

Title of presentation

Supporting online personal tutoring with gather.town: an innovative approach to foster student belonging

Presenters

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Abstract

Transition to university can be a challenging experience for many students but an important opportunity to develop connections, create a sense of belonging, and identify learning communities which can support an individual's academic journey and wellbeing through their university career (Thomas, 2012). Through social distancing measures brought on by the COVID pandemic, many students have lost out on this vital opportunity which has contributed to increased feelings of isolation, disengagement, and ultimately reduced mental health (Browning et al., 2021; Hill & Fitzgerald, 2020; Weiss, 2021). Digital platforms can offer some relief to this, enabling students to interact with each other and their educators, however success has been variable with many platforms offering environments which are perceived as too formal for students to engage with fully (Themeli & Bougia, 2016). In this Pecha Kucha we propose the use of gather.town to support a blended approach to personal tutoring groups for students transitioning to university in order to support belonging and engagement in a remote environment (McClure & Williams, 2021). Student and educators' perspectives are encouraged, as well as to seek interest from colleagues in joining a pilot study to investigate the effectiveness of this initiative. References Browning M.H.E.M, Larson L.R., Sharaievskia I., Rigolon A., McAnirlin O., Mullenbach L., et al. (2021). Psychological impacts from COVID19 among university students: Risk factors across seven states in the United States. PLoS ONE, 16(1). Hill, K., & Fitzgerald, R. (2020). Student perspectives of the impact of COVID-19 on learning. All Ireland Journal of Higher Education, 12(2). McClure, C.D. & Williams, P.N. (2021). Gather.town: an opportunity for self-paced learning in a synchronous, distance-learning

environment. *Compass: Journal for Learning and Teaching*. Themeli, C. & Bougia, A. (2016) 'Tele-proximity: Tele-community of Inquiry Model. Facial Cues for Social, Cognitive, and Teacher Presence in Distance Education.' *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 17(6): 145-163. Thomas, L. (2012) Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: Final report from the What Works? Student Retention and Success Programme. London: HEFCE. Weiss, S. (2021) Fostering sense of belonging at universities. *European Journal of Education*. 56: 93–97.