“So, you want me to read for my degree?”: a Universal Design for Learning approach to reading

Talis webinar
29th April 2020

Michelle Malomo & Dr Sarah Pittaway
University of Worcester
m.malomo@worc.ac.uk
s.pittaway@worc.ac.uk
@dr_sarah_p
Today

• Where did this research come from?
• Theoretical background – what is UDL?
• The practical solution – accessibility tools in Resource Lists
• Research with staff and students
• Implications for teachers, librarians and publishers/vendors
Some of our assumptions

Students don’t read
Students don’t understand the need to read / are surprised they need to read
Students prefer print books
Joliffe and Harl (2008) highlighted 12 years ago that patterns of students’ reading did not reflect the expectations of the reading approach/skills need in Higher Education.

So, you want me to read for my degree?
Earlier research at the University of Worcester (Malomo, 2017) highlighted that students often:

- perceive reading as a pleasurable, nostalgic activity of their childhood
- Don’t understand that “reading for your degree” means reading!
What are the barriers that students might experience around reading?
STUDENT

Barriers to students' learning
Demographics of student body within the research project

- 74% are mature students
- 97% are female
- Qualifications on entry:
  - 29% entry with A levels
  - 55% enter with a variety of vocational qualifications
- 45% of students have an IMD count 1-2 (25% in overall student body)
- 50% have a POLAR score of 1-2 on entry (27% in overall student body)
Universal Design for Learning
Anticipatory Adjustments – DMU Universal Design for Learning

Equal

Equitable

This is making reasonable adjustments to barriers to learning

Reproduced with permission from Dr Abi Moriarty
How did we try to remove barriers to reading?
We wanted to link audiobooks in our Resource (reading) Lists.

This is not without its problems!
Instead we added accessibility tools to our Resource Lists
What does this look like in practice?

Top tools to support you in completing your reading

There are lots of strategies and methods to engage with literature. You may prefer to curl up with a print book in the library, scroll through an ebook on your laptop in a cafe, or set up a Text to Speech player while you cook at home. You may find that you want to read different items in different ways at different times - there is no one way of reading, so feel free to experiment to find what works for you.

Here you will find a short list of recommended tools that can enhance your use of electronic books, journals and other resources. These specific tools generally work best using smart browsers like Google Chrome, but all browsers will have a range of options available. This list is far from exhaustive! You are encouraged to explore other options and feedback what works well (and less well) for you to help this list develop.

Do you find reading from a screen to be difficult or uncomfortable? Use ‘ATBar’ to adjust your settings. ATBar is a free toolbar you can add to any web browser, and has lots to offer for everyone. You can change font style and size, add a colour overlay to reduce screen glare, and use the Text to Speech function to listen to your reading, as well as a dictionary and spellchecker, both tidily embedded. Click on the links below for more about how this tool could support you alongside easy to use instructions.

- ATBar (download)
  - Webpage
- ATBar (instructions)
  - Webpage
Did it work?

We had 30 clicks on these tools in 2018/19 out of a cohort of around 200
Methods that were used within the research

Focus group made up of academics who teach on the programme, capturing responses on a Padlet

Online survey for students
Who were the focus group?

Group of lecturers who teach on the FdA Early Years (0-8)

Both experienced and new lecturers

All teaching on the course in Partnership Colleges in the West Midlands, Herefordshire, Worcester and through our flexible and distributed route.
Voice of the focus group

Themes that emerged

• Accessibility tools
• Reading plans
• Embedding reading expectations within teaching
Voices of the academics - accessibility tools

- The need to be a super user
- Perceived problems with the tools
- Lack of confidence around use especially within the resource list - more training needed
"the spoken word is a different set of skills to following a novel being read aloud - is there any research on this?"
“Students are developing a different approach to reading as ebooks and pdfs enable the identification of specific words in texts, therefore they can 'speed read' for references rather than reading sections or chapters”

“Most of the time students think they have to read every book from cover to cover”
"Considering my current students, I think curiosity is the key; I can see students whose curiosity lead [sic] them to read a whole article and follow it up with further research - they are 'thirsty for knowledge' rather than just reading for assignments"
Ideas and suggestions from the focus group

“Time for all tutors to read for themselves specific chapters and then discuss with other tutors teaching the same modules as to how a piece could support certain topics, thus spreading the load”

"The purpose is to help students recognise that reading needs to be planned in the same way as assignment writing"
Voice of the students

Themes that emerged:
• Reading & learning
• Accessibility tools
• Barriers & constraints
Reading & learning
When do you use your Resource List?

- Before seminars or lectures: 5 (29.4%)
- For assignments: 14 (82.4%)
- When asked to by tutors: 9 (52.9%)
- As part of a reading plan: 8 (47.1%)
- I don't read: 0
- Other: 0
How often do you use your Resource List?

- Every day: 5 (29.4%)
- Once a week: 8 (47.1%)
- Fortnightly: 2 (11.8%)
- Once a month: 0
- Never: 1 (5.9%)
- Other: 1 (5.9%)
Which are your top 3 resource types to use?

- Books (in print): 16 (94.1%)
- Books (online): 9 (52.9%)
- Journal articles (in print): 5 (29.4%)
- Journal articles (online): 7 (41.2%)
- Videos: 6 (35.3%)
- News articles: 1 (5.9%)
- Government documents/policies/updates: 5 (29.4%)
- Other: 0
Accessibility tools

- 24% said they’d definitely noticed accessibility tools in their Resource Lists; 24% weren’t sure

One student used NV Access and said “It has helped me to gain more knowledge for the uni [sic] that I was reading up on”

- 52% would definitely try audiobooks if they were available and another 18% might
### Barriers & constraints: “how do you feel about reading for your course?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47% don’t have enough time to read</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30% said reading is hard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35% felt nervous about understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18% felt unsure about what to read</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30% felt unsure about how much to read</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47% also said they enjoy reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_BUT_
“Sometimes it is enjoyable but other times I don't know the purpose of why I am reading something and/or exactly what I am supposed to get from the reading”
Reflections and implications
Implications for the teaching team - the insider
• A change is needed in the pedagogical approach to ensure that reading is explicit
• An understanding of UDL principles and how they can support the removal of barriers
• Developing staff skills in using all online platforms that support all students to access materials
• Further engagement with librarians to support and develop an intrinsic approach to reading
Implications for librarians
There is a challenge for UDL practitioners around student preferences for print vs ebooks.
We need to add to or change our teaching. But who teaches academic staff?
Implications for publishers & systems vendors
Make systems easy and intuitive to use

I.e. make them work with third party tools like screen-readers and/or have in-built tools to do the same job
We’re still interested in the idea of audiobooks – but we’d need a publishing partner to run a pilot...
But what about the students?
References (1)


References (2)


