

## EDITORIAL

### **Evaluation for equity and social justice in higher education: Confronting notions of neutrality; reconceptualising purpose and practice**

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Formal evaluation is everywhere—shaping programs, policies, and even how we see ourselves—yet the question of justice in evaluation remains stubbornly sidelined. For decades, and in the context of equity in higher education work, evaluation has been treated as a neutral, technical exercise, a mechanism for crude forms of accountability and supposed efficiency. But neutrality in this context is not just a myth, it is a convenient fiction that conceals the values and power relations embedded in every evaluative act. Evaluation practices determine whose knowledge counts, whose success is legitimised, and whose voices are heard or silenced. When these dynamics go unquestioned and unacknowledged, we risk reinforcing the very inequities we claim to understand and address.

This Special Issue of ACCESS emerged from a desire to create spaces that challenge silences and blind spots in higher education equity evaluation and to catalyse new conversations about justice in evaluative practice. Its intention is to respond to an absent aspect of discussions in relation to equity in higher education: while evaluation is everywhere—shaping programs, policies, and practitioner identities—questions of ethics, power, and cultural integrity remain marginal. This Special Issue aims to engage with this absence through reconceptualising evaluation as a tool for equity and justice; a tool that can resist the reproduction of inequalities and amplify marginalised voices. Through the Special Issue call for papers, contributors were invited to interrogate dominant value systems, contest the illusion of neutrality, and explore methodologies that prioritise

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inclusivity, reciprocity, and community-defined success. By bringing together diverse perspectives—Indigenous, feminist, decolonial, and participatory—the Special Issue seeks to advance collective understanding of how evaluation can move beyond compliance and control toward transformative social change.

To set the scene for the Special Issue, this editorial lays out the context and rationale for bringing these papers together. The editorial also frames the intellectual and practical stakes involved, articulates why the conversation matters now, and signals the contribution the collection aims to make. By examining the questions that drive the authors' work and situating them within the Special Issue's purpose and scope, the editorial invites readers into a shared space for critical reflection. The papers themselves offer a diverse range of topics, theoretical perspectives, and empirical approaches; however, they also converge on a common stance that challenges dominant assumptions about policy, program and strategy evaluation – calling instead for justice-oriented alternatives<sup>1</sup>. Rather than reducing this diversity to a single narrative, the editorial will show how these contributions speak to one another and collectively advance the field. The second part of the editorial provides a concise overview of each paper's focus and contribution, offering readers a roadmap for engaging with the collection and for understanding how these varied perspectives open new possibilities for justice-oriented evaluation.

We have framed this Special Issue as an urgent discussion regarding the non-neutrality of higher education equity and widening participation evaluation. It is important to examine why such a conversation is necessary. For all its claims of neutrality, mainstream evaluation often functions as a compliance instrument, privileging metrics over meaning. Equity and/or Widening Participation in higher education is part of the policy agenda in many contexts around the globe, including in Australia, the UK, across Europe, parts of Latin America, the USA, and parts of Asia. These are agendas differently shaped in relation to nation-state context but often borrow policy ideas and language from one another. Accompanying each of these agendas is the ever-present demand for monitoring and evaluation. In Australian higher education, for example, frameworks such as the Student Equity in Higher Education Evaluation Framework (SEHEEF) dominate the landscape. Despite efforts over many years to foreground the importance of equity provision-evaluation taking much more seriously what matters to people (e.g. Bennett 2018), these formally endorsed frameworks embed neoliberal logics that align equity work with national economic agendas rather than social justice goals (Warren 2025 **SI**). In England, as Schulte (2025 **SI**) articulate, the agenda to widen participation has had a fraught relationship with the idea of evaluation for over twenty years, with efforts to systematise practice within higher education providers leading to the normalisation of practices that commonly deploy 'technical expertise, linear thinking, and rationality' over a more pluralistic set of possibilities. Squire (2025 **SI**) also notes the rise of regulator-funded bodies such as TASO who shape evaluation of access and participation schemes by providing training and guidance, commissioning evaluation, and producing literature reviews – all focused on developing 'robust, causal evidence'. These types of evaluation frameworks can tend to prize 'certainty' through experimental or quasi-experimental designs, pursuing indeed what has been termed a "chimera of certainty" (Warren 2025 **SI**) even as they fail to capture the complexity of lived experience. Success is reduced largely to enrolment, retention, and completion rates —metrics that dominate equity discourse while ignoring cultural

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<sup>1</sup> In this editorial, much of the literature drawn upon are papers in this Special Issue. To denote this, we have used "**SI**" within the citation brackets.

identity, belonging, and intergenerational aspiration (Pham 2025 **SI**; Moors-Mailei, Williams & Natapu-Ponton 2025 **SI**). Indicators become technical proxies for effectiveness, sidelining structural questions of justice (Rahman 2025 **SI**) and reinforcing deficit framings that cast underrepresented students as lacking the right forms of aspiration or capability (Warren 2025 **SI**). This fixation on numbers is not benign; it reflects a deeper neoliberal orientation that positions equity cohorts as “under-used resources” for economic competitiveness rather than as agents of educational justice (Warren 2025 **SI**). Compounding these issues is the absence of a critical evaluation culture: universities rarely assess the effectiveness of equity programs, and when evaluations are conducted, findings are often withheld due to sector competition (Pham 2025 **SI**). These dynamics reveal that dominant evaluation practices do not simply measure impact—they actively shape what counts as success, privileging institutional priorities over community-defined outcomes and perpetuating the very inequities they claim to address.

If dominant evaluation logics shape what counts as success, they also shape how institutions—and individuals—govern themselves and create a set of broader forces that make these logics so pervasive. Governments no longer pull the levers directly; they steer at a distance through evaluation frameworks, performance indicators, and accountability regimes—a dynamic Neave famously described as the “evaluative state” (Neave 2012). These mechanisms embed neoliberal rationalities into higher education, positioning evaluation as a tool for governance rather than learning. At the same time, Dahler-Larsen’s notion of an “evaluation society” (Dahler-Larsen 2012) illuminates how these external controls become internalised: practitioners measure their worth through outputs, dashboards, and compliance metrics, even when these indicators distort the realities they claim to represent (Tovey, Reid, Boyce, Huff & Onwuka du Bruyn 2025 **SI**; Pham 2025 **SI**). This culture of self-surveillance constrains what is “thinkable” in equity work, narrowing the space for approaches that privilege relationality, cultural integrity, and community-defined success (Moors-Mailei, Williams & Natapu-Ponton 2025 **SI**). Neutrality, far from being a safeguard, operates as an illusion—for evaluation does not merely observe reality; it actively constructs it, shaping priorities and legitimising certain forms of knowledge while erasing others (Tovey et al. 2025 **SI**). These dynamics create profound tensions between institutional accountability and cultural responsibility, a theme that runs through the papers in this Special Issue. By surfacing these tensions, it is important to signal why justice-oriented evaluation cannot be achieved through technical fixes alone. The contributions gathered here challenge the evaluative state’s quiet grip, and the normalization of compliance (Kelly & Schulte 2025 **SI**), offering alternatives that reframe evaluation as a practice of care, reciprocity, and shared authority (Squire 2025 **SI**).

While evaluation governance may set the rules of conduct, tools such as program logic models, theories of change, and impact pathways often provide the architecture. These tools promise clarity and are widely used to structure interventions and articulate causal assumptions, yet their influence is far from neutral. At their best, these tools can support transparency, foster shared understanding, and even advance social justice when co-designed with communities and informed by relational ethics. However, when they are driven by an obsession with narrow forms of visible impact and disregard for complexity, they risk reproducing the very inequities they claim to address. As Rahman et al. (2025 **SI**) argue, evaluation can be a dangerously effective path to a ‘masquerade’ whereby historically formed institutional barriers that require urgent change are understood only as individual challenges with which people need to cope. In equity work, models such as program logic can sometimes force complexity into rigid, linear pathways, privileging neat chains of inputs

and outputs over the messy realities of cultural identity, belonging, and intergenerational aspiration (Moors-Mailei, Williams & Natapu-Ponton 2025 **SI**). This reductionist logic aligns with the sector's pursuit of "certainty" through experimental designs and allows evaluation design to dictate program design, reversing the intended relationship (Warren 2025 **SI**; Kelly & Schulte 2025 **SI**). Such architectures ignore context and relational accountability, reinforcing the illusion of neutrality and sustaining structures of control (Tovey et al. 2025 **SI**).

The papers in this Special Issue collectively challenge these tendencies, arguing that complexity is not a problem to be solved but a condition to be embraced—and that pluralism in evaluation design is essential for justice-oriented practice. Kelly and Schulte's (2025 **SI**) work demonstrates the benefits of engaging with complexity through adopting Critical Systems Heuristics, an approach that guides toward normative practices, with questions including "What makes this the right thing to do?". This embracing of complicated contexts and relationality is a common theme across this issue of the ACCESS journal. By surfacing these critiques, the Special Issue underscores why dismantling rigid architectures is not about abandoning structures altogether but about reconceptualising their purpose: from compliance to care, from control to collaboration.

If program logic style tools dictate the architecture of evaluation, then the values embedded within that architecture determine what is seen as credible—and what is erased. Every evaluation rests on values, so why does the illusion of objectivity persist? Axiology—the question of whose values shape what counts as success—is central to equity evaluation, yet it remains largely unexamined in dominant frameworks. Institutional priorities often overshadow community-defined aspirations, privileging indicators that serve compliance over those that reflect cultural integrity or lived experience (Pham 2025 **SI**). This illusion of neutrality masks the reality that evaluation is an act of judgment, not a mechanical process—a point underscored by Tovey et al. (2025 **SI**), who argue that legitimacy should come from responsibility, not control. Their call for phronesis, or practical wisdom, reframes evaluation as a moral and relational practice, accountable to context and care rather than abstract standards. Indeed, as Hayton shares (2025 **SI**), the motivation behind the development of NERUPI in the UK (the Network for Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions) was to show it was possible to combine understandings from educational theory along with insights from practice, while continuing to take account of policy and reporting requirements. The papers in this Special Issue collectively challenge the fetishisation of objectivity, proposing markers of rigour grounded in ethical relevance (Squire 2025 **SI**) and context-specific validity (Moors-Mailei, Williams & Natapu-Ponton 2025 **SI**). Pham's contribution advances this argument through the Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS) CARE principles—Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, and Ethics—which embed justice into the very fabric of evaluation design. By surfacing these questions of axiology, the editorial signals a critical shift: from evaluation as a neutral arbiter to evaluation as a value-laden practice that must own its commitments. This is not a technical adjustment; it is a philosophical reorientation that underpins every justice-oriented approach featured in this collection.

Values determine what success looks like, so there are questions to consider regarding what kinds of outcomes we are willing to recognise—and what remains invisible. If belonging, cultural identity, and intergenerational aspiration don't count as success, then what exactly are we measuring? For decades, higher education equity evaluation has been dominated by a metrics obsession: enrolment, retention, and completion rates presented as definitive indicators of impact.

These numbers matter, but they tell only part of the story—and often the least transformative part. It is also often ignored that for something or someone to be quantified, it must first be rendered recognisable within existing categorisations that are an expression of a social gaze carrying judgement and injustice related to class, gender, race, ability, etc. (Burke & Lumb 2024). When evaluation reduces success to technical outputs, it ignores the relational and cultural dimensions that equity programs seek to nurture (Moors-Mailei, Williams & Natapu-Ponton 2025 **SI**; Pham 2025 **SI**). Indigenous and Pacific epistemologies expand the very notion of rigour, proposing indicators such as belonging, identity, and collective wellbeing as legitimate measures of success (Moors-Mailei, Williams & Natapu-Ponton 2025 **SI**; Pascoe & Armstrong, 2025, **SI**). Similarly, the IDS CARE principles—Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, and Ethics—reframe evaluation as a collaborative, ethically grounded process rather than an extractive exercise (Pham 2025 **SI**). Taken together, these approaches challenge the assumption that rigour equals control, insisting instead that ethical relevance and context-specific validity are the true markers of quality (Tovey et al. 2025 **SI**).

The papers in this Special Issue converge on this point: moving beyond metrics is not about abandoning evidence but about broadening what counts as evidence, embedding cultural integrity and relational accountability into evaluation design. As Squire (2025 **SI**) asks, given the complex power relations identified, how might evaluators of equity, access and participation in higher education pursue an ethics whereby their complex role shifts away from worrying forms of authority toward facilitating learning within a “network of responsible parties”. By highlighting these alternatives, this collection signals a shift from evaluation as a mechanism of measurement to evaluation as a practice of meaning-making—one that honours complexity, resists reductionism, and opens space for justice-oriented futures.

Shifting policy, program, or strategy evaluation practice in new directions is a formidable challenge, particularly when the term “evaluation” carries longstanding conceptualisations that continually reassert purposes and legitimate practices. To move beyond this commonsense territory is to risk being constructed as illegitimate, unreasonable, and outside what is considered true. Yet, given the stakes identified within this Special Issue, these are risks worth taking. As Moors-Mailei, Williams & Natapu-Ponton demonstrate, for some communities evaluation cannot be understood as a technical exercise—it is a cultural practice grounded in relationships and reciprocity. Guba and Lincoln (1989) anticipated this argument, asserting that “to approach evaluation scientifically is to miss completely its fundamentally social, political, and value-oriented character” (1989 p. 7). Indigenous–Pacific paradigms such as *fa’afaletui*, *vā*, *talanoa*, and *tok stori* (Moors-Mailei, Williams and Natapu-Ponton 2025 **SI**) should never be cursory additions to furnish the fringes of equity evaluation. These are rich and fundamental frameworks within which cultural integrity and reciprocity are sustained through iterative, relational, and ethical conduct. These approaches dethrone neutrality and situate evaluation in context and care, demanding that any credible process remain accountable to the communities and contexts it serves. Pascoe and Armstrong (2025 **SI**) describe how creating a safe social space for sharing is so intricately woven into cultural practices as to feel ‘natural’ to many First Nations community members, and therefore almost difficult to define. For these authors, notions of relation, reciprocity and respect are brought together through reference to *reverence*; a way to signal where power relations need to shift in recognition of whose knowledge and perspective matters when it comes to justice-oriented evaluation. Tovey et al. extend this vision through Reflective Dialogue (RD), a

living practice that “moves at the speed of trust” and resists the illusion of rule-bound certainty. RD’s enabling conditions—spaciousness, attunement, and accountability to relationship—echo the commitments articulated by Pascoe and Armstrong (2025 **SI**) and Moors-Mailei, Williams and Natapu-Ponton (2025 **SI**), positioning evaluation as dialogic and interpretive rather than mechanical. Together, these contributions signal a profound shift: from evaluation as compliance to evaluation as cultural praxis, where humility, care, and collective flourishing become the true markers of rigour.

Justice-oriented evaluation needs to be understood as not a solo act—it thrives on solidarity among practitioners, communities, and scholars. Solidarity among practitioners is not only about shared critique but about cultivating spaces for mutual learning and ethical courage. As Tovey et al. (2025 **SI**) argue, evaluators often feel trapped between complicity and irrelevance within compliance-driven cultures; RD’s enabling conditions—such as safety and shared risk—offer a way to hold this tension collectively rather than in isolation. Similarly, Hayton’s account of NERUPI (2025 **SI**) demonstrates how collaborative frameworks can resist hegemonic norms by sustaining dialogue across institutions, while Moors-Mailei, Williams and Natapu-Ponton (2025, **SI**) remind us that solidarity requires humility and accountability to relationships, not just technical alignment. These commitments converge on a common stance: dismantling extractive practices and resisting hegemonic evaluation cultures that privilege ‘certainty’ over complexity. The Special Issue itself becomes a space for collective praxis, where diverse voices interrogate dominant logics and co-create justice-oriented alternatives. By foregrounding collaboration over compliance, these contributions remind us that evaluation’s emancipatory potential depends on networks of care and collective action.

If evaluation is to serve equity and justice, it must stop asking “what works” and start asking for whom, on whose terms, and how our design supports this. The critique of a what works approach can certainly take many paths, including in relation to the democratic (e.g. Gordon et al. 2023) that responds to a ‘democratic deficit’ (Biesta 2007) which arguably circulates through “what works” agendas. In a revisiting of his essay “Why ‘What Works’ Won’t Work”, Biesta recently analysed the continued rise of evidence-based education, describing the resulting research monocultures and subsequent education monocultures that leave “little time and scope for engaging with normative questions about what education is for and professional questions about how education should be enacted.” (Biesta 2025 p. 4). Looking forward, the challenge appears structural: to embed sovereignty, pluralism, and ethics into the architecture of evaluation in higher education. Authors in this Special Issue call: for paradigms that privilege cultural integrity and community-defined outcomes: dismantling frameworks that treat equity as a technical problem rather than a structural question of justice: blueprints for ethical futures; and reframing evaluation as collaborative and self-determined rather than extractive. The authors urge us to embrace uncertainty and complexity as conditions for flourishing, cultivating evaluative soil where practical wisdom—*phronesis*—can thrive. The issue sees a sustained critique of neoliberal logics, underscoring why this shift is urgent: as long as evaluation remains tethered to economic competitiveness and reductive metrics, it will reproduce the inequities it claims to address. In our view, futures should not be imagined or enacted in isolation. We see reconceptualisation of evaluation *for* equity and social justice requiring solidarity among practitioners, policymakers, and communities to co-create evaluative cultures that resist compliance and nurture care. Collective action—through shared frameworks, dialogic practices, and ethical alliances—will be essential to sustain this transformation. The path ahead demands courage to break with orthodoxy, reframe rigour through ethical relevance, and design

evaluations that nurture belonging, dignity, and justice. This is not a technical adjustment but a moral and political project—one that invites readers to join in reconceptualising evaluation as care, not control, and as a collective endeavour toward equity and transformation.

## **The papers**

In this section of the editorial, we introduce each of the papers in the order they appear. As we invite you to engage with these contributions, we acknowledge the challenges navigated by the authors who have made this Special Issue possible. Writing about evaluation—and doing evaluation itself—is never neutral work. As Squire (2025 **SI**) shows, navigating evaluation of equity is an ethical minefield. It is intellectually demanding and emotionally charged, often unfolding in spaces of tension, uncertainty, and discomfort. As Tovey et al. (2025 **SI**) remind us, evaluators are called to inhabit a posture of judgment that resists the lure of control and neutrality and staying accountable to relationships. This is not easy work. It asks us to sit with complexity, to hold competing values, and to navigate institutional pressures while remaining answerable to communities. It can provoke anxiety, vulnerability, and even fatigue, because the stakes are high: evaluation shapes what counts as knowledge, whose voices are heard, and whose futures are imagined.

### ***Moors-Mailei, Williams and Natapu-Ponton – Beyond metrics: Centring Indigenous Knowledges in higher education equity evaluation***

This paper dismantles the illusion of neutrality in equity evaluation, showing how dominant frameworks reproduce epistemic exclusion. It introduces Indigenous–Pacific paradigms—fa’afaletui, vā, talanoa, tok stori—that define rigour through reciprocity, cultural integrity, and relational accountability. Rather than treating evaluation as a technical exercise, the authors position it as a practice of care and sovereignty, generating indicators like belonging and intergenerational aspiration. Their argument is both critical and hopeful: evaluation can move beyond extractive logics to become a transformative, justice-oriented process that honours Indigenous authority and community-defined success.

### ***Warren – Beyond ‘skills through equity’ and ‘the hope of redemption’: contesting neoliberal Australian widening participation policy and hegemonic evaluation practices***

Warren interrogates the neoliberal underpinnings of widening participation policy, tracing how equity agendas have been co-opted by economic competitiveness narratives. He critiques evaluation practices that pursue a “chimera of certainty” through experimental designs, while ignoring the complexity of lived experience. The paper exposes deficit framings that cast underrepresented students as lacking aspiration and positions disadvantaged groups as “under-used resources.” By linking these dynamics to the Australian Universities Accord, Warren calls for evaluation that resists reductive metrics and reclaims social justice as the core purpose of equity work.

### ***Kelly and Schulte – Evaluation for equity and justice in higher education: The Political, the Relational, and the Transformational***

Kelly and Schulte take careful account of the Widening Participation context in England as it has developed over recent decades, including the key players, shifts in processes relating to legitimate practice or evidence, and the ways in which evaluation of policymaking and programming is shaped by macro, meso and micro level socio-political factors. The authors introduce Critical

Systems Heuristics as a framework to create spaces in which more explicit identifications can be made in relation to, for example, the authorities, assumptions and judgements at play within an evaluation process. The paper articulates a specific use of this framework, deconstructing the approach to WP and consequences for evaluation as by formulated by a central stakeholder in England, the Office for Students.

***Tovey, Reid, Boyce, Huff & Onwuka du Bruyn – Judgment, flourishing, and the composting of evaluation through Reflective Dialogue***

Tovey et al. challenge the positivist “illusion of neutrality” that pervades evaluation, introducing Reflective Dialogue (RD) as a living, relational practice. RD resists rule-bound certainty and moves “at the speed of trust,” enabling evaluators to act with phronesis—the practical wisdom to discern what is good and just in context. The paper offers enabling conditions for RD, such as safety, attunement, and accountability to relationships, positioning evaluation as dialogic and interpretive rather than mechanical. Using the powerful soil metaphor, the authors contrast the “positivist-poisoned garden” with RD’s fertile ground for ethical, human knowledge-making—a space where evaluation can truly flourish.

***Squire - What counts? Who counts? Ethical evaluation in access and participation***

The role, perspectives and experiences of those responsible for conducting evaluation in relation to access and participation is an under-explored area of higher education policy and program literature. Squire presents an engaging analytical account from within the complex politics of policy and program evaluation of access and participation work in England. This work brings specific attention to ethical dilemmas identified by thirteen people (including the author) who held responsibility for producing evaluation processes and products in this context. The paper asks many questions, including whether it is possible, given the complex power relations at play, to argue for an ethics which sees evaluators taking seriously their situation in a “network of responsible parties”.

***Pham – Critical evaluation through the lens of Indigenous Data Sovereignty***

Pham reframes evaluation as an ethical and political act, introducing the IDS CARE principles—Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, and Ethics—as a blueprint for justice-oriented evaluation. The paper critiques the dominance of institutional metrics and the absence of student voice in data governance, arguing that extractive practices reinforce systemic inequities. By centring Indigenous data sovereignty and participatory approaches, Pham shows how evaluation can shift from external judgment to collaborative, culturally accountable processes. This vision positions evaluation as a tool for empowerment, not surveillance.

***Rahman, de Henau and Matlock – Waves of evidence: A novel approach to the collaborative enquiry of equity in higher education***

Rahman et al. present a fascinating project of collaborative enquiry that challenges conventional policy and program evaluation approaches. The authors bring together policy, practice, theory, methodological innovation across three distinct programmatic projects, with multiple investigators, to develop a collaboration that draws on Barad-inspired diffractive cooperative enquiry. This paper demands the reader’s attention and rewards that attention with a journey of ‘productive tension’ rather than the sorts of consensus that can drive ‘the reproduction of

institutional inequities’, as the authors so aptly put it. Rahman et al demonstrate plurality of approach is possible and necessary if we are to counter narrow, evidence hierarchies privileging a restricted set of methodological possibilities and notions of rigour.

***Pascoe and Armstrong – Evaluation of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tertiary Preparation program experience: An exploration of the program’s contribution to First Nation student futures***

Presented in the form of a yarn, this exchange with the SI editors offers insight from the authors on the challenges faced when trying to ensure contemporary higher education institutions actively value culturally safe, Indigenous-led programs. The yarn asks us to consider why an award-winning program would be discontinued and absorbed into a mainstream model without consultation. We are challenged by questions such as why rigid approaches to review and reporting are seen as legitimate when they are clearly unfit for purpose if we consider cultural standards of conduct. The authors argue for Indigenous co-designed evaluation in higher education, the valuing of culturally embedded preparatory programs, and the need for forms of reverence when an effort seeks to build knowledge with community members through evaluation research.

***Hayton – Reflections on evaluation of widening participation initiatives in England: the emergence and development of NERUPI***

Hayton provides an historical and conceptual account of the NERUPI Framework and its evolution in response to policy, practice, and theoretical developments in English higher education. NERUPI is now a network of over 70 higher education organisations, many of whom implement a framework developed by author Hayton and Dr Andrew Bengry. Through this personal account, Hayton offers insight into the challenges of evaluating widening participation (WP) initiatives by reflecting on NERUPI’s efforts over many years to sustain a collaborative set of contexts and approaches that resists narrow, positivist models of evaluation.

**Concluding thoughts**

The authors in this collection have leaned into the discomfort that comes with unsettling convention with both courage and care, offering insights that challenge dominant logics and open space for justice-oriented alternatives. Their work reminds us that evaluation is not only technical but deeply ethical and relational—a practice that requires humility, reflexivity, and solidarity. We thank these authors for their generosity in sharing these ideas and for contributing to a conversation that is as urgent as it is transformative. The editorial team would also like to thank ACCESS Journal Manager Ms Julia Shaw, whose expert curation of the process has ensured a generative experience for us, plus a final product with a provocative character and an equally bold aesthetic. In relation to the look and feel of this issue, we also would like to thank Izabela Pluta for contributing her artwork for the cover imagery. You can read in the front matter of this issue some of the connections made back and forth between the editorial team and Izabela in relation to the focus of the issue and the artwork. No journal survives without the generous labour of reviewers. As an editorial team, we are grateful to the many anonymous reviewers who strode into yet another context of evaluation in higher education, (the peer review!), to challenge and encourage authors with an impressive combination of capability and care. From all of us on the editorial team, we invite you to engage with the author’s work in this Special Issue of ACCESS.

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