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Book Review for Assessments for Inclusion in Higher Education - Promoting Equity and Social Justice in Assessments

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Abstract- This review examines "Inclusive Assessment in Higher Education: Promoting Equity and Social Justice in Assessment," edited by Rola Ajjawi, Joanna Tai, David Boud, and Trina Jorre De St Jorre. The book, comprising 21 standalone chapters from 35 contributors, explores inclusivity in higher education assessments through societal, institutional, and interpersonal perspectives. It emphasizes the need for assessment practices that cater to diverse student populations, considering factors beyond traditional demographics. The review highlights the book's strengths, including its multi-author approach, practical examples, and incorporation of indigenous knowledge. However, it also notes weaknesses such as a lack of field-specific guidelines and limited practical narratives. The book contributes significantly to assessment literature, offering valuable insights for researchers, educators, and policymakers seeking to develop more inclusive assessment practices in higher education. This review analyzes the book's main arguments, strengths, weaknesses, and potential audience, providing a comprehensive overview of its content and relevance in the field of educational assessment.

Keywords: *higher education assessments, inclusion, book review.*

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Book Review for Assessments for Inclusion in Higher Education - Promoting Equity and Social Justice in Assessments

Joy. J [α] & Sen. A [σ]

Abstract- This review examines "Inclusive Assessment in Higher Education: Promoting Equity and Social Justice in Assessment," edited by Rola Ajjawi, Joanna Tai, David Boud, and Trina Jorre De St Jorre. The book, comprising 21 standalone chapters from 35 contributors, explores inclusivity in higher education assessments through societal, institutional, and interpersonal perspectives. It emphasizes the need for assessment practices that cater to diverse student populations, considering factors beyond traditional demographics. The review highlights the book's strengths, including its multi-author approach, practical examples, and incorporation of indigenous knowledge. However, it also notes weaknesses such as a lack of field-specific guidelines and limited practical narratives. The book contributes significantly to assessment literature, offering valuable insights for researchers, educators, and policymakers seeking to develop more inclusive assessment practices in higher education. This review analyzes the book's main arguments, strengths, weaknesses, and potential audience, providing a comprehensive overview of its content and relevance in the field of educational assessment.

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I. Introduction

This book has 21 standalone chapters discussing inclusivity in assessments, specifically in higher education. The authors explained inclusivity through three lenses: societal & cultural perspectives, institutional & community perspectives, and educators, students, & interpersonal perspectives. There are 35 contributors to this book, and the editors Rola Ajjawi, Joanna Tai, David Boud, and Trina Jorre De St Jorre have condensed multiple critical issues in assessments through the three different lenses.

II. Summary of Main Arguments

This book acknowledges that higher education has a diverse set of students and requires a pedagogy that caters to diversity. It informs educators that diversity is not just in the race, ethnicity, or gender but also in career aspirations, personal goals, prior experiences, and expectations. The authors make us aware that instructors should consider these disparities when they create assessments, especially in higher education. Assessments should not be advantageous or disadvantageous towards one particular group of students. The book chapters provide many examples where assessments can be partial to one group of students. For example, a traditional closed-book exam will be advantageous for students who are good at recalling under pressure. Similarly, rigid deadlines can disadvantage students with work commitments, chronic medical conditions, or personal issues. The book highlights these issues and makes professors aware of these issues. The book also explains how the term "inclusion" has different meanings in different contexts.

The book refers to the universal design for assessment (UDA) to inform readers about the shortcomings of assessments in higher education. The book argues that using UDA is not fair for all students, especially when used for sustainable assessments. Sustainable assessments are when students carry their understanding beyond the targeted assessments. The chapters suggest that the first step to create social justice in assessments is by being open to new ideas in assessment practices. The book encourages educators to discuss including social justice in their assessments by being vocal about these issues in faculty meetings. The chapters emphasize that we must act on our students' differences by enabling them to achieve their academic goals. The chapters also talk about how disability can be viewed as a discriminator, and as assessors, we should be considerate towards disabled students. The book emphasizes that disabled students should be treated equally with other students, and instructors should make arrangements to cater to disabled students. The book also outlines how pedagogy can be modified to cater to students with diverse identities.

The chapters guide us not to make assumptions about students, especially students who are marginalized in higher education. It is essential to understand that inclusive assessments are an ongoing process, and instructors need to modify their instructions based on their students' diverse identities. The book provides a culturally inclusive assessment model that explains how curriculum and assessments can be culturally relevant. It discusses social justice and fairness for all students, especially marginalized ones. The chapters provide thoughtful questions for readers

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to ask while developing an inclusive curriculum. The chapters also tell us that assessments are situational and cannot be standardized. This means that, as researchers, we need to create guidelines and policies that instructors can modify as required.

The book also expands on technological usage in assessments and the disparities artificial intelligence brings about in education. The chapter on artificial intelligence focuses explicitly on the hazards of AI. One of the key takeaways from this chapter is that, as educators, we need to understand how AI is being used and critically evaluate the outcomes or reports it generates. The book does not suggest that we should not use AI in pedagogy, but it advises on how artificial intelligence is used to improve student learning. Another important aspect of the book is its emphasis on student voice and agency in assessment design. Several chapters discuss the value of involving students as partners in creating more inclusive assessments. This approach not only ensures that diverse student needs are considered but also empowers students to take an active role in their learning. The authors argue that this collaboration between educators and students is crucial for developing truly inclusive assessment practices that cater to the varied needs and experiences of the student population.

Throughout the book, various theoretical frameworks are explored to inform inclusive assessment practices. These include critical disability studies, decolonial approaches, and social justice theories. By grounding the discussion in these theoretical perspectives, the authors provide a robust foundation for understanding and addressing the complexities of inclusive assessment in higher education. The book demonstrates how these frameworks can be applied to challenge traditional assessment methods and develop more equitable practices. The authors also delve into the policy implications and institutional barriers that often hinder the implementation of inclusive assessment practices. They highlight the need for systemic changes within higher education institutions to support and promote inclusive assessment. The book argues that while individual educators can make significant strides in their classrooms, true transformation requires institutional commitment and policy changes that prioritize equity and inclusion in assessment.

Lastly, the book concludes on how socially and economically backward students (SES) have an inherent disadvantage in higher education with reference to the opportunities they have, internships and networks they can use, and even their employment outcome gap. The book explains how current research targets getting low SES students into colleges but not improving their chances for better employment and reducing the employment gap, thereby ensuring students' success. This book has interesting insights into understanding the needs of diverse students in a higher education setting.

Strengths

A significant strength of this book is its comprehensive coverage of diverse student groups. The authors don't limit their focus to a single demographic but instead address the needs of various student populations, including students with disabilities, international students, and those from low SES backgrounds. This approach provides readers with a holistic view of inclusivity in higher education, acknowledging the complex intersections of identity and experience that shape students' educational journeys. The book also offers a critical examination of AI and technology in assessment, which is particularly relevant in today's rapidly evolving educational landscape. Rather than simply advocating for or against technological solutions, the authors present a nuanced perspective, highlighting both the potential benefits and risks for equity and inclusion. This balanced approach helps readers navigate the complexities of integrating technology into assessment practices.

A noteworthy aspect of the book is its strong focus on student agency. By emphasizing the importance of student voice and involvement in assessment design, the authors promote a more collaborative and empowering approach to education. This aligns with contemporary pedagogical philosophies that view students as active participants in their learning rather than passive recipients of knowledge. The book's strength also lies in its multi-level analysis of inclusive assessment. While it provides valuable insights for classroom-level practices, it doesn't stop there. The authors extend their discussion to broader institutional and policy contexts that impact inclusive assessment. This comprehensive approach helps readers understand the systemic nature of the challenges and opportunities in creating more inclusive educational environments.

By drawing on various theoretical frameworks such as critical disability studies and decolonial approaches, the book offers a rich, interdisciplinary understanding of inclusive assessment. This inter-disciplinary approach allows readers to engage with the topic from multiple perspectives, fostering a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand. Lastly, the book introduces and explores the concept of 'assessment for social justice,' which goes beyond traditional notions of fairness in assessment. This forward-thinking approach encourages readers to consider how assessment practices can contribute to broader societal equity, positioning education as a powerful tool for social change. This perspective makes the book not just a practical guide, but also a catalyst for reimagining the role of assessment in creating a more just and equitable society.

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Weaknesses

One of the significant weaknesses in this book is the lack of practical narratives and examples of student outcomes in a diverse classroom. The authors provide guidelines regarding making assessments inclusive but haven't offered practical examples of the benefits of using inclusive assessments. This absence of concrete case studies or success stories makes it challenging for readers to envision how these inclusive practices might play out in real-world settings. Additionally, the book falls short in exploring the long-term impacts of inclusive assessment practices on students' future careers and life outcomes, leaving readers to wonder about the broader implications of these approaches.

The authors have not distinguished between the fields of education they studied. Since the mission of each university department is different, we cannot generalize the guidelines in all departments. For example, the inclusive assessment guidelines for medical science cannot be the same inclusive assessment guidelines for the general education department. This lack of specificity is compounded by the book's limited acknowledgment of the practical constraints educators might face when implementing inclusive practices, such as time limitations, resource scarcity, and potential institutional resistance. Future research can aim to expand on the extent of generalizability and the differences in assessment's inclusivity across a different subject domain, as well as strategies for overcoming these practical hurdles.

The book chapters also confuse readers in how the assessments can be fair for all students when making assessments for students with different academic needs. The authors tried to generalize but did not expand on the practical ways to generalize inclusive assessments. This lack of specific guidance is particularly problematic when considering the potential tension between maintaining academic rigor and implementing inclusive assessment practices - a common concern among educators that the book doesn't adequately address. While the book does a commendable job of discussing various theoretical frameworks, it could have provided more guidance on how to integrate these different approaches into a unified, actionable framework for inclusive assessment.

The book starts with the American higher education system but diverges into the Australian higher education system in the second half. This is confusing for readers, especially within the American education system. Furthermore, the book's treatment of technology in inclusive assessment could be more comprehensive. While it discusses artificial intelligence, it doesn't fully explore other technological tools and platforms that could support inclusive assessment practices, missing an opportunity to provide a complete picture of technology's role in creating inclusive educational environments.

Contributions

This book has a literary contribution to the body of assessment literature. It enlightens researchers and practitioners to improve the current assessment strategies and make them more inclusive toward all students. By bringing together diverse perspectives and theoretical frameworks, the book offers a comprehensive overview of the current state of inclusive assessment in higher education. This book is an excellent source of information for inclusive assessment practices and inculcating student needs and voices in creating appropriate tests for diverse students. The book's exploration of "assessment for social justice" is particularly noteworthy, as it extends the conversation beyond mere inclusivity to consider how assessment practices can contribute to broader societal change.

Its interdisciplinary approach, drawing on critical disability studies, decolonial theories, and social justice frameworks, provides educators with a rich theoretical foundation from which to inform an educator's practice. The book's emphasis on student voice and agency in assessment design promotes a more collaborative and empowering approach to education, offering practical suggestions for implementing student-centered assessment practices. Additionally, the book's critical examination of universal design for assessment (UDA) and its exploration of the role of technology and artificial intelligence in assessment offer timely insights into both established and emerging approaches to inclusive assessment. By addressing these topics, the book contributes to the ongoing dialogue about how to create assessment practices that are truly inclusive and equitable in the rapidly evolving landscape of higher education.

Appropriate Audiences

This book is appropriate for budding educational researchers, educators, policymakers, or any enthusiastic practitioner. This book draws from various sources and summarizes the need for having inclusive assessment practices. And hence, this book can be used as a source of reference for creating inclusive assessments.

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