Mindfulness in VR

**What is the project and its pedagogical focus?**

This is a project about the use of virtual reality in mindfulness within the medical school and the IHSE.

It might be not surprising that medical students usually report levels of stress, especially during exam and results season. When we start working in virtual reality, we identified that there was a huge opportunity to use this technology in collaboration with the Student Support Office to provide an additional service or resource to our students. Students have the option currently to book a 30-minute slot where they go to the Student Support Office and wear our virtual reality headsets. They can follow a virtual reality, meditated and guided session.

The great thing about this technology is that unlike traditional meditation where you typically close your eyes and follow some audio guides, here you're immersed in a virtual digital environment where you have some digital and visual inputs.

For instance, when you are breathing, you could see a beam of light coming in or coming out when you are expected to breathe in or out, which has been quite helpful to support students managing stress, especially if they haven't meditated before, or they have been apprehensive towards mindfulness.

**Can you give us an overview on how you developed and implemented this project with any collaborations, and the student use?**

When my team started working with virtual reality a couple of years ago, we identified that there was a huge opportunity to use this technology to support students’ mental health and well-being overall.

So we start a collaboration with the Student Support Office and we identify some pieces of software that focus on mindfulness and virtual reality, and we lend them a few headsets.

The student support office team had an opportunity to internally test a few scenarios and the different programs to identify the one that would fit best with our current student population. They highlighted that this technology could be used to attract students that wouldn't necessarily ask for help or support internally, but that could still benefit from these types of interventions.

They decided to use a software that is called TRIPP, which provides the virtual guided meditations and since they have been providing this service, students have an option to book a 30-minute slot in the Student Support Office.

They will receive a quick briefing about this technology before they start the session. And they will be in a private room following a guided meditation on a topic that they selected. If they need it, there will be an opportunity to have a quick debrief at the end of the session as well.

**Can you share with us the impact of this project on the student experience and on their skill development?**

At the moment we are researching how students perceive this intervention. Nevertheless, it seems that overall they are enjoying it.

There are few students that have reported that they don't necessarily enjoy it either because they didn't enjoy meditating or the software which is to be expected. Not all interventions are going to be a match with everyone, and that's fine.

Nevertheless, the majority of the students seem to enjoy it. Some of them have come back for multiple sessions which show that there is an interest or a perceived usefulness in trying this software.

Some of them have reported that they continue meditating at their home even without using the virtual reality headset, which shows that this technology could open a door for some of them to practice some of these skills about stress management and emotional regulation, even without using the virtual reality headset.

From our end, I think that the biggest takeaway is the importance of an interdisciplinary collaboration. My team, the learning innovation team is very focused on this data technologies for learning and student experience. And the Students Support Office has a huge knowledge about our students’ experiences, the challenges they face and the support that they require. So it's great to have these conversations work in collaborations to find solutions that would hopefully support our student population.