultures" (Dron & Anderson 2022, p. 12). For me, this latter conception doesn't make epistemological sense alongside the allocation of numerical grades for individual contribution.

### Authentic assessment: one answer to the call for communality?

**Juuso:** I really enjoyed Jan McArthur's (2022) article about authentic assessment which addresses the issue of authenticity in relation to whether we authentically contribute to society. There's a lot of potential there to rethink what we mean by assessment. Perhaps the idea of "authentic assessment" can help us to break the individualistic epistemic boundaries of assessment?

**Tim:** Jan argues for a shift from focusing on what tasks students are asked to do, to why those tasks matter. It is not just important that students do well in assessment and know how to apply their knowledge, but also that they understand the social value and implications of their work. This must go beyond subject-related knowledge and specific disciplinary competencies to the ways in which their learning can enrich the common good. Authenticity should be transformative. For McArthur,



this social world of huge, urgent, global challenges is the “real world” to which authenticity should be connected. This offers an alternative to the common focus on validity and reliability. The common wisdom is that an exam must be reliable, in the sense that it must produce the same type of results across multiple contexts and trials. Validity is often seen as closely related: an assessment is only valid if it’s reliable. This, again, is predicated on an individualistic conception of “objective” knowledge and performance (Govaerts & van der Vleuten, 2013), which closes down possibilities for collective assessment.

**Juuso:** This makes me think of Brown and Harris’ (2016) study in which they talked about “intuitive test theories” as they discussed the assessment conceptions of non-professionals such as parents. I think that in higher education, we often draw on intuitive test theories as we design assessment. Assessment is rarely standardised or psychometrically solid, but we still conceptualise it through ideas of validity and reliability. Unfortunately, we might then forget what matters the most in assessment — not technical matters, but ethics and good education (Biesta, 2009). Issues of accessibility and social exclusion come to my mind when I think about what “intuitive test theories” produce in practice. For example, if we only understand fairness and equity in assessment through test theories, we might end up excluding and discriminating against students. We have to be careful that those concepts don’t get in the way of something more meaningful. Do we actually value the diversity students bring to assessment? By answering such questions, we can reconsider how assessment might contribute to social good, not only for the students themselves, but for broader communities. To me, this makes “authentic assessment” an important aspect of assessment for good.

## Theme 2: Reflexivity

Assessment for good requires constant consideration of social consequences that is *reflexive* and not just *reflective*. Whereas reflection often involves turning our gaze inward, reflexivity, for us, is outward facing, beyond individual humanism and individual development, toward the collective world (Bleakley, 1999). As Bleakley argues, this holistic view is an important ingredient for ethical and ecological

sensitivity to the effects of what we do. It helps us go beyond immediate preoccupations with ourselves and our micro-level pressures, to look at a wider picture of what matters. Such reflexivity may be necessary for situating the learning and performance of individuals within collective endeavours.

### Assessment as a way to divide populations

**Tim:** If we're honest, I think, our assessment systems are largely driven by a desire to label people in relation to ability.

**Juuso:** Absolutely. Testing systems around the world categorise children in terms of mathematical abilities, based on a cultural understanding of "ability" that shapes what we see as intelligent and productive. Mathematical abilities are seen as something that all modern citizens need in employment, and for participation in society as consumers. For example, people recognise that it's important for children in primary schools to learn about history, but history is not tested internationally in almost every single country of the world in the same way as is mathematics. Perhaps, this is partly because the relational aspects of history are widely acknowledged, whereas mathematics is seen as universal, as true and objective, and, thus, measurable. Education systems globally use mathematics assessment to divide children into different levels of society and jobs, according to their so-called "abilities".

**Tim:** This system gives the impression of providing clarity around what's right and wrong. It reduces people to single numbers that can be used to sort them into categories or trajectories, which is convenient from the viewpoint of accountability. History is a good example of how quickly things become complicated if we look below the surface. If there are multiple, alternative, possible histories — as there always are — then what is the right answer on an exam? Critical questions like this are inconvenient within our current assessment systems. They threaten the legitimacy of how we assess and, therefore, how we educate. It is both important and challenging to open up alternative possibilities for assessment and education when we're so entangled in closed and reductive systems.

**Juuso:** That's what's so fascinating about assessment! When I think about something seemingly simple, such as how to facilitate peer feedback in my classroom, it often leads to deep questions about epistemologies, preferred ways of educating, and being a modern citizen. This is particularly the case in higher education, where assessment helps students both to become productive parts of societies and to challenge and change societies!

**Tim:** It's interesting that exams are so prominent in primary and secondary school, and medical school. The argument is often made that exams are an efficient way of testing across a large range of domains. They capture a lot of subject content, and the results seem clear, though not necessarily meaningful for the learner or society. I suspect, though, that in both contexts, an important driver is also that education systems are set on categorising people in relation to each other. Relatedly, psychometrics as a way of measuring ability and assessment validity are prominent in medical education (Hodges, 2013). To me, this is really about a false reassurance that we can control outcomes in a messy, high stakes space. It also shows how higher education is not always a progressive space for critical appraisal. Some programmes can be constrained by links to professions and employment. For example, medical education programmes often set narrowly defined learning outcomes that conform to the requirements of accreditation bodies, but leave little room for exploration or attunement to situated or emergent social needs.

### Reflexivity over what is good, and for whom?

**Tim:** Lining students up in competition through reductive metrics, I think, limits the claims we can make about assessment contributing to broader social good, at least in medical education. Our assessments are, technically, for good: they're aimed at making safer practitioners, and helping patient care. However, standardised ways of assessment in medical schools are also exclusionary, predicated on idealised models of medical students. We favour risk-averse, normative approaches, and I don't think we've sufficiently unpacked the harms they do to marginalised individuals and communities, and to the greater whole by missing out on important, diverse contributions.

**Juuso:** We could also take a wider view and ask who higher education is for. Who are our students in the first place? Here in Finland, very few people are talking about wider access to medical education in relation to disability, for example. We have a particular, ableist ideal of medical students.

**Tim:** This illustrates an important distinction between intentions of doing good and the actuality of different kinds of good. Intentions are insufficient. We live in a complex world with complex systems, and to understand the implications of educational practices, we need to trace the entanglements of the different components (Fawns, 2022). We need to look at students' actual experiences and try to understand the ongoing implications. For example, how do assessment experiences relate to how students and graduates view the world and the practices they develop?

**Juuso:** It's not an easy job to trace those entanglements, especially if you consider the potential diversity of how they might play out for different students. However, I think that we — as educators and assessors — have a responsibility to try. This can't be put aside as too hard, and it is not enough to follow the latest guidance and theory. To do good through assessment, we need to keep learning about the implications of what we do, and how things are connected. "Good" is not a fixed characteristic. It requires persistence, and ongoing learning and work, not only from students but from teachers as well.

**Tim:** One problem is, I suspect, that "good" is also not binary. Technologies, assessment formats, standards — they are good from some angles and not good from others, and only ever good in some ways for some individuals. We need tools for analysing the different and complex ways in which things are, or could be, good.

### Good across different levels of education

**Juuso:** I believe that assessment for good is possible in higher education, perhaps more so than in lower levels of education, because there is more scope for interrogating and reshaping the focus on testing individual skills as part of a meritocratic system. There is more space to question myths of measurement and psychometrics. Do you think it may also be

important for assessment at lower levels of education to contribute to the fostering of community and a valuing of social good?

**Tim:** Yes, I do. One of my worries, at any level of education, is that we create a distinction between learning the basics early on (e.g. retention of content), and addressing more nuanced and sophisticated ways of knowing later. This means students need to change gears suddenly and radically, after having been enculturated into narrower forms of education. This is particularly pronounced in medicine, where individualised, competitive knowledge retention at undergraduate level is suddenly replaced by teamwork, caring, discretion, and complex ethical judgement at postgraduate level. Once we've taught students to value exams, individual testing, grades, and right and wrong answers, it's hard to dismantle that. Students have developed certain values and habits, and neglected others. I think we want to start early with fostering patterns of reflection and action that are motivated by the desire to do collective good.

**Juuso:** Here, we might have different disciplinary perspectives. Mathematics is assessed from the very early stages of education in most societies. Its disciplinary assessment culture is strong and spans multiple levels of education, although it looks very different across those levels. In higher education, mathematics assessment is rarely as high stakes as it is at school. But when it comes to assessment practices, it's quite similar: test-driven (Iannone & Simpson, 2021). Students develop within cultures of testing. It must be quite different from medical education, because when medical students enter higher education, they wouldn't have a similar kind of assessment history, right?

**Tim:** Yes and no. Medical students have usually undergone traditional testing at school in maths, language and science. So, assessment in medical education is not independent of those contexts. And while medical education might be new to undergraduate medical students, those old ways of learning and being assessed are already embedded and embodied, which influences how they understand their new discipline. Where assessment in medical education resembles that mathematics testing culture you mentioned, I suspect it reinforces those ideas of right and wrong answers, individual ability, and so on.

## Questioning and tweaking systems

**Juuso:** Earlier, you mentioned the need for confronting individualistic epistemologies. But this is tricky, as it requires us to think deeply about the system. We cannot simply provide a checklist for teachers to conduct assessment for good: “three easy steps toward assessment for good!” But we can certainly offer prompts for reflexivity, as we are trying to do with this chapter.

**Tim:** In some ways, medical education is already engaging with collective ideas, but these sit alongside a deeply entrenched, individualised system. Many teachers recognise the value of group work for example, but, pragmatically, they need to be able to transform collective work into individual marks. It is difficult to reconcile our assessment systems with the idea that being good at group work is different from being a good individual within a group. Yet, when graduates are employed, they become members of teams that are not just the sum of the individual parts, they are amalgams of people, processes and practices.

**Juuso:** Another challenge is that we can’t just change assessment without changing teaching and the curriculum. On the other hand, many educators try to contribute to social good through their teaching and curriculum development, but without challenging assessment. Perhaps that’s where formative assessment comes in?

**Tim:** For me, there’s an important distinction between formative assessment that directly prepares students for summative assessment, e.g. practice exams, and that which compensates for gaps in summative assessment. This latter category includes things that teachers value but can’t easily measure, e.g. complex practice, group, peer and self-assessment. These kinds of formative assessment might have forms and templates, but they often don’t have grades. This frees them up to be more creative, which seems like more fertile ground for assessment for good.

**Juuso:** In the end, though, the division between assessment that leads to grades, and assessment that does not, is often quite clear for students and educators alike. This is why I think it is important for higher education to start certifying the “good” that assessment

promotes. Perhaps digital badges or portfolios could be used to embed, say, authentic assessment projects in the curriculum? We need to start recognising the work teachers and assessors do towards social good. For example, while training mathematics teachers, I've seen many who are deeply interested in social justice and want to teach students to use mathematical knowledge for building better societies. Yet, teachers often struggle to connect these ideas to assessment. Why would they not, as testing systems around them do not exactly value "social good"? So, we might need concrete, tangible ways to value the "assessment for good" work of teachers in higher education and beyond.

**Tim:** Interesting idea. But could this valuing process avoid those same trivialising and individualising forces that we have discussed in relation to the assessment of students?

### Theme 3: Transformation

To do good through assessment, reflexivity is not enough. Transformative practices are needed to move assessment closer to good in practice. Sustainable assessment change is never simple: we cannot simply rebuild the system while being entangled in it. Nor can we be content to say it is too hard. In this final theme, we search for a constructive message to tie up our dialogue.

The potential of higher education for transforming assessment

**Tim:** Reflexivity is a necessary but insufficient ingredient for assessment for good. Whether you are a clinician in a hospital or a mathematics teacher at university, you cannot contribute to social good in a meaningful way without both integrating into *and* shaping the systems that you are part of. Perhaps, we can imagine a future in which assessment practices modify the system rather than just complementing it or trying to co-exist with it!

**Juuso:** Higher education systems around the world have traditionally been seen as sites where students not only learn a predetermined set of skills, but also *become* someone new in the prevailing society

(Yang, 2022). These processes cannot be captured through traditional assessment practices. Might assessment projects be directed toward more sustainable higher education policies, perhaps by mobilising students and educators?

**Tim:** That's interesting. This might be another reason to revisit and expand our thinking about earlier ideas such as "sustainable assessment" and "authentic assessment". Sustainability, for example, seems like an important social value within higher education for good? For this, we need students to be involved in co-designing assessments and maybe even policy reform if we think this is where the need for transformation towards good is required. That way, we are less likely to impose our own *good* ideas on our students. We could collaborate with them to develop a more communal and sustainable conception of assessment for good. After all, we want systemic transformation rather than short-lived changes.

**Juuso:** The key issue with these earlier concepts is that they see context as something that surrounds assessment design. I don't think it is possible to separate assessment "practices" from their "context". This is the issue with technical approaches to assessment: we try to *implement* practices, such as formative assessment, just like we implement medical treatments for patients. Assessment is always partly about transforming the context, since educational practices are entangled with their environment. So, let us transform assessment and grading policies! It is easy to say that a cool, formative assessment practice from Finland cannot be used in the test-driven context of Hong Kong (having taught in both contexts). Less attention has been given to how certain assessment practices might transform their contexts and create more fruitful environments for sustainable learning.

Perhaps even one experience of assessment for good?

**Juuso:** I'd go so far as to say that every higher education student requires at least one experience of assessment for good — and preferably more than that! Does higher education meet its purpose if this promise cannot be fulfilled?



**Tim:** But is that how assessment for good works—“good” as a characteristic of a particular assessment? I am reminded of a quote in a recent paper by Coccia and Veen (2022) on *care* in healthcare education:

If health care education is a cake, care is not just one of its ingredients, but the laws of chemistry that guide the baking process. It permeates everything else that happens there; it is essential rather than peripheral, and therefore a fundamental concept. (p. 342)

For me, goodness is not so much a quality, or characteristic, or feature, but an ethic that permeates not only our designs and practices, but the programmes and systems around them. It needs to be embedded at a deeper level in our cultures of assessment.

**Juuso:** Well said. I agree that good cannot simply be a characteristic of an assessment practice. However, students need *explicit* experiences of assessment for good. Perhaps, while we cannot transform our assessment contexts completely, assessment for good is all about creating “bolt-holes and breathing spaces” (Webb, 2018, p. 96) for students to really focus on what is important. Amidst the neoliberal ideologies that frame higher education—competition, individualism, and performativity—perhaps, once in a while, we could provide experiences of assessment for good. These experiences of using assessment for the purposes of broader communities might be something that students remember years later.

**Tim:** That sounds positive, but we should also keep in mind that “goodness” might be contextual. We have terms like “the greater good” which imply a sort of abstract goodness, but what is good for some can be bad for others. What’s good in an overall sense can be bad for particular elements. An example in medical education is the normative nature of assessment, where we push students towards an idealised state to meet accreditation requirements, competencies, and standards. In theory, at least, this creates a safety net for future practice, but it marginalises those with different ways of learning, performing, and being (see, for example, Valentine et al., 2020 on fairness; and Zaidi et al., 2021 on racism). I wonder how much good we can do without also challenging some of these oppressive and discriminatory policies and systems?

## The role of technology in transforming assessment for good

**Tim:** We sometimes think of digital education as distinct from “non-digital” education (Fawns, 2019). But all education, and all assessment, involves multiple technologies including computers, pens, paper, chairs, desks, rubrics, templates, etc. And technology — digital or otherwise — does make a difference, but that difference is entangled in the methods, purposes, values, and context of the assessment (Fawns, 2022). For example, in remote, online proctoring of a multiple choice question exam, the questions might be the same as a paper exam, but the experience is very different. The environment is different — learners might do the exam in their bedroom, and their agency is more heavily constrained (e.g. they must keep their eyes always focused on a screen in front of them). They are recorded, and their data is held by a third party commercial company that becomes part of the educational relationship (Fawns & Schaepekens, 2022). This is an extreme example of technology in assessment, but it raises questions about whether we really understand the contribution of technology to assessment and issues of ethics and social justice?

**Juuso:** The picture gets even more complex as we think about how digital technology might feed on individualisation, reductive quantification of complex learning, atomisation of knowledge via behaviourist principles, and so forth. And then I wonder: can digital technology also challenge the individualistic culture of assessment?

**Tim:** That’s a very good question. Technology can never do this by itself, but it can be part of an approach. For example, wikis, social media platforms, and blogs all create design possibilities for opening up assessment beyond the course, or for creating and collaborating on work that can be shared with wider communities (e.g. Durand, 2016; Kohnke et al., 2021; Tay & Allen, 2011). An exam captures just a momentary snapshot, but these technologies create possibilities for broadening assessment out over time and space, and across social groupings. This may be messier, but it allows different options for going beyond testing, to generating new knowledge.

## Conclusion

While an aim of higher education is to produce public good for societies, in-depth analyses of such “good” in assessment are lacking. Through this dialogue, we have contributed to a conversation about the ethics of assessment, and the various forms of social good it might produce. We have shared our “thinking out loud” and can offer no clear definitions, let alone solutions. Our tentative ideas and tensions around assessment for good cannot be resolved easily, and certainly not by the two of us on our own. More and diverse voices are needed to negotiate what it means to do “good” through assessment. However, we can offer some guiding thoughts.

For us, assessment for good means social, not just individual good. Whether in mathematics or medicine, to understand assessment in these terms seems, to us, to require an epistemological shift from the measurement of individual competencies and abilities against known standards, to collective and *communal* ways of knowing. We associate this with a shift in focus, from accrediting pre-specified outcomes to embracing uncertainty and complexity, such that we are better prepared, collectively, to adapt to, and shape, our uncertain futures. This is no simple feat: it means reframing fundamental principles of good assessment from its traditional basis on individual learning and achievement to societal values. All of this requires ongoing *reflexivity* around the social consequences of assessment practices, our own roles within them, and the relations between people, assessment practices, institutions, and wider society. Yet, reflexivity is not enough. We also need active, collective *transformation*, while recognising that earlier forms of education will also be critical to more deeply and sustainably embedding good habits and patterns.

Future work that delves deeper into definitions of “good” in assessment should, we think, challenge the usual idea of “social justice work” as a separate approach that might add something to assessment. Instead, we should place “good” in the centre of assessment. We particularly welcome wide definitions of good that consider something greater than a course, an individual student, or a closed system, instead connecting assessment to its social, cultural, and political contexts. As we have discussed, conversations about assessment for good take different

shapes in different disciplines within higher education. There are also different kinds of public good to consider such as moral, health-related, or cultural good. Assessment is never simply “good” or “bad” but operates within complex and situational systems of ethics. Assessment always reflects what is seen as valuable and desirable in higher education (see Coccia & Veen, 2022, for a similar argument about care in healthcare). Furthermore, broader, societal conceptualisations might help us to unpack whether good would only be available to a minority of the population. Access to higher education is not equitable (Czerniewicz & Carvalho, 2022), and goodness should not be fostered according to privilege, or distributed via some flawed ideal of meritocracy.

There may be some benefit to introducing modest changes such as factoring goodness into the design of discrete assessments or integrating technologies that help us to expand assessment practices through creative, collaborative, iterative, and dialogic approaches that extend over longer periods of time. However, we think that more meaningful change will require threading goodness through programmes, policies, cultures, and systems of assessment. For this, we need to question and rethink some fundamental aspects of our assessment systems and, therefore, of higher education itself. In doing so, we must take care since intentions can be different from outcomes, and what can be good for some can be bad for others. A good starting point is to see all assessment as a social, reflexive, ethical, and transformative practice, for which we are all responsible.

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