TLA Talks: Uniting All Makerspace Patrons through Accessible Practices

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Overview

• In this session, I will discuss accessibility in library makerspaces. This session is based on the results from an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant, and I’ll share with you the ways we gathered input. The disability community is unfortunately often overlooked when considering public library spaces, but this study sought their feedback in order to improve public spaces and services.

• By building more inclusive, diverse, and welcoming spaces, libraries can meet the needs of all members of their community. We’ll cover practical and impactful ways in which to improve library spaces.
Outline

• Study Design Overview
  • Background (or, why focus on accessibility in makerspaces?)
  • How we recruited participants
  • How we collected and analyzed data

• What Barriers Exist

• What Matters for Creating an Accessible Makerspace
  • Access to information
  • Staff knowledge and dispositions
  • Inclusion
A Few Notes First...

- The study was focused on adults in public libraries, but many of the findings apply broadly.
- I am an able bodied, neurotypical researcher. I’ve done my best to represent adults with disabilities, but do not consider myself any more knowledgeable than those with personal experiences with disability.
Study Design: Background

• Disability Broadly
  • Social Model of Disability
  • Disability is multi-faceted
  • Think about principles of Universal Design

• Disability in Public Libraries
  • ASGCLA recommended incorporating UD
  • Individual accommodations still must be made; disclosure can be an issue

• Inclusion and Disability in Makerspaces
  • Makerspaces allow for tinkering in low-pressure environment
  • Have shown potential in long-term care facilities contributing to residents’ senses of competence, autonomy, relatedness, and identity (Carucci & Toyama, 2019).
  • Accessibility is a top priority, but it’s not often built in
Study Design: Data Collection

• Three groups of participants
• Advisory Board Pilot Test
• Options for participation
  • Focus groups, interviews, survey
• Accessible practices built into data collection
Study Design: Data Analysis

• Inductive and deductive coding
• Codes grouped into theme
• Themes shared with advisory board to establish transferability
• Member checks completed with participants
What Barriers Exist

- Barriers related to the library building itself
What Barriers Exist

• Barriers within the makerspace: Physical space
What Barriers Exist

- Barriers within the makerspace: The sensory environment
What Barriers Exist

- Barriers within the makerspace: Related to events
What Barriers Exist

• Barriers within the makerspace: Related to fine motor skills
What Barriers Exist

• Barriers within the makerspace: Related to technology
What Matters in Creating an Accessible Makerspace

- Access to Information
What Matters in Creating an Accessible Makerspace

- Creating accessible spaces
What Matters in Creating an Accessible Makerspace

• Creating inclusive spaces
• Inclusive, as derived from the American Library Association (ALA)’s Library Bill of Rights, refers to a space in which all are treated with fairness and respect, all are valued as individuals, all have equal access, and all are given the opportunity to contribute to the library’s success.
What Matters in Creating an Accessible Makerspace

- Creating inclusive spaces through fair and respectful treatment
What Matters in Creating an Accessible Makerspace

• Creating inclusive spaces by valuing all as unique individuals
What Matters in Creating an Accessible Makerspace

- Creating inclusive spaces through equal access to materials and services
What Matters in Creating an Accessible Makerspace

• Inclusive practices to build community
Recommendations for Practice

To reduce physical barriers:
- Place makerspace in a library location with accessible parking
- Place makerspace in an easy-to-reach area of the library
- Allow room for multiple wheelchairs to move around comfortably
- Provide chairs and seating that accommodate all body sizes
- Ensure that overhead power cords are the right height. Are they high enough that they are not a danger to patrons with low vision? Are they low enough that all can reach?
- Ensure that cabinets and drawers are easy to open and reachable
- Ensure that materials and projects are available for those who are unable to stand for extended periods of time
- Ensure that materials and projects are available for those who have limb differences or use of only one hand
- Provide items that are big enough for all to grasp and utilize, even those with limited fine motor control
Recommendations for Practice

To reduce sensory concerns:
- Reduce clutter and unnecessary visuals
- Avoid timed lighting
- Replace fluorescent lighting
- Implement an air filtration system to mitigate smells from materials
- Limit or ban use of materials with strong smells
- Place makerspace in an area of the library away from other sensory distractions
Recommendations for Practice

To support technology use:
- Test technological programs for audio feedback and compatibility with JAWS
- Provide an ergonomic mouse and keyboard for laptops; do not just rely on trackpads
- Provide staff support for manipulating technology
Recommendations for Practice

To effectively share information:
- Provide instructions in multiple formats
- Share information in advance when possible
- Have clocks on the wall
- Provide information about timing and schedules
- Include messaging about availability of accommodations through signage and marketing materials
Recommendations for Practice

To support learning activities and events:
- Complete projects prior to demonstrating them for patrons to identify potential barriers
- Encourage multiple approaches for using tools and making
- Be adaptable if something does not work as planned
- Encourage questions and be approachable
- Keep makerspace activities low pressure; don’t introduce assessment or competition
- Keep the focus on developing skills rather than completing a project
- Limit attendance for programs and events
- Avoid long events
- Avoid packing many things into a scheduled event
- Provide space for patrons during wait times between activities
Recommendations for Practice

To support community building:
- Provide opportunities for collaborative projects
- Build inclusive practices into all making activities and events rather than providing “disability friendly” options
Thank you!
Questions?

Let’s stay in touch:

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