

Book Review

Lorena Basso, Magdalena Cardoner, Paula De Bonis, Mariana Ferrarelli, Stefanía Martínez León and Pedro Ravela. *Aprender en Comunidad: Prácticas Colaborativas para Transformar la Evaluación (Learning in Community: Collaborative Practices to transform Assessment)*, Montevideo: Grupo Magro Editores, 2023. 191 pp \$U1,080. ISBN 9789915948058.

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Aprender en Comunidad: Prácticas Colaborativas para Transformar la Evaluación (Learning in Community: Collaborative Practices to transform Assessment) is the joint creation of Argentinian and Uruguayan practitioners. As much of the current discourse in comparative and international higher education is on the Global North, this book expands the discussion to territories historically excluded from the conversation. The book has a prologue by a university lecturer and researcher and is structured in seven chapters, which go from telling about the constitution of the work team, through the statement of their common goal: the design of improved course planning with authentic assessment tasks, to the reflection on the implementation of such proposals, as well as on the experiential knowledge gained from the collaborative work within the community of learning. The book's purpose is then to describe and reflect upon those proposals with the intention of inspiring similar collaborative assessment practices. While the book is written in Spanish, the intended audience is any teacher, teacher trainer/trainee, college/university educator or tertiary level student who wants to read about varied innovative assessment experiences, carried out mainly at higher education (HE) institutions, and the synergy that learning from and with other colleagues harnesses.

In Chapter One (pp. 13-25), *Comunidad de Aprendizaje: Relato de nuestra experiencia de trabajo* (Community of Learning: Account of our work experience), the authors tell the readership how the community of learning gathered. Most of the authors of the book had participated in a previous collective project that had sprung from an instance of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) on Authentic Assessment, led by two members of the current team, Ravela and Cardoner. Others soon followed. They also discuss the way in which they supported each other and kept the teamwork going by means of respecting a self-directed agenda that organized their synchronous meetings and asynchronous activities, such as writing or reading and giving feedback to their colleagues' written pieces. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) refer to this form of *Collaborative Professionalism* as one of the most successful ones because of its methodical and continuous quality -instead of having sporadic meetings- and its basis on positive bonds of trust (p. xv). The educators that make up this learning community elaborated different authentic assessment proposals, meaning those which comply with the following features enumerated by Wiggins (1989): show the students' progress, need collaboration with others,

involve situated intellectual challenges, resemble real life problems, require an audience, encompass both assessing and self-assessing several variables not just giving/getting a single grade, and are enabling, transdisciplinary, fairer, equitable and more humane than traditional tests (pp. 711-712). These proposals were thought for and enacted in diverse educational contexts, four for higher education and one for secondary school, and were developed in depth in each chapter.

In Chapter Two (pp. 27-57), *La evaluación (al cubo): Sobre la coherencia entre lo que decimos de la evaluación y cómo evaluamos, en un espacio curricular denominado “evaluación”* (The cube of Assessment: On the coherence between what we say about assessment and how we assess, in a subject called “Assessment”), Magdalena Cardoner describes the planning and implementation of her assessment practices in the subject *Evaluación II* (Assessment II) at the teachers’ training college for kindergarten and Primary School from Universidad Católica Argentina (UCA), which is inscribed in an approach named *Aprendizaje Inclusivo y Efectivo* (Inclusive and Effective Learning). She meant assessment to be coherent and organic by having her teacher-trainees go deeper into the knowledge and competences on assessment built in *Evaluación I* (Assessment I) and integrating *what* they discuss about assessment theory, for example, differences between formative and summative assessment, into *how* students are actually assessed. This was done going through assessment tasks that are hand in hand with the class bibliography seen, and both peer and self-assessment situations where the theory sheds light on their own assessment histories prior to this course and instances exposed to within it. The course ended with an authentic assessment activity, an *Encuentro de Mejora Institucional* (EMI), simulating an in-service CPD institutional meeting.

In Chapter Three (pp. 59-89), *¿Cómo evaluar en la virtualidad? Relato de una experiencia en el ámbito Universitario* (How to assess in a distance education scenario? An account of an experience in the university context), Paula De Bonis reports on her assessment practices at faculty of Economics from UCA in the years 2020 and 2021 in the midst of Covid-19 pandemic. She intended to maintain the same precision and academic level as those held in face-to-face education before the emergency lockdown. The students in *Administración Avanzada* (Advanced Administration) were asked to carry out some fieldwork, i.e., to interview managers and other workers from an existing company of their choice virtually, so as to have contact with corporate reality. The information collected in their interviews had to be transcribed in critical reports that were finally shared in an event in which the students roleplayed being company consultants who provided, not only a description of the companies but also an informed kind of feedback with improvement suggestions based on the analysis of the situation and the theoretical baggage acquired along the learning process. Among the assessment tools De Bonis employed we can highlight: the use of analytic rubrics, shared from the beginning of the course for students to resort to as a guide preliminary to their fieldwork, and after the completion of the written reports and oral presentations as opportunities for self-assessment on individual and group work, paying attention to aspects such as organization, commitment, participation, creativity and performance.

In Chapter Four (pp. 91-106), *Repensando la clase: Propuestas auténticas en el nivel superior* (Rethinking the lesson: Authentic proposals in higher education), Lorena Basso and Mariana Ferrarelli delve into their assessment venture within the subject *Psicología del Aprendizaje II* (Learning Psychology II), corresponding to the third year of *Tecnicatura Superior en Psicopedagogía* (Psychopedagogy College) at a higher education center in the province of Buenos Aires. The educators specified two purposes behind their renewed assessment practices: making lessons more meaningful and building a bridge between the theoretical knowledge developed by the students and their future professional job. Basso and Ferrarelli subverted a previous limited assessment view that involved the reading and discussion of texts on theory and then the search for examples from reality, by beginning with real problematic situations whose complexity requires resorting to bibliography to be solved. The tertiary-level students were to write an article that would be published in the institution’s mural. The article had to address a school problem seen in the light of the authors that the educators contemplated in the course syllabus and others that they themselves included to enrich the analysis and the possible solution. Apart from publishing the articles in the institutional context, the students were asked to share them orally in a formal conversation with students from second year through the teleconference platform *Meet*. The future psychopedagogists self-assessed their knowledge construction process as well as their performance in the technologically-mediated panel, which was deeply valued by them.

In Chapter Five (pp. 107-144), *Investigación educativa aplicada a la gestión de instituciones educativas* (Educational research applied to the management of educational institutions), Pedro Ravela explains the assessment

changes he implemented in a six-month subject from the first half of the second year in a postgraduate course for in-service school headmasters and headmistresses in Uruguay. His authentic assessment task consisted of having the heads develop a concrete improvement plan for each institution, involving the recognition of a current problem, the elaboration of questions to be answered via gathering and analyzing empirical evidence. He reflects that, even though the changes introduced contributed to the subject significantly, the activity continues being too “ambitious” as the course participants do not begin from the same starting line. Consequently, different finishing points should be acknowledged.

In Chapter Six (pp. 145-176), *De los boletines a los informes: Una mirada institucional a los procesos de evaluación en el nivel medio* (From grading to writing personalized feedback: Institutional assessment processes in secondary education), Stefania Martínez León, a pedagogical advisor, expounds the modifications made in the tool used for communicating parents the assessment results their children obtained along the year in a secondary school in the city of Buenos Aires. She tells how the tool evolved from being a report card with grades from one (the lowest grade) to ten (the highest one) to being a rubric with thorough descriptors and room for personalized feedback. The focus was placed on trying to strike a balance between objectivity and subjectivity in the assessment carried out and valuing both final results and effort involved in the learning process, making it all a more humanizing practice. According to Martínez, future improvements to be taken into consideration entail adaptations for the different subjects and student rubric ownership for increased learner autonomy.

In Chapter Seven (pp. 177-191), *Lo que aprendimos en esta experiencia: De cuando el todo es más que la suma de las partes* (What we learned in this experience: On when the whole is much more than the sum of its parts), the authors provide their personal insight on the takeaways both from the community exchanges and the actual implementation of their varied projects. Cardoner makes emphasis on the need for coherence between discourse and action. De Bonis underlines the richness of the external view of the learning community in the interpretation of the variety of educational scenarios and assessment challenges. Basso foregrounds the potential of conversation as a joint action in meaning making, therefore, in learning and teaching. Ferrarelli remarks on the collaboration, support, empathy, warmth and respectful feedback shared within the community of learning. Ravela puts the stress on the horizontal relationships established among his colleagues, as they all made conscientious suggestions and reading recommendations. Martínez León agreed with Ferrarelli in the fact that the community of learning was a safe space to share doubts and ignorance on certain matters since the colleagues weaved a supportive net that helped each and every one grow at a professional and personal level.

The book is solid and inviting. Diversity is its strength; diversity in the voices gathered, in the contextual scenarios and in the teaching and assessment modalities. The polyphony reached through the knitting of the authors’ thoughts and those of their students, providing insight on the assessment proposals, enrich the analysis of such practices and the design of future ones. The variety of geographical and institutional settings adds substance to the written production, given the facts that the professionals involved in this transnational project were from Argentina and Uruguay and the proposals were materialized at secondary school, at a teachers’ training college, at a psychopedagogy college and in two university courses: Economy and Administration of educational institutions. The different modalities depicted, wholly virtual, hybrid and face-to-face, make it possible for other colleagues to take or adapt what they might find useful for their own didactic spheres. With respect to difficulties found in the process, authors, proving their criticality, humbly recognized weak points to improve in forthcoming courses. One of these challenges was providing a sufficient but not exceeding quantity of materials or activities; Ravela pointed out offering a large amount of bibliography for students (in his case, heads) to handle and Cardoner referred to students feeling overwhelmed by the number of asynchronous tasks. Another challenge was making students aware of the importance of peer feedback, as in traditional practices the authorized voice is simply that of the teacher and student agency requires developing; De Bonis noted that some oral peer-feedback comments tended to be repetitive, only to comply with what was asked, or superficial, to avoid “hurting” their mates’ feelings if anything negative was said. The last, but overarching, challenge was making the assessment proposal or communication tool open and flexible enough for other agents involved to own them; Basso and Ferrarelli detected this tension between planning as preestablished linear actions which are fixed and those which are open for students to be able to make choices and Martínez León identified the needs to adequate the assessment communication tool to the specificity of each subject and to make students acquainted with it so that it is useful for them. It would be interesting to have the chance of reading about how these challenges are tackled with upcoming groups in a future volume.

This book contributes to the scholarly conversations within this journal in two ways. It opens up another discussion subtopic with respect to assessment because it deals with collaboration in the planning of authentic assessment instances, while other articles on assessment deal with intercultural competence, such as that of Rokos et al. (2023) or with the impact of race in academic performance, such as that of Zewolde (2022). It also extends the international discussion, as mentioned above, because it shows what is happening in the matter in two countries of the Global South, which could be compared and contrasted with other assessment practices held in both near and far away regions, allowing for fertile dialogue.

To conclude, *Aprender en Comunidad* is worthwhile reading for a wide Spanish-speaking audience range. In-service and pre-service teachers and educators can profit from it as they will be able to rethink their own present or future assessment experiences, either those they go through as students or the ones they pose as educational workers. The collection of the students' voices assessing the assessment procedures and the educators' ongoing reflection to enhance learning through their teaching are proof of this mutual benefit. As the assessment activities emulated real ones, other graduate or undergraduate professionals might gain insight too, since any project undergone should be assessed to give the expected result. On top of that, all readers will see the relevance of collaborating with others to grow better professionally and personally. The clarity in the description of not only the processes involved in assessing the different groups but also the theory that gives such undertakings a proper framework can help those who read it reproduce their endeavor, adapting the assessment tasks to new contexts, applying some of the practical strategies used or following the dynamics of the learning community though in the pursuit of different goals. The authors' freshness in style and humble but informed viewpoints invite us to both read the book and innovate in our assessment practices.

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