E-Learning and Disability in Higher Education: Accessibility Research and Practice by Jane K. Seale (review)

Katherine C. Aquino

Book Reviews

Jane K. Seale. *E-Learning and Disability in Higher Education: Accessibility Research and Practice.* **New York: Taylor & Francis, 2014. 280 pp. Paperback: $44.95. ISBN 978-0-415-62941-6.**

Reviewed by Katherine C. Aquino, Doctoral Student at Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey.

In *E-Learning and Disability in Higher Education: Accessibility Research and Practice,* Jane K. Seale reestablishes the theoretical and empirical impetus to improve the current postsecondary awareness of learning technologies and policies specific to students with disabilities. In this second edition, she addresses many of the concerns originally highlighted in the 2006 text. However, with the inclusion of updated data and new policy implementation noted throughout the international postsecondary community, Seale argues that only minimal improvement to e-learning technology access has occurred in the eight years since the first edition.

Incorporating the multidimensional role of higher education stakeholders involved in program accessibility, Seale discusses the functionality and current socioacademic demands in the overall advancement of e-learning for students with disabilities, calling for refreshing the system and "new ways of thinking about possibilities for future accessibility practice and research" (p. x).

Over the course of the 13 chapters, the author examines the current state of e-learning inclusion for postsecondary students with disabilities and the improvement needed with future technology-based learning endeavors. Seale provides an extensive country-specific breakdown of various student disability policies found throughout the international postsecondary milieu. In doing so, she illustrates the wide-ranging e-learning programmatic suc-cesses found throughout the international higher education community and shortcomings within specific countries.

Seale divides the text into four parts: contextualizing, surveying, critiquing, and reimagining the postsecondary "scene," providing a comprehensive literature review for each specific section. This review allows the audience to feel informed about the topic, relevant evaluative programs, and the overall themes developed throughout the book. Seale skillfully develops a foundation rich in data-driven, theoretical, and programmatic models focused on disability-specific electronic educational tools. The text addresses a topic minimally addressed in higher education literature—e-learning accessibility for students with disabilities—and lays the groundwork for future analysis of the subject.

The first section, "Contextualizing the Scene," addresses the current theoretical models (e.g., deficit/medical model and social model of disability) contributing to the negative conceptualization of disability and the socioacademic separation of students with disabilities and their postsecondary counterparts. The author notes that "labels are considered by many, including students themselves, to be stigmatizing and disempowering" (p. 4) and argues that the noted categorizations only emphasize students' inabilities and what cannot be accomplished due to disability. Moreover, the current models fail to successfully implement a more effective way to efficiently incorporate student disability into the postsecondary learning environment. Seale emphasizes: "Given such distrust and stigma surrounding negotiating accommodations, it is not surprising that for many disabled students the issue of whether or not to disclose their disability to their institution, tutors, and peers is a real dilemma" (p. 29).

Beyond stigmatization, variation with disability labeling creates a disconnect in the overall

standardization of relevant definitions and topics, including the term "accessibility" itself. Incorporating Freire's (1972) concept of "cultures of silence," the author examines how access and improvement to e-learning technological needs continue to be overlooked both in the literature and in the international higher education system.

Increased legislation related to equality and anti-discrimination, growing postsecondary enrollment of students with disabilities, and continued attention to improving accessibility guidelines, the author argues, will serve as the foundation for future change in the current higher education environment. Moreover, she offers a contextualized model of accessibility practice as a potential option to aid in this change.

In her model, Seale asserts that improved e-learning student accessibility does not solely occur in the identification of additional stakeholders within the higher education dynamic. Instead, involved stakeholders must translate calls for improvement with viable action plans within their specific postsecondary setting. The author presents four key responsibilities for postsecondary staff to aid in e-learning advancement: "the development of strategic partnerships with key stakeholders; embedding accessibility in all e-learning related staff development programs; targeting specific staff groups as well as all staff generally and formalizing and incentivizing attendance" (p. 62). The presented framework serves as a functional alternative to the current overarching disability models, promoting small-scale action plans and their potential influence on long-term improvement in student e-learning accessibility.

In the second section, "Survey the Scene: Making Sense of Practice," Seale notes that improved accountability and the greater contribution of stakeholders in disability service improvement creates an increased likelihood for future program and policy development. Service-focused guidance for postsecondary stakeholders, the author explains, can provide strategies for future e-learning implementation and can take the form of "guiding the development of systematic approaches to accessible design and accessibility evaluation; guiding the assessment and provision of assistive technology and guiding the provision of alternative formats" (p. 83).

Despite this procedural advice, evaluation techniques on web accessibility has been historically unsystematic and may not cover key aspects for policy formation, including timeframe, enforcement, and applicability. Seale explains, "There has been a great disconnect in the current accessibility field in that legislation is aimed at changing practice at an institutional level, whilst guidelines and standards appear to be aimed at changing practice at an individual level" (p. 111). With ad-

ditional standardized auditing tools, e-learning program options and accessibility can become a more encompassing aspect of the postsecondary environment.

In Part 3, "Critiquing the Scene: Making Sense of Voices and Silences," Seale assesses the current research pertaining to the overall higher education experience of students with disabilities, noting that "academics researching disabled students' general experience of higher education generally have called for more research that listens to the experiences of disabled students, enabling them to express themselves and illuminate hidden barriers" (p. 135). This significant gap in empirical literature is specific to identifying and investigating students' personal accounts of their socioacademic experience in higher education and their perceptions of assistive postsecondary technologies.

The author asserts that, without appropriate research examining students' socioacademic experience, educational researchers may skew actual accessibility literature and miscalculate policy needs and programmatic organization. Seale notes that postsecondary policy creation is split between individualistic and universal designs, creating a lack of an interdisciplinary approach in disability e-learning access and instructional strategies. The current gap in research dedicated to the importance of stakeholders roles' in the disability e-learning student experience highlights the current mismanagement of disability accessibility practice and poorly defined best practices. However, the sporadic and often fragmented literature related to accessibility is met with a "growing acknowledgement in accessibility and other related research that disabled students' voices have not been attended to in a serious and systematic way" (p. 163).

In the final section of the text, "Reimaging the Scene: Voicing the Future for Accessibility Research and Practice," Seale presents her own e-learning accessibility research, which she calls the "LEXDIS project." This description provides a thorough and descriptive research option for future accessibility exploration. Based on participatory design, the project explores the active, multifaceted interactions between students with disabilities and various postsecondary technologies. This section reports Seale's personal experience with e-learning accessibility research development and comprehensively instructs the reader in the various research components including phases of student participation and participant interviewing structure, spelling out details so that the reader grasps the complexity of this research design.

Despite this empirical contribution, Seale stresses that additional improvements must occur in the field to advance e-learning accessibility. "Although words like equality and empowerment are used a lot in accessibility research . . . they are rarely

defined and poorly explained. Digital inclusion is therefore concerned with addressing inequalities where those unable to access the affordance of technologies are disadvantaged, marginalized in society, and therefore digitally excluded" (p. 220).

Although the text provides an extensive review of relevant literature and initiatives related to e-learning accessibility and the socioacademic experience for students with disabilities in the postsecondary environment, the text may leave the reader wanting more conclusive information. The author incorporates her own inquiries related to the included literature without providing answers or, at times, even suggestions in how to better navigate accessibility-related challenges. While the book is an excellent tome for anyone interested in postsecondary disability policy and/or e-learning accessibility initiatives, the reader may get lost in the technological jargon embedded throughout the text. Readers should have a foundational understanding of the current research and recent technological advances to truly benefit from the theory and strategies presented. Regardless, Seale imparts a deep understanding of the topic, and her passion for e-learning accessibility advancements is sensed throughout. It is this passion that can inspire the reader to apply Seale's theoretical and programmatic suggestions in their campus setting.

The inclusion of the extensive country-specific disability legislation section and intercontinental policy comparison provides a comprehensive summary of the international postsecondary community's current focus on e-learning accessibility. However, this global inclusion creates the challenge to include overarching strategies that could be theoretically applied on an international level. Due to the many various factors and unique characteristics created in each country's postsecondary disability sector, the presentation of various models, including the author's own contextualized model of accessibility practice might have been better understood if the text had addressed potential improvement in a country-by-country analysis. Regardless, the author maintains the readers' curiosity regarding the discrepancy between policies and standards within different countries.

Throughout the book, Seale expertly establishes an empirical and programmatic foundation for future improvements regarding postsecondary e-learning accessibility initiatives. Readers have the opportunity to better gauge the international landscape of disability policy and the various educational technologies assisting students with disabilities postsecondary experience. Seale establishes the need for continuing attention to the topic of postsecondary disability support and, more importantly, the specific focus of e-learning accessibility for students with disabilities. Noting the additional need for increased support for disability

service stakeholders and greater standardization with definitions, policy norms, and universally accepted programs, Seale lays the foundation for future topic reviews and provides the opportunities for the topic continuation. The book serves as a strong contribution to the field of higher education, and more specifically postsecondary disability support, shedding light on a topic in need of further exploration.

REFERENCE

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Douglas E. Clark. *Eisenhower in Command at Columbia.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013. 132 pp. Hardcover: $55.00. ISBN 978-0-7391-7836-2.

REVIEWED BY JEFFREY ALSTETE, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, HAGAN SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, IONA COLLEGE, NEW ROCHELLE, NEW YORK

It has been said that those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it. Those of us who work in or study the field of higher education understand that our academic organizational culture is quite distinctive. However, choices in leadership are sometimes made that disregard our long-standing uniqueness by seeking to influence change with craftily selected administration appointments. This can happen in positions such as president, chancellor, professional school dean, and other senior-level officials. Douglas E. Clark writes an interesting and informative examination of a definitive situation of an event such as this in his book, *Eisenhower in Command at Columbia.*

While historians and biographers have examined the life and career of Dwight D. Eisenhower as general and U.S. president previously, this book delves into the somewhat murky period when "Ike" was president of a prestigious Ivy League university. The research from this new book on Eisenhower's tenure at Columbia is based on work from a doctoral program in higher education management at the University of Pennsylvania. Douglas Clark includes primary research collected from people who worked with President Eisenhower in addition to well-documented secondary sources. Clark is an experienced administrator and faculty member who acknowledges that there is a previous book on this topic (Jacobs, 2001) and that many broader biographies examine Eisenhower's leadership in his military and political roles.

However, this book seeks to critically examine the famous American leader and his appointment as president of an academic institution while high-