

Incorporation of Virtual Tour Guides Into Tourism Class as an Online Engagement and Retention Strategy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has been evidenced as a powerful framework for the inclusion of diverse learners in the K-12 sector. Little attention has been paid, however, to the sectors of further education, adult education, vocational training, and all other alternate forms secondary education can take beyond the mainstream or conventionally delivered grades 11 and 12. Yet, it is clear that UDL may have a greater impact in these alternate paths within which learner diversity is significant. This chapter examines the use of UDL within a vocational end of secondary alternate pathway program. It explores specific UDL strategies within a tourism course. The chapter discusses the implications of this case study within the wider global discourse on UDL integration in the classroom. It showcases a reflection around UDL in vocational secondary settings which is growing but still poorly documented in the literature.

CONTEXT

Interest in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a framework for the inclusion of diverse learners is increasing rapidly in the K-12 sector (Rao, 2015; Unal et al., 2022). One area where this momentum has not been as noticeable is the vocational alternate secondary sector. In most jurisdictions around the world, despite growing insistence on mainstreaming, there exists alternate secondary pathways which involve a degree of vocational training and empower learners with real world skills for rapid entry to the employment market (Adamec, 2023; Guo & Wang, 2020). There is little literature documenting the use of UDL in these alternate vocational secondary pathways, and yet it is quite clear that UDL would be of particular relevance for these learner groups which are inherently diverse and usually experiencing barriers in traditional formats of teaching and learning (PwC, 2018; Roisin et al., 2022; Kelly et al., 2022). This chapter explores, through a case study, the use of UDL to engage learners in vocational secondary programs. It hopes to lay the ground for a specific and rich scholarship to emerge around this topic in order to fill a very noticeable gap in practice and research.

The adoption and integration of UDL in community college programs has begun over the last decade and there is therefore a fair amount of emerging scholarship relating to UDL in pre-university settings, as well as in trades and vocational programs at post-secondary level (McGuire & Scott, 2006; Hromalik et al., 2021). However, there is also an increasing amount of vocational and trades instruction that is happening at pre-postsecondary level (Kreisman & Stange, 2020; Matthewes & Ventura, 2022). In some countries these routes are sometimes formally described as the further education sector (Bowers, 2023; Eurydice, 2023). There is, to date, very little evidence or literature discussing the use of UDL in such alternate secondary programs, particularly those with a heavy trade or apprenticeship focus (Quirke & McCarthy, 2020).

The School-College-Work-Initiative discussed in this chapter is a program offering alternate pathways for struggling Grade 12 students to complete remaining credits towards their high school diplomas in Ontario, Canada. The Intro to Tourism course offering is considered a 'dual credit' - diploma and college credits - partnership between a large Ontario college and local school boards in a School Within A College (SWAC) setting. Any experiential learning initiative in alternate settings in the secondary sector is likely to experience certain tensions. It may sometimes be challenging to present in engaging, motivating, and meaningful ways employment related courses to students who may be feeling at risk of failure or exclusion, and may already have a tenuous relationship with or commitment to secondary education. These tensions were tangible in the Intro to Tourism course, but the challenges increased when instruction had to be further modified during the COVID pandemic.

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