Student mental health: exploring the role of Universal Design for Learning and assistive technology

Kellie Mote

kellie.mote@gmail.com

@KellieMote

College Development Network | Leading Creating Sharing

PDA Advancing Equality and Diversity through Inclusiveness

- SCQF level 9 and SQA accredited

- Dedicated needs assessor pathway: Practising Inclusiveness Through Needs-led Assessment

- Delivered entirely online with live teaching, rich resources and one-to-one mentoring

- Possible to achieve via RPL+ for experience and/or by updating previous qualifications e.g. BRITE; vFILS; vNAP; PDA Inclusiveness

Summary

- Mental health in our professional context
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
- What do we need UDL and AT to do?
- Using your VLE to advance UDL
- Examples of AT supporting students with study difficulties related to their mental health
- Discussion and key take-aways

Some common student concerns

- Managing academic demands
- Anxiety about underachievement or failure
- Coping with self-directed study
- Dealing with social aspects of student life
- Missing important information
- Maintaining focus, concentration and motivation when mental health is compromised

What we need UDL and AT to do

- Reduce or at least not exacerbate anxiety
- Keep students on-track and on-task
- Promote a sense of control
- Enhance productivity and facilitate organisation
- Be flexible enough to adapt to changes
- Maintain or enhance standards
- Benefit tutors as well as students
- Be accessible to all students

Universal Design for Learning

- UDL is a framework for curriculum design that provides flexibility in instructional goals, methods, materials and assessments in order to optimise learning opportunities for all individuals.

- At UDL's core is an appreciation for the variability and diversity of learners. It guides educators to identify potential barriers and to reduce these with a more flexible curriculum with alternative paths to success.

Rose, D.H., Gravel, J.W. & Gordon, D.T. (2014) **Universal Design for Learning** *in* The SAGE Handbook of Special Education, Editor: Lani Florian

UDL enables learning environments to provide:

- Multiple means of representation
- Multiple means of action and expression
- Multiple means of engagement

UDL anticipates and integrates well with assistive technology

Discover more about UDL in postsecondary education at http://udloncampus.cast.org

VLEs: modes of representation

- PowerPoints, handouts and glossaries
- Information about expectations and key dates
- Prioritised task and reading lists
- Resources of varying levels of complexity
- Links to podcasts and subtitled videos summarizing key concepts

Fovet, F. (2018) Making do with what we have: using the built-in functions of LMS to implement UDL. The AHEAD Journal 7 (pp 7-17).

Modes of action and expression

- [Moderated] chatrooms (!)
- Quizzes and polls
- Accepting assignments in various formats
- Ease of submitting assignments
- Informal feedback on assignment planning (!)
- Organised – no messy paper mountains

Fovet, F. (2018) Making do with what we have: using the built-in functions of LMS to implement UDL. The AHEAD Journal 7 (pp 7-17).

Modes of engagement

- Opportunities for curriculum co-creation
- Reciprocal dialogue with students
- Contributions from guest speakers
- ePortfolios and wikis (!)
- Interdisciplinary approach showing where course content sits in the big picture

Fovet, F. (2018) Making do with what we have: using the built-in functions of LMS to implement UDL. The AHEAD Journal 7 (pp 7-17).

The role of assistive technology

- Is **not a solution in isolation** but part of a suite of supports useful to students e.g. mentoring, personal tutors, trauma-informed approaches to service provision and teaching
- Requires **skilled needs assessment** and opportunities for evaluation
- Should **not exacerbate** stress or workload
- Requires **reliable support and training**

AT through the lens of mental health

- Note that there is little peer-reviewed research evidence on the effectiveness of AT in postsecondary education generally

- There is a need for evidence and to collate honest feedback from students on their experiences

- What follows are ideas that may be worth consideration based on reflective practise

Speech recognition e.g. Dragon

- Can boost productivity and confidence
- Overcomes 'blank page' anxiety
- Might the level of engagement help to diminish the impact of intrusive thoughts, rumination, or getting into repetitive loops when writing?
- Note that using speech recognition has a high cognitive load and makes demands on working memory – carefully assess whether a student is a suitable candidate for SR

Managing recordings and slides

- Taking good notes is a particular challenge for many students

- Audio recordings can be difficult to manage and make meaningful use of

- Software like **Notetalker** and **Sonocent AudioNotetaker** enable students to organise recordings, slides, images and notes all in one place – highlighting important information

- Helps with revision and essay planning

Discussion and future thoughts

- Examples of solutions or innovative practice?

- As practitioners, what support do you need?

- How might we capture the student experience and generate evidence of impact?

- Find out more at the AT exhibition today: ask for demos, evaluation licenses, online training, and make useful contacts.

Relevant and flexible CPD

PDA in Advancing Equality and Diversity through Inclusiveness (incl. needs assessor's pathway) and the Inclusive Practitioner Series (IP is free to access) professionallearning.collegedevelopmentnetwork.ac.uk

Needs Assessor Update Series (webinar recordings)

1. Motivational Interviewing

2. Solution Focused Approaches Part 1

3. Solution Focused Approaches Part 2