“Using ‘Voice’ to Understand what College Students with Intellectually Disabilities Say about Learning”

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What I’ll be talking about…

- ‘Voice’ – how is it conceptualised in the context of school and higher education?

- **Voice in Higher Education & people with intellectual disabilities**
  - Inclusive education programme in Trinity College Dublin – ‘The Certificate in Contemporary Living’

- **Inclusive research project**
  - How students with intellectual disabilities experience learning while undertaking the Certificate in Contemporary Living
Student ‘voice’ in schools

• “Having an active role in decisions about and implementation of education policies and practice”.

(Holdsworth, 2000)
Student ‘Voice’ in higher education

• Little consideration given to issues such as empowerment and transformation
Educational opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities in higher education

- University of Iceland
- Flinders University in South Australia
- University of Alberta, Canada
- 149 programs across 37 US states that enrol students with intellectual disabilities
- Trinity College Dublin - The Certificate in Contemporary Living
Currently 20 students with intellectual disabilities on the course

10 modules covering the expressive arts, the humanities, transferrable skills, and sports

Students attend college three days a week for two years
Research project entitled: ‘Intellectually Disabled Students’ Experiences of Learning in Tertiary Education: an Inclusive Phenomenography’

- Inclusive research
  Researching WITH people rather than ON people
  (Walmsley & Johnson, 2003)

- Participatory research
  (Chappell, 2000; Reason and Bradbury, 2006)

Aim:
To build a more balanced partnership between non-disabled researchers and researchers with intellectual disabilities
Methodology

Participants:
6 co-researchers with ID
18 CCL students

Inclusive Research
Material design
Semi-structured Interviews
Presentation skills
Co-researchers asked their peers

‘How do you experience learning in college?’
Four Categories to describe learning

1. The cognitive stages of Learning
2. Self-regulation of learning
3. Learning as collective meaning making
4. Learning and environment.
1. The **COGNITIVE** stages of learning

- Learning as increasing one’s knowledge
- Learning as memorising and reproducing
- Learning as applying knowledge
2. Self-regulation of learning

• 1 The forethought phase

• 2 The performance phase

• 3 The self-reflection phase
3. Learning as **collective meaning making**

- Collective learning from discussions and debates
- Peer support with home assignments
- Collective learning from parents/guardians
- Collective learning from college mentors
4. Learning as environment

“The atmosphere, ambience, tone, or climate that pervades the particular educational setting” (Dorman, 2002, p. 1).

The learning environment as a ‘safe space’
Experiences of learning most important to CCL students...

1. The Supportive Environment and Learning

2. Collective Meaning Making

3. Self-regulation of Learning

4. Learning as Cognitive
CCL students’ ways of experiencing learning

The supportive environment and learning

Learning as collective meaning making

Collective learning from:
• discussions and debates in class
• Peer support with home assignments
• Parents/guardians
• College mentors

Self-regulation of learning

The foresight phase
(BEFORE LEARNING - goal setting)

The performance phase
(DURING LEARNING - self-control / self-observation)

The self-reflection phase
(AFTER LEARNING - self-judgement / self-reflection)

Cognitive Stages of Learning

Learning as:
• increasing one’s knowledge
• memorising and reproducing
• applying knowledge
Implications for teaching students with ID - environment

In effective classrooms, teachers:
• express high expectation for themselves and their students.

• positively reinforce their students’ abilities and intelligence, spending quality learning time interacting with their students

• promote positive relationships among class members

• have orderly environments that emphasise learning and academic activities, a commitment to learning, and the use of effective teaching strategies

• create an orderly learning environment that is characterised by warmth and respect for others
Implications for teaching students with ID
- strategies

Students valued teaching instruction that:

• was facilitated through the use of dialogue and discussion

• used audio and visual stimuli in the form of Mnemonics, PowerPoints, Brainstorming and Concept/Mind mapping

• stimulated the learning process as a thinking activity, one that explicates the process of learning instead of conceiving it simply as the memorisation and reproduction of facts.
Final comments…

“...the achievement of voice is mutual, and teachers who help students to find their voices will discover that their own voices are clearer and stronger in the process” (Lincoln, 1995, p. 93)