



A-Skills Online: Supporting students on the Autism Spectrum to successfully transition to Higher Education

Key Words

Online Learning; Peer Mentoring; Autism; Diversity; Inclusion; Student Success

Abstract

Success and transition within Higher Education has been demonstrated as a challenge for many students on the Autism Spectrum, with reported academic and employment outcomes for students discouraging (Cai & Richdale, 2016). While there is some research that focuses on the needs of such students, there are few programs specifically tailored to supporting students in Higher Education in Australia (Owen, McCann, Rayner, Devereaux, Sheehan & Quarmby, 2016). One such tailored support program is A-Skills, which was developed at the University of Southern Queensland as a 10-week peer mentored face-to-face support program for students on the Autism Spectrum. Formal program evaluation identified the opportunity should also be extended to students studying online to enable a greater reach of support to this group of students. The aim of this project is to develop an Open online support program based on the face-to-face A-Skills program, specifically tailored for the needs of Higher Education students on the Autism Spectrum. The course is underpinned by the principles of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and draws upon a strengths-based perspective on the abilities of people with Autism. It has been developed in collaboration with specialists in learning and teaching, clinicians, and students on the Autism Spectrum. The newly developed program has been user tested on a small sample of students on the Autism Spectrum in order to generate critical evaluations of the success of the project to date before wider roll out to a university wide cohort of students. Discussions of early data collected for the ongoing evaluation of the newly developed peer support program will be provided. The transition to Higher Education may be one in need of support for students on the Autism Spectrum, and this program seeks to provide a blended learning opportunity for local and distance students to access key supports, which may be crucial to facilitate educational success.

References

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