Accessibility and Diversity in Instructional Design: Making Strides toward Education for All

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Abstract

With the growing field of instructional design and the sprint toward equality for all, we have come to a crashing point. How do we design in such a way that we incorporate the needs, interests, and rights of all learners? How do we teach disabled students in the same classroom as those who are not? How do we teach native and non-native speakers together? How do we stimulate visual learners while at the same time accommodating visually-impaired learners? And the same for auditory learners vs. hearing impaired learners? In this paper we explore recent literature on different types of diversity in the classroom and the research that they include so that we can brainstorm how to answer these questions and continue to make strides toward equal learning opportunities for all.

Keywords: learning, instructional, disabled, language, hearing, deaf, blind, visual, diversity, accessibility

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Introduction

When we get married, we subconsciously change parts of us to either match or complement our significant other, and that's a big part of making a marriage work. Just follow me here. Throughout the years, as we grow and change for each other, we gradually make each other better. Keeping that in mind, take a moment to contemplate this: many, many years ago, education married technology. Putting aside the fact that technology has a similar relationship with more than just education, education is wholeheartedly dependent on its spouse, technology.

Understanding the complementary and co-dependent relationship between technology and education, what does that mean for the relatively recent boom in accessibility and diversity in education? As society becomes more and more accepting and encouraging of rangingly diverse people, these same people feel a motivational push toward education as a first step into productive society. Technology seems to be okay with this new player in education's life, because every day we see more and more assistive and user-friendly technologies being developed and implemented into the learning environment. Let's look at a few.

America is Melting Pot

Welcome to reality, in case you've never heard this ever-popular phrase. America is a melting pot. "Melting pot?" You ask? We are a society of diverse people in more ways than one, but the most common reference here is ethnicity and culture. Take a high school in California, for example. Their pot consists of 46.89% Hispanic people, 25.47% white people, 18.75% Black

people, 6% Asian people, and 1.22% Native American and Pacific Islander people. This is the

high school I went to, and the culture I grew up in. Naturally, in a school where the majority is

not white, the learning environment will be different from a primarily white school. This

phenomenon grows throughout the years to more than just the knowingly-diverse California,

and as it spreads across the United States, we will become more than just a melting pot. We

will all become just American.

So what does this have to do with the learning environment? Well until that melting pot

metaphor diminishes, we have many, many cultures to respect and integrate into our

classrooms. A common complaint from students is that their teacher(s) is prejudiced, although

most of the time they are simply ignorant to the cultures and customs they have in their

classrooms. According to Basbay (2014), the best way to welcome the diversity that comes our

way is to educate ourselves, as educators, about these cultures and adapt to them. That is to

say that while we think that our idea of respect and our ideas of learning are the norm, this may

not be the case with a diverse classroom.

Socialization - We All Do it, Right?

Wrong. Or at least, kind of wrong. In most schools, there is a hidden classroom

somewhere filled with intellectually disabled students of all intellectual levels, many of us may

not have even known it was there, or that some of those students don't actually belong in a

pre-school-resembling classroom but were put there because their intellectual abilities were

not as high as the system said they should be. However slowly, we are now seeing an increase

in high-functioning intellectually disabled students joining our classrooms. Based on an

investigation done by Jones and Hensley (2012), a common necessity of intellectually disabled

students is simply opportunities for socialization. Socialization can be incorporated into the classroom in many ways, so there is plenty of freedom to accommodate these students beyond the usual extra time on tests.

How Do You Hear?

Perhaps the most common disabled students to enter into our classrooms as of late are of the hearing impaired population. We hear all the time about ADA compliance laws in school and in the workplace, but it is also something that is required of all government websites, including educational. All school websites have to be ADA compliant—that is, videos must have captions and images must have alternate text—and that is just the beginning of our adaptation to the hearing impaired. Cheesman, Jennings, and Klinger (2013) talk about a software that has been implemented into classrooms in which the professor wears a microphone that can transmit an FM signal to a device that the student wears, giving the student a direct line to the class content without outside interruption. This software is called ClassTalk (p. 142). While the software may not be as helpful to students with complete hearing loss, it may prove very useful to those with certain degrees of hearing impairment.

Conclusion

As our relationships with our diverse society grow, so does the relationship between education and technology, with an understanding for diversity. It is important for us, as educators, to learn about the technologies available to us to help make a smooth transition for diverse students without hindering those we already have. How do we do that? Well, that's up to us each individually and our individual instructional design models, right?

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