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Universal Design for Learning as a form of Intersectionality in Practice
Trinity Inclusive Curriculum Project

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What is Trinity-INC?

Commenced in October 2020, the mandate of Trinity Inclusive Curriculum (Trinity-INC) Project is **to embed principles of diversity, equality and inclusion across all curricula at Trinity College Dublin**.

An inclusive curriculum is one in which all students, regardless of personal circumstances, or learning backgrounds, abilities or strategies, have equitable opportunity to engage fully in their studies and achieve their learning goals.

Intersectionality

"Intersectionality is a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking." (Crenshaw, 1989)

Importance: Analytical tool to study systems of power and oppression.
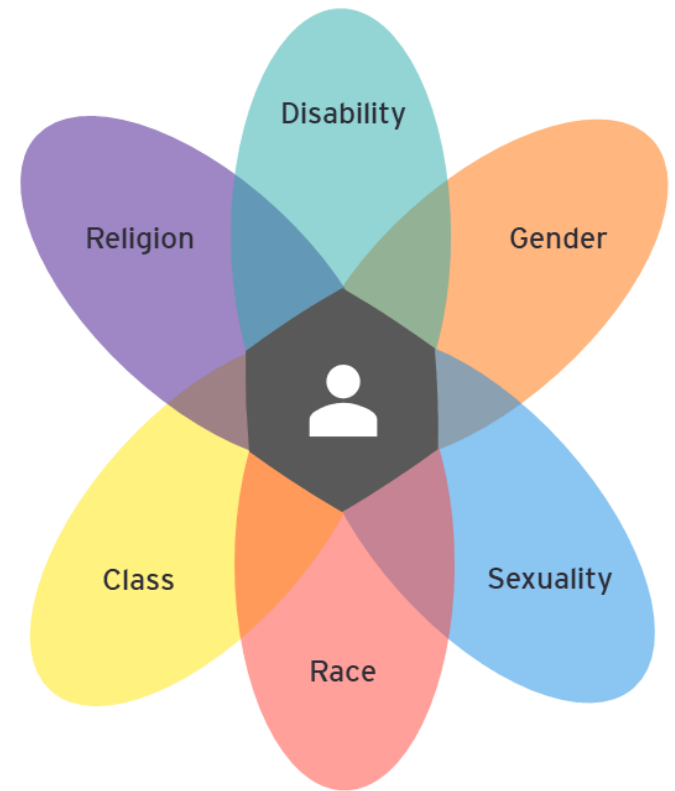
Intersectionality in Higher Education Students

Focus: To observe potential barriers that may prevent students from fully engaging with their studies.

Student 1 - Engineering: Female; from an ethnic minority; has Autism

- Gender (in STEM) and ethnic minority (sense of alienation among peers and materials); sensory sensitivity (finds large lectures overwhelming)

Student 2 - Law: Non-Binary; working class; caring responsibilities; works part-time

- Gender and class minority (misgendering; not meaningfully represented in curriculum); time poor (arbitrary study structure; increased levels of stress)

Trinity-INC Student Partner Programme – A Case Study

The **Trinity-INC Student Partner Programme** works with Trinity students from underrepresented backgrounds to listen to their experiences of inclusion and exclusion in the teaching and learning environment in real time.

These students will typically intersect with one or more of the nine grounds of equality – very diverse and intersectional identities.

This work continually exposes the variability that exists within the individual student experience in higher education.

Universal Design for Learning

"A set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn. UDL aims to improve the educational experience of all students by introducing more flexible methods of teaching, assessment and service provision" (AHEAD, 2024).

Engagement	Offering options and supports to stimulate and sustain motivation, enthusiasm and active participation.
Representation	Presenting information in different ways to support access and understanding.
Action & expression	Offering options and supports so everyone can share their knowledge and understanding.

Universal Design for Learning – Learner Variability

Universal Design for Learning aims to reduce the amount of potential barriers a student may face by **assuming learner variability** – which can be understood to be variability among groups of students but also within an individual student.

Learner variability is not just diverse, it's also dynamic as student's experiences are not static – life is not static!

Implementing UDL to reduce potential barriers

Student 1 - Engineering: Female; from an ethnic minority; has Autism

- Gender (in STEM) and ethnic minority (sense of alienation among peers and materials - **group work; diversify materials)**; sensory sensitivity (finds large lectures overwhelming - **recorded lectures; materials released in advance; alternative assessment methods)**

Student 2 - Law: Non-Binary; working class; caring responsibilities; works part-time

- Gender and class minority (misgendering; not meaningfully represented in curriculum - **use pronouns; provide real-life examples of diverse identities);** time poor (arbitrary study structure; increased levels of stress - **clear and concise module structure; flexible deadlines).**

UDL and Intersectionality: A Congruent Relationship

There is limited research linking the concept of intersectionality and the framework of UDL. However, the connection has been made by some like Tobin and Behling, 'Reach Everyone, Teach Everyone' (2018), and Teresa McConlogue in 'Assessment and Feedback in Higher Education' (2020).

Congruency: Intersectionality as a lens to view the variability and potential barriers within the student experience; with UDL as the framework implemented to mitigate those barriers. An intersectional lens also reinforces and validates the need for UDL.

This approach can aid in identifying what (or who) is being overlooked in our teaching practices and help tailor the experience to suit the needs of student variability, avoiding a more siloed approach.

Conclusion

Summary:

- **Intersectionality:** Essential for understanding compounded barriers and variability within the student experience.

- **Trinity-INC Student Partner Programme:** continually exposed the diverse and dynamic student experience in real-time.

- **UDL:** A framework which assumes variability within and amongst students to reduce barriers to learning.

Universal Design for Learning is Intersectionality in Practice!

References

- Crenshaw, K. (1989) 'Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics'.

- AHEAD (2024).

- McConlogue, T. (2020). 'Assessment and Feedback in Higher Education'.

- Tobin and Behling (2018), 'Reach Everyone, Teach Everyone'.

![Trinity College Dublin — Coláiste na Trínóide, Baile Átha Cliath — The University of Dublin]

inclusive Trinity

Thank You!

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www.tcd.ie/equality/projects/inclusive-curriculum