Book review

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Walsh, A. (2018). *The librarians' book on teaching through games and play.* Tallinn: Innovative Libraries. pp150. 9781911500070. £19.95. Pbk.

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Andrew Walsh's latest book provides a practical guide to all teaching librarians with an interest in active and playful learning, or those who are simply curious about how to make their information literacy sessions more engaging and dynamic.

The introduction to the book will have many librarians nodding in agreement as Walsh describes his initial frustrations with teaching information literacy (IL) sessions to students who perceived them as being somehow separate from the rest of their academic work. Instead of the students watching how to carry out a database search (and perhaps getting a chance to practice for themselves), Walsh was keen to explore an active learning approach whereby students are learning by exploring, discussing, examining and testing the ideas put to them by their librarian, and then continuing to use these skills outside of the IL classroom. Much of his knowledge he attributes to colleagues and conferences – an important reminder of the need for us all to share knowledge, to network, and to work with colleagues outside our own institutions.

The book briefly explores the theories behind active learning, social constructivism, and learning through games and play. By putting playful learning into a theoretical context, this section could prove helpful when trying to explain to colleagues, academics or senior management the importance of using play when teaching IL.

The section on 'Games and play' (p.15) outlines the different types of play (for example, imaginative play versus games with specific rules), and how different types of play suit different learning outcomes. In brief, the more playful activities allow for student reflection and exploration based on prior knowledge, whereas more structured games suit the introduction of new facts, with students learning through formal rules and progression within the game.

The section on 'Permission to play' (p.23) is a timely reminder to those keen to jump into the next section on creating IL games. Walsh outlines the importance of creating situations whereby students feel comfortable enough to play, to have fun, to take risks. If students are used to a didactic teaching style (where the part they play is a purely passive one) they may feel unsettled and uncomfortable with a sudden transition to game play, and therefore the benefits from playful learning would be immediately lost. It is important to provide students with an environment where they feel "safe" enough to play, to not be judged by peers, to behave differently to the 'norm'. It is the job of the IL librarian to create that environment, and Walsh will later explain how.

The majority of the book is given over to 'Examples of games', providing instructions for the creation of 14 different IL games. Each game has details including the number of players, timings, resources required, the instructions for game play, and if any additional resources are needed (Walsh is happy for these games to be adapted, with just a polite request to cite the original game). Games cover a variety of IL skills, and are adaptable from small groups to lecture theatres, and suit students from FE to postgraduate. Walsh has concentrated on the creation of simple, physical

games, which require little to no budget, and just a small amount of prep time – ideal for small library budgets and busy librarians.

Games include the CRAAP (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy and Purpose) test as a dice game, a playful library induction, referencing games, and using Lego® to promote reflection. Walsh provides full details on this broad range of games, all of which could be adapted to suit a wide range of students and courses.

The next section, 'Playful interventions', takes the reader back to the need to create an environment where students can feel safe to play. Ideas such as playing music as students enter the room, playing familiar childhood games such as 'pass the parcel', blowing bubbles and (playfully) dividing up the class, all help to create a sense of fun and change, shaking up the normal structures of the class, both physically and psychologically. Again, all are simple ideas that could be introduced with little initial outlay in terms of cost or time.

Walsh ends the book with a section on creating your own educational game (starting with the learning objective, rather than the desire to include a game in your teaching), and a section on how to create your own escape room challenge – currently very popular with students (and staff), but it does take a bit more planning.

In this era of students paying high tuition fees, with ever-increasing pressures to achieve high grades in order to secure a graduate role after university, it is common to see students taking fewer and fewer risks in their academic work, for fear that risk-taking may lead to a lower grade. However, it can be argued that educators (not just IL librarians) need to ensure that students use their time in education to take risks, to question, to explore, to challenge, because if they don't feel safe enough to do this within the classroom, then when will they?

In summary, this book is clear, well written and of a very practical nature, which will suit those teaching librarians who are looking for help in introducing (or building on) playful learning activities within their IL sessions. Andrew Walsh is well known for his work on playful learning, and has delivered workshops for librarians on this topic, as well as writing other books of a similar nature. He is a well-respected 'playbrarian' (which Walsh also uses as his Twitter handle), and this book is an invaluable addition to any teaching librarian's bookshelf.