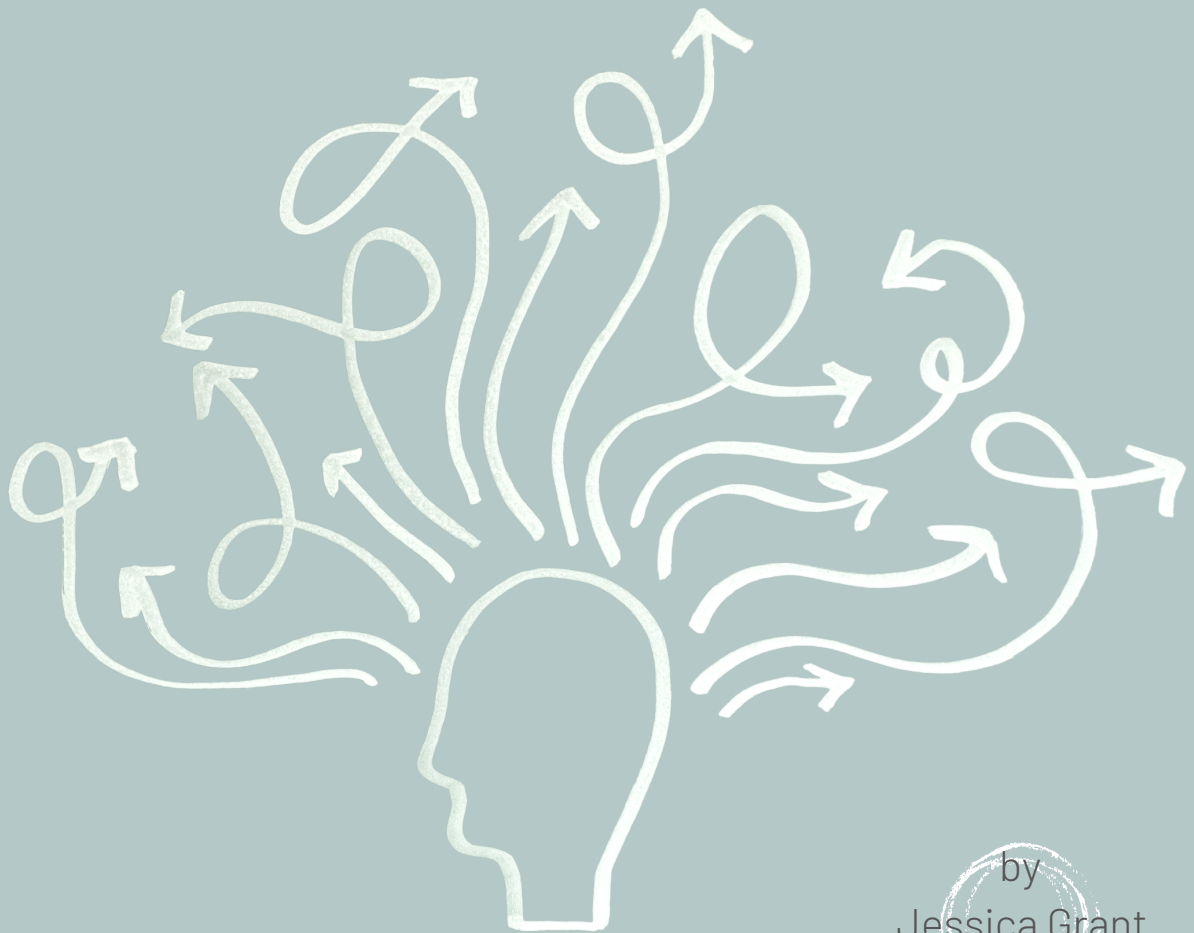


SUPPORTS IN ONLINE LEARNING

FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Education is not
preparation for life;
education is life itself.

JOHN DEWEY



by
Jessica Grant



1 Introduction

PAGE 03-04



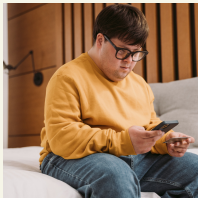
2 Learning Challenges

PAGE 05



3 Physical Challenges

PAGE 06



4 Cognitive Challenges

PAGE 07



5 Supporting Online Learners with Disabilities

PAGE 08



6 Online with ADHD

PAGE 09



7 Resources, Attributions + References

PAGE 10 -12

CONTENTS

inside | online learning



INTRODUCTION

MDDE 621 - Online Teaching in DE + Training
Assignment 1
Jessica Grant, AU Student Number: 3572789
Professor: Dr. Bainbridge



During the global pandemic students and parents needed to learn to adapt to learning online. For many students and parents this was a challenging adjustment.

Learners with disabilities were especially affected by the transition from classroom to online learning. As pointed out by Tony Bates, (Resources, 2021) One size does not fit all in learning and teaching and each student needs to be treated individually.

While some students with disabilities and their support teams struggled to transition from the classroom to online learning, some have chosen not to return to the classroom and remain learning online.

Among this group, are students that have found the barriers associated to their learning in the classroom have been either lessened or diminished.

During the pandemic, many students with disabilities and their families found they were further denied access to inclusive education for various circumstances. These include lack of or limited access to the internet and computers, interruptions in instruction, and cessation of specialized support.

INTRODUCTION



Students with disabilities and their families felt marginalized and disenfranchised by the virtual instruction being offered by the schools during the COVID-19 global pandemic. (Porter, S.G. et al, 2021).

Even in the homes of students with disabilities equipped with adequate internet access absenteeism increased. Teachers considered these students as high-risk for chronic absenteeism. This was due to their families feeling marginalized and disenfranchised by the virtual instruction and support being offered by the schools during the pandemic.

Educators are discovering that through applying social

constructivist learning theories to online learning environments they can incorporate strategies including; personalization, collaboration and authenticity to overcome barriers and engage students with disabilities. (Porter.S.G. et al, 2021).

There are both pros and cons to learning in an online environment for students with disabilities. With support, there are an abundance of resources available and learners can thrive in a virtual environment.

LEARNING CHALLENGES

"DESPITE BEING FACED WITH CHALLENGES, IT DOES NOT MEAN THESE INDIVIDUALS CANNOT MEET CURRICULAR GOALS AND STANDARDS AND PERFORM WELL IN ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL LIVES". (BARDEN, 2017)

Disabled students are classified into 8 categories according to their disabilities. With the advent of eLearning, education is no longer a laborious work for disabled students. Technology is also playing a pivotal role in providing the perfect learning solutions to the disabled students.

The 8 categories learners with disabilities are categorized into are - medical impairment, mental illness, mobility impairment, hearing impairment, learning disability, vision impairment, acquired brain impairment, and intellectual disability.

**"ONLINE LEARNING CAN BE A LIFELINE TO THOSE WHO HAVE OBSTACLES, SUCH AS GEOGRAPHICAL DISTANCES OR PHYSICAL DISABILITIES".
-PAUL LEVINSON**

Despite being faced with challenges, it does not mean these individuals cannot meet curricular goals and standards and perform well in academic and professional lives. (Barden, 2017)

With online learning, individuals with disabilities can study and gain academic knowledge with more tools available than through classroom-based learning.





Learners with physical challenges learning online

One group of learners with disabilities that find an improved quality of life with the emergence of online learning are those with physical impairments.

This group of learners find they are no longer faced with the barriers they endured in classroom learning. These challenges include commuting to campus, mobility issues in the classroom and on campus as well as the hindrance of getting between classes. They can learn from home without these physical issues inhibiting their education.

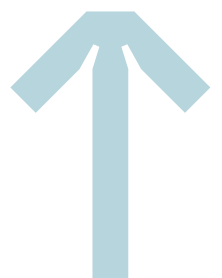
Furthermore, in an online learning environment, students with difficulties in typing can use talk-to-text programs in their learning. In a classroom environment, this can be

disruptive and difficult for their peers to concentrate, but learning from home allows for the use of this platform.

Talk-to-text software is also applicable to visually impaired learners, along with screen reader applications, braille keyboards and recorded lectures, optimizing their online learning experience.

For individuals that are learning with hearing impairments, viewing materials and/or lectures with closed captioning online and communicating with peers, teachers/instructors or professors through forums and text-based messaging is a preferred choice over classroom-based learning and in-person communication. (Barden, 2017)

PHYSICAL CHALLENGES



ONLINE LEARNING WITH COGNITIVE CHALLENGES



Some learners with cognitive disabilities can concentrate and stay on tasks online without the classroom's busyness and distractions. In asynchronous online learning, flexibility offers students the ability to take breaks when needed and structure their own day according to what works for them and their mental health.

Many students suffering from mental health challenges and anxiety disorders find that learning online allows them freedom from social challenges and drama that can occur in the classroom environment, impeding their education and preventing them from attending school or learning.

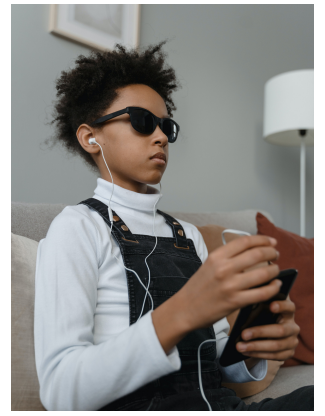
Some learners often feel barriers removed and more comfortable contributing to class discussions and sharing opinions and thoughts in an online environment versus in person, allowing them to contribute and take part in class activities online.

Learners managing learning disabilities can review materials at their own pace and repeat videos and lectures as many times as they require to encode the information, pausing when needed.

There are browser plug-ins for language-based learning disabilities. This includes colour overlays, audiobooks, specialized fonts and dictation software for dyslexia and individuals struggling with reading.

See appendix A for resources.

SUPPORTING ONLINE LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES



*Visually challenged
student
learning online*



Hearing impaired student learning online

DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY

Rob Power (Thriving Online, 2022) outlines the importance along with the guidelines for Digital Accessibility in the development of digital courses and digital online learning resources.

Connection fuels engagement - both in person and online. (Branstetter, R. 2020).

Students may not be familiar with the software used or have misguided expectations about how to interact with others online due to social media and gaming or prior online experiences. With the development of a teaching matrix, students are guided through behaviour expectations, how to use software, the use of video, audio, chat, class activities, and any support needed is determined. (PBIS, 2020)

Aside from tools to support online learners, consideration of the teacher-student relationship is fundamental. Connection fuels engagement - both in person

and online. (Branstetter, R. 2020). Students with disabilities need to feel that they have a support team, whether they are learning in the classroom or online. This supports social constructivist learning.

Dynamic supports typically found in face-to-face settings are absent in online learning environments, therefore, it is important for instructors to support executive functioning skills. This can be achieved by providing prompt feedback, providing goal-setting checklists and progress monitoring and engaging activities promoting participation. (Executive Functioning, n.d.)

online
with

ADHD

ADHD

For students struggling with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) sitting still and trying to focus can be challenging. Elementary and middle school educators are using smart online teaching. This looks like: giving learners ample brain and body breaks, chunking lessons into short units, and seeking feedback and communication from their students. Giving these students choices in their learning has also been found helpful as well as tools such as white noise machines during math, fidget toys and visual timers to increase focus. (Reckdahl, K, 2020)

Parents or support workers can help learners with ADHD by giving them a clear outline of what their day looks like, allowing them the ability of knowing what to expect and when they will receive breaks.

It is also important to ensure they receive enough sleep, exercise, a healthy diet, and a learning environment conducive to their needs. They may not be able to sit at a desk and prefer standing, a wobbly stool or a beanbag chair. Breaks may include 5-10 minutes jumping on a miniature trampoline or other aerobic exercise.

Work with the individual's occupational therapist to determine the best plan to determine their needs.



One size does not fit all in learning and teaching

Appendix A

Chrome Extensions for Struggling Students and Disabilities

<https://www.controlaltachieve.com/2016/10/special-needs-extensions.html>

Edutopia's How to "Maslow Before Bloom"

A toolkit for meeting students' social emotional learning needs online using classroom meetings

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-maslow-bloom-all-day-long>

Jennifer Gonzales' podcast: Creating Moments of Genuine Connection Online.

<https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/genuine-connection-online/>

Digital Promise - Learning Disabilities

A curated list of special education resources and edtech products to support learners with disabilities in a distance learning context. https://digitalpromise.org/online-learning/sped-resources/?fwp_paged=3

Smart Online Learning

7 High-Impact, Evidence-Based Tips for Online Teaching

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/7-high-impact-evidence-based-tips-online-teaching>

<https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/genuine-connection-online/>

CommonLit + Newslea

Nonfiction articles for choice in reading materials

<https://www.commonlit.org>

<https://newsela.com>

United Federation of Teachers Special Education Resources

Literary resources for special education

<https://www.uft.org/teaching/students-disabilities/special-education-resources>

Google ScreenReader

<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/screen-reader/kgejglhpjiefppelpmljglcjbhhoiplfn>

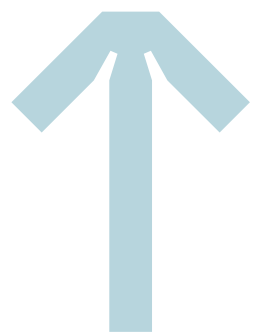
Listen to Your Word Documents

<https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/listen-to-your-word-documents-5a2de7f3-1ef4-4795-b24e-64fc2731b001>

NVDA Free Screen Reader

<https://www.nvaccess.org/about-nvda/>

RESOURCES



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