

Lived and Learned Experience with Accessible and Inclusive Pedagogy

Angie Brunk

I have always walked in two different worlds. Because I am low vision, not blind, I know the joy of seeing and capturing the perfect image in my digital camera's viewfinder. I know the joy of teaching a dance class. I know what it's like to be perceived as abled. Because I am low vision, not "normal," I know the frustration and sometimes humiliation of a teacher caring more about their seating plans or their favorite activity than my ability to participate fully in class. I know the frustration of missing parts of presentations because the presenter did not explain visual content on a slide. I know what it feels like to have an instructor ignore accessibility needs that you have clearly articulated. I know the humiliation of people commenting on the appearance of my eyes. I know what it is to be underestimated or not taken seriously because of preconceived notions about my capabilities.¹

In the course of my professional life, I have been involved in library instruction, taught journalism classes, and even taught a recreational dance class. I have served on ADA committees at three different universities. I have learned a great deal from all of this. I have made mistakes along the way. I have not always lived up to my ideal of making accessibility my first priority. I do not have all the answers and will not use this chapter to tell you what to do.

I will offer you a different perspective on creating accessible instruction. I will introduce you to the unique challenges of library instruction as it relates to accessibility. I will walk through all the gray areas and possible solutions. Each institution and librarian is unique. It is not possible to offer the ultimate solution to accessible

library instruction. Instead, I will offer my experience and my perspective to help my fellow librarians develop their own professional philosophy on accessibility.

Let's get a little more specific about my biases to start. I am a strong proponent of the social or social justice model of disability. I believe this model best fits the values of most libraries as well. In a nutshell, the social justice model strives to make the experience for disabled people as similar to the experience of temporarily able-bodied people as possible. I say temporarily able-bodied because most of us will experience disability due to injury, illness, or aging. When defining solutions to problems, the dignity and autonomy of the individual is as important as function! That means students, with appropriate support, should be expected to meet the same academic standards as their nondisabled peers. Yes, this does mean that if a little tough love might be appropriate for a nondisabled student, it would be appropriate for a disabled student. In other words, the fact that Sally uses a wheelchair does not change the fact that beginning your search for materials twelve hours before your paper is due is really not a good idea. It does not change the fact that many students, including many of us reading this chapter, had to learn this lesson the hard way.

Perhaps a slight detour to unpack language is in order here. You might have noticed that I use identity-first language. That is to say, I use phrases like "disabled student." You might have been told that person-first language, such as "student with a disability," is preferred. Outside of North America, use of person-first language is rare. Within North America, it is a controversial topic, and a Google search would yield many varying opinions. I prefer identity-first language and will use it in most cases. When I am the one speaking, I hope my humanity does not need to be explicitly stated. However, when speaking with the institutional voice, person-first language may still be appropriate. This is one of those cases where you need to know your community.

The last of my biases that are relevant here is that I believe library instruction is primarily library marketing. While many of us have grand visions of being integrated into the curriculum and scaffolding our instruction, let's not lose sight of reality. Some of us do get to teach for-credit information literacy classes. I have found the experience very rewarding when I have had that opportunity. However, just as many of us know we need to be prepared to deliver our dog-and-pony show with short notice. (I think one hour notice has been my shortest so far, but I'm only midway through my career; I'm sure there will something even tighter.) We are banging our heads against a wall to get the professor who assigns a research paper to give us just one class session to talk to their students about library resources. Sometimes that professor gives us only fifteen minutes. We cannot get all of our content to stick in that time. The most important thing we can do with that time is make students more comfortable with the library and more likely to use reference help.

Whether we are willing to admit it or not, I think most of us know that instruction is really marketing. We try everything we can think of to make it fun and exciting.

We even try to make it a game. Unfortunately, making it fun can make it inaccessible or highlight a student's disability in a way they are uncomfortable with. This is not good marketing.

Let's fly up to the 30,000-foot level to look at instruction strategy. (My apologies to anyone afraid of heights.) For most of us, classroom instruction is only a small part of our instruction strategy. We're embedded in online classes. We produce LibGuides and tutorials. We've probably even done a few YouTube videos. Many of us have created a LibGuide for every single instruction session or class, even though much of the information is a duplication of the departmental guide. But is that really the best use of our time? Let me be clear, creating accessible content from the design process forward is much less time-consuming than fixing content that is not accessible. However, creating accessible content does require more time and effort than just creating content. If accessibility is to be a priority for your library, the focus needs to be on creating accessible content. In short, you need to give up on a librarian's penchant for reinventing the wheel! If you are a department head or otherwise "in charge" of instruction, examine your policies and expectations. Is there really a reason to have Your University branded tutorial on Academic Search Complete, or would an accessible tutorial made by another university or even the vendor serve your purpose just as well?

Now, let's drop to 10,000 feet and talk about content strategy. Think like a marketer here. You wouldn't expect your students to know about a library event if your only marketing strategy was to stick some posters up on the bulletin board in the union. Creating accessible content is no different. Adaptive strategies used by disabled people are complex and unique to the individual. Sometimes, they can be contradictory. A blind or visually impaired student may not be able to get key concepts from a video. For that student, a screen reader or magnification-friendly text-heavy document may be the preferred format. Don't get me wrong, I love playing with new technology as much as anybody, but sometimes the simple Luddite format is the most accessible format.

Let's drop down further and hover just above the classroom, both in meatspace and in cyberspace. Let's start with what happens when a student needs a reasonable accommodation to complete academic work. I cannot tell you exactly how the process functions at your institution, but I can summarize my experience as both a student needing accommodation and a faculty member deeply involved in accessibility at several institutions. The student will meet with the university official or department responsible for student accommodations and present the required documentation to substantiate their diagnosis and need for accommodations. The student's accommodation will be documented and communicated to all faculty members teaching that particular student each semester. The faculty member will not be informed of the student's specific diagnosis or disability. The instructor is not to offer additional accommodations to the student. I would add, though, that nothing

is preventing the instructor from realizing something that might benefit the student and offer the same opportunity to the entire class. I hope you can begin to see some of the challenges unique to libraries and the gray areas I have been alluding to. We will discuss them in greater detail in a bit.

Let us now plant our feet on terra firma in the classroom. One of the unique challenges of library instruction, and one of the greatest for creating an accessible classroom, is, chances are, you will not know if you have a disabled student in class. Even if you ask, the instructor may not be able to provide useful information about student needs. That does not, however, mean there is nothing you can do. Assuming you have ample notice of an instruction session, you can ask the professor to forward an e-mail to the class. Introduce yourself and explain the purpose of the class and any activities you have planned. If there are any areas of your library that are not easily accessible, your e-mail should include that information as well as how disabled students could still access these services. This might also be a good time to remind students that library records and conversations with librarians are protected by state and local laws. Ask students to contact you if they have questions or concerns about any activities you have planned or questions about the library in general. While directly asking any students that come forward about their disability is probably not advisable, you can let the student know that you are a safe person and eager to hear any information they wish to share that would help you provide a more supportive environment.

Meanwhile back in reality where you have not had the luxury of reaching out to the class for one of many, many reasons, you can still have a positive classroom experience even if you notice there is a student who uses a wheelchair and your plans called for students to go to that one area of your library that isn't really wheelchair accessible. Perhaps it might be best to skip that area this time. The most important thing is to be flexible and be sensitive. When you walk into the classroom, have a plan for modifying any activities for various disabilities. It can be very tempting to use a new cool app you've heard about for instruction. Let's assume you've overcome the technical and digital divide issues by putting the app on library-supplied devices for each team or student. Is that app accessible? Do you know how to activate any accessibility features or make it play nicely with the built-in accessibility features on the device? Could you quickly and discreetly help a disabled student use the accessibility features? Until you can answer "Yes!" to all of those questions, it might be best to find another tool that meets your needs. When you are planning activities, use task analysis to determine the physical and cognitive demands of an activity, and plan modifications to meet various needs. Dale Monobe and I have explored modification of active learning exercises in depth in two papers. "Don't Make the Kid Who Is Blind Play Dodge Ball" is available as an open-source document, and "Level Up! Making Games Accessible" is available in another ACRL anthology.²

Whether you are familiar with the concept or not, you've probably been using task analysis on at least an informal basis in your professional life. Task analysis is

breaking a task into all of its many steps. Think about all the physical and cognitive demands next time you play your favorite card game. Can you shuffle by hand? Can you comfortably hold a fanned-out hand of cards? (There are devices available to assist, suggesting this is common problem.) Can you remember all the rules and keep a strategy straight in your head? How difficult was it for you to learn those rules and strategies? Now, think about a time when you were sick or injured. How much more difficult did each of these activities become? A very good and straightforward guide to task analysis is available at usability.gov.³

Now back to those gray areas I've been hinting at. What if a student is uncomfortable with your planned walking tour or scavenger hunt? Is your priority making the student comfortable or making sure they meet the same standards as other students? While there may be a time where standards matter, I would argue that in most cases, the student's comfort, dignity, and autonomy are more important. Questions of standards versus dignity always bring me back to my high school marching band days. I'm glad I was a high school student in the early 90s. Like band nerds in many small towns in the US, being a part of band meant participating in marching band, whether I wanted to or not. As I'm sure you can imagine, trying to hold a tight formation while playing trombone is challenging if you have neither depth perception nor peripheral vision. Today, the "solution" is to have the visually impaired musician literally led around the field by a sighted student. I found the exercise humiliating the one time I tried it and might have given up on music had I been forced to continue. It is fortunate my band teacher and I were able to decide that field marching really wasn't for me. I was still able to participate fully in music and maintain my dignity. If the disability rights movement has a prime directive, it is "Nothing about us without us." Disabled people should always be consulted about accommodations. Sometimes not participating in a particular activity is the right accommodation for that person.

Let's drill down to a more practical example. You have scheduled an instruction session for a first-year experience (FYE) class. The planned activities for this class session are a brief walking tour of the library and a scavenger hunt in small teams. All students will complete a worksheet for the class. You are approached by a student who is uncomfortable with the activity because navigating a new space is made more difficult by their disability. (There are several disabilities that could apply.) The student could have several concerns. If this is a team event, they may be concerned about whether or not they are able to do their "fair share" of the work for the team. They may not be "out" about their disability and do not want their classmates to learn about it in this way. I've certainly felt both of these things at various points. There are several ways to make the student feel more comfortable. Perhaps this student could fully participate in the class exercise if they are given a slower paced private tour before the class meeting. This private tour might even help the student feel more confident and like they are an asset to the team rather than a liability. Another solution might be for the student to do the scavenger hunt worksheet at their own

pace outside of class. The student refusing to do the worksheet is a whole other matter and should be treated like any student refusing to do the worksheet. The aim of this exercise is really to get the student more comfortable with the library. Rigid requirements for how the student obtains the information to fill out the worksheet will not accomplish that goal. Demonstrating that librarians are flexible and willing to meet students where they are at will accomplish that goal.

Instruction planning is about priorities. If accessibility is a priority, then other priorities need to shift. While one librarian can make a difference by promoting accessibility in their practice, creating an accessible experience for all students requires the cooperation of the entire instruction program, including any departments heads or others setting goals and priorities for library instruction. Creating quality, accessible content takes time. It may mean there is less time to produce more content. However, prioritizing accessibility often creates a better experience for all. If you have a smart phone, you are already using a technology originally designed for disabled people. As much as we may curse predictive text, many of us still rely on it when composing text messages. If you use curb cuts, ramps, or elevators, you are using assistive and adaptive technology. Yes, accessible design does take more time, but it is good design and thoughtful design that we all use. Prioritizing accessibility can help you meet several goals shared by many libraries. Accessible design prioritizes human needs, which helps us meet student needs and increase library use. As much as I do believe sharing my perspective is important, hearing one disabled person's experience is not enough. I've included a few of my favorite writers and blogs to get you started.⁴ Now, settle down by the fire and get cozy with some gray areas!

Notes

1. Paul K. Longmore, "Why I Burned My Book," in *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 231–60.
2. Angie Brunk and Dale Monobe, "Don't Make the Kid Who Is Blind Play Dodge Ball: Making Interactive Library Instruction Accessible to Students with Disabilities" (presentation, Brick and Click Libraries: An Academic Library Symposium, Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, MO, November 1, 2013), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED545375.pdf>; Angie Brunk and Dale Monobe, "Level Up! Making Games Accessible," in *Games and Gamification in Academic Libraries*, ed. Stephanie Crowe and Eva Sclipa (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2020), 49–61.
3. US General Services Administration, "Task Analysis," How To and Tools: Methods, User Research Methods, accessed December 8, 2021, <https://www.usability.gov/how-to-and-tools/methods/task-analysis.html>.
4. Mike Ervin, "Blogger: User Profile: Smart Ass Cripple," *Smart Ass Cripple* (blog), accessed December 8, 2021, <https://www.blogger.com/profile/13017074589165581514>; Kim Sauder, "About—crippledscholar," *crippledscholar* (blog), accessed December 8, 2021, <https://crippledscholar.com/about/>; Elin Williams, "About—My Blurred World," *My Blurred World* (blog), accessed December 8, 2021, <https://myblurredworld.com/about-2/>.

Bibliography

- Brunk, Angie, and Dale Monobe. "Don't Make the Kid Who Is Blind Play Dodge Ball: Making Interactive Library Instruction Accessible to Students with Disabilities." Presentation, Brick and Click Libraries: An Academic Library Symposium, Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, MO, November 1, 2013. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED545375.pdf>
- , "Level Up! Making Games Accessible." In *Games and Gamification in Academic Libraries*, edited by Stephanie Crowe and Eva Sclipa, 49–61. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2020.
- Ervin, Mike. "Blogger: User Profile: Smart Ass Cripple." *Smart Ass Cripple* (blog). Accessed December 8, 2021. <https://www.blogger.com/profile/13017074589165581514>.
- Longmore, Paul K. "Why I Burned My Book." In *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability*, 231–60. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003.
- Sauder, Kim. "About—crippledscholar." *crippledscholar* (blog). Accessed December 8, 2021. <https://crippledscholar.com/about/>.
- US General Services Administration. "Task Analysis." How To and Tools: Methods; User Research Methods. Accessed December 8, 2021. <https://www.usability.gov/how-to-and-tools/methods/task-analysis.html>.
- Williams, Elin. "About—My Blurred World." *My Blurred World* (blog). Accessed December 8, 2021. <https://myblurredworld.com/about-2/>.

