

Don't Make the Kid Who is Blind Play Dodge Ball: Making Interactive Library Instruction Accessible to Students with Disabilities

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Abstract

Currently, there is a movement for libraries to provide more interactivity in instruction sessions to foster greater student engagement. However, Angie Brunk, born with a visual disability, and Dale Monobe, with a teaching/educational background in rehabilitation counseling, have both observed how students with disabilities may be left behind. For example, popular activities, such as the “Amazing Library Race” and a “Scavenger Hunt,” may be completely inaccessible for students with disabilities. Most library instruction is meant to encourage library use. Unfortunately, activities that are not well planned can leave students with disabilities feeling unwelcome and make it more difficult for them to seek assistance from librarians. We will describe several popular library instruction activities, explore potential difficulties for students with disabilities and offer modifications that allow students with disabilities to fully participate in instructional activities.

Introduction

Gamification has become force in higher education and especially in libraries. This had led to an increasing use of games and other interactive learning activities in library instruction (Kim). The stated goal of gamification is often to increase student engagement and involvement with the library. However, many of the commonly used activities present barriers to students with disabilities. We will examine several activities presented in the book entitled Let the Games Begin!, as well as one activity presented at LOEX 2013, and suggest modifications to these activities. Activities from these sources are widely available to members of the profession and represent types of activities frequently used in library instruction.

Most librarians will encounter students with disabilities. According to the U. S. Department of Education, 88% of all institutions of higher education enroll students with disabilities. Nearly all, 99%, public two and four year institutions enroll students with disabilities (Rau and Lewis 3-4). A librarian may not always be aware that students with disabilities are present, but most librarians will encounter students with disabilities during their careers. Failure to consider the needs of students with disabilities in instruction sessions can lead to student not being able to access vital information. Library instruction sessions are often designed to encourage students to use the library in the future. A student who is unable to fully participate in classroom activities in the library may feel unwelcome in the library as a whole.

Review of Literature

Alienation

People with disabilities throughout history have experienced alienation in various degrees despite the well acknowledged need of all humans to feel a part of the social group. Unfortunately, such alienation may cause a person with a disability to experience anxiety and consequently reduced self-esteem and self-belief (Agarwal). Other authors have echoed this by saying that such alienation and related treatment causes a sense of isolation (Henderson) and a sense of not belonging (Brown et al.).

Providing Opportunity and Engagement

To remediate such historical alienation, providing equal opportunity to succeed in school and consequently in the workplace have been consistent themes (Wright) throughout the literature. One

approach to providing such opportunity is to emphasize the importance and need for accommodating student learning styles (Sahlen and Lehmann). Another approach is to increase the student's sense of engagement and connectedness to their educational environment, which can lead to academic success (Upadyaya and Salmela-Aro).

Modifying Information Literacy Classroom Activities

To accommodate the learning styles of students with disabilities (necessitated by their disability) as well as to engage and to instill a sense of connectedness in such students, Henderson advocates that “teachers should . . . try to understand the classroom conditions that may negatively affect students . . .” (192) and recognize individual and variant styles of learning and try to adapt teaching methods to fit them” (193). As for literature on information literacy classroom games, there are several; however, a search for information literacy games that are modified for students with disabilities failed to return any results.

Accommodating Students Satisfies the Law

Accommodating student learning styles not only facilitates pedagogical goals but also helps satisfy *The Rehabilitation Act* (Sahlen and Lehmann). More specifically, “. . . Section 504 of this act requires schools at both the secondary and postsecondary level to provide necessary accommodations for students with disabilities” (Cawthon and Cole 113).

Modifying Classroom Activities Benefits All

It is significant to note that though the above literature may focus on people with disabilities, there is from time to time a reminder to all that we all have connections to people with disabilities and if we do not have a disability now, we may at any time experience a disability. With time, the chance of having a disability almost becomes certain. “Disability is, after all, an identity that touches everyone . . .” (Fox 47).

Activities, Problems and Modifications

Online Jigsaw Puzzles

In this exercise, online jigsaw puzzles are used to teach students about constructing proper citations. (Porter) The students are asked to put a puzzle together to reveal a correctly formatted citation. This activity would be difficult to impossible for students with visual impairments or limited use of their hands. The muscle control required for precise alignment of objects with a mouse would pose a challenge to students with limited use of their hands. A person with a visual impairment may not be able to see puzzle pieces in enough detail to match pieces together. The online component would remove any tactile sensation. Also this program would not be compatible with screen readers and may not respond well to magnification. It would be difficult to modify this activity for students with disabilities. However, if the instructor knows there are no disabled students in the class then the activity would present no problems.

Library's Best Beach Ball

This activity is essentially a library scavenger hunt. (McDevitt and Stillwell) A beach ball is tossed to students. Students then pick their library location to investigate based on where their right thumb lands. Students then investigate a location or service in the library and report their findings to their classmates.

Library scavenger hunts in general present some challenges. Navigating new spaces can be difficult for students with mobility or visual disability. Signage is often designed for people with average vision. All of this can be more problematic if students are working in teams and the game is competitive. Catching a thrown object can be very difficult for students with visual or motor impairments.

This activity can be modified for students with disabilities. Offer students a brief walking tour before they go to their areas. This can be very brief because you are relying on students to fill in the bulk of the information. If there is a student in the class who feels it is necessary, offer an individual walking tour to help them navigate more successfully before the class meets. A student may not feel comfortable participating, and should be offered a 1 on 1 alternative. Don't use a beach ball. Draw places out of a hat

or use a list randomizer to assign students to teams to investigate services. You can find one at RANDOM.ORG.

Library Quest

Library Quest requires teams of four students to use library resources to answer questions. (Ellis and Falcone) The creator of this activity suggests projecting the rules and using large sticky notes to record answers. This activity also requires the use of computers in the classroom, which may not have appropriate adaptive technology for students with print, visual or mobility disabilities.

A few modifications make this activity much more accessible to disabled students. Have at least one printed copy of the rules that students can hold and read the rules out loud. Read the answers on the answer sheets out loud. Be familiar with the adaptive setting available on all computers and ready to deploy them as needed. Windows and Mac both have built in voice over and magnification and can modify the mouse controls.

One Minute Paper

This is a fairly common exercise in which students are asked to write a very brief response about what went well, what didn't go so well and what they learned during the instruction session.

This is a fairly low risk activity. However, students with mobility or visual impairments may find writing on paper or using a non-adapted computer difficult.

Be prepared to accept a student's submission later if needed. Be familiar with adaptive technology available in any computer lab you are using.

YouTube Detectives

Students watch a YouTube video to develop a research question. (Villa) They then use popular and scholarly sources to evaluate the information presented in the YouTube video. Unfortunately, many, if not most, YouTube videos do not include closed captioning. Also the quality of YouTube videos often means that details are lost when going to full screen. Some videos could even cause seizures in student with light sensitive epilepsy. There are several options to make this exercise more accessible to students with disabilities. If the instructor is working from a set list of videos, make sure that at least one of the options is closed captioned and/or the information that would help students form a research question is available to that student. Alternatively, allow students to use another popular format such as researching the veracity of information presented in a meme, web page or Facebook post.

Photo Comic Book Storytelling

Students write a script and then use an iPad to take photos and a comic app to create a photo based comic book telling their story of the research process and/or describe various features of the library (Upson and Mudd). Use of the iPad and app can be problematic for students with visual or mobility disabilities. If students are working in teams, any student unable to use the iPad or app could be assigned to another part of the project. Students could also be prompted to tell a story about their experience or the library in a way that works for them. This would also be beneficial for students who do not like the comic book genre.

Game Modification Rule of Thumb

A employment-based rehabilitation placement rule of thumb is to try to place a person with a disability back in the same job she or he had with accommodations if needed; if that is not feasible, then try to place the person with the same employer in a different job with accommodations if needed; and if that is also not feasible, then place the person with a different employer with accommodations if needed. Applying this rule of thumb to a classroom game, the instructor should try to accommodate a student with a disability (such as allowing extra time or providing large print instructions); if this is not feasible, then the instructor should change the game to accommodate the student; and if this is not possible, the instructor should find a different game that allows the student to fully participate.

Conclusion

Gamification of library instruction has the potential to present instructional barriers to students with disabilities. However, with some pre-planning most popular interactive activities used in library instruction can be successfully modified, removing barriers and engaging students with disabilities. We recommend that future research on interactive learning in library instruction focus on outcomes for and experiences of students with disabilities to ensure that librarians are serving all students equitably.

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