Promoting Health and Academic Achievement: Mental Health Promoting Online Education

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Abstract : Pursuing post-secondary education is a milestone for many Canadian youths. This transition involves many changes and opportunities for growth. However, this may also be a period where challenges arise. Perhaps not surprisingly, mental health challenges for post-secondary students are common. This poses difficulties for students and instructors. Common mental-health-related symptoms (e.g., low motivation, fatigue, inability to concentrate) can affect academic performance, and instructors may need to provide accommodations for these students without the necessary expertise. 'Distance education' has been growing and gaining momentum in Canada for three decades. As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, post-secondary institutions have been required to deliver courses using 'remote' methods (i.e., various online delivery modalities). The learning challenges and subsequent academic performance issues experienced by students with mental-health-related disabilities studying online are not well understood. However, we can postulate potential factors drawing from learning theories, the relationship between mental-health-related symptoms and academic performance, and learning design. Identifying barriers and opportunities to academic performance is an essential step in ensuring that students with mental-health-related disabilities are able to achieve their academic goals. Completing post-secondary education provides graduates with more employment opportunities. It is imperative that our post-secondary institutions take a holistic view of learning by providing learning and mental health support while reducing structural barriers. Health-promoting universities and colleges infuse health into their daily operations and academic mandates. Acknowledged in this Charter is the notion that all sectors must take an active role in favour of health, social justice, and equity for all. Drawing from mental health promotion and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) frameworks, relevant adult learning concepts, and critical digital pedagogy, considerations for mental-health-promoting, online learning community development will be summarized. The education sector has the opportunity to create and foster equitable and mental health-promoting learning environments. This is of particular importance during a global pandemic when the mental health of students is being disproportionately impacted.

Keywords : academic performance, community, mental health promotion, online learning