

**Students of the Certificate in Contemporary Living co-research how their peers experience learning in college.**



Pictured above left: Niamh Fortune, Brendan Shields, John Power, Tomás Murphy, Anneliese Baird and Fiona Lacey

**Intellectually Disabled Students' Experiences of Learning in Tertiary Education: an Inclusive Phenomenography**

by

Dr John Kubiak, Niamh Fortune, Brendan Shields, John Power, Tomás Murphy, Anneliese Baird and Fiona Lacey

**About this research:**

This research explored how students with intellectual disabilities experience learning while undertaking the Certificate in Contemporary Living (CCL) at Trinity College Dublin. Two main questions were addressed: 1) how can students with intellectual disabilities be meaningfully included in a research project on their own learning? 2),

what kind of variation exists in intellectually disabled people's ways of experiencing their learning while attending college?

There were two stages to this research: Stage 1 documented the process of six CCL students undertaking training as co-researchers; in Stage 2, a phenomenographic approach was used which aimed to identify variation in the ways CCL students experienced learning.

Under the guidance of Dr John Kubiak, co-researchers interviewed 18 CCL students on the topic of 'How CCL students' experience learning'. Four categories of description were found which form an 'outcome space', an inclusive, hierarchical unity in which the categories further up the hierarchy subsume those preceding them. The categories are: 1) the Cognitive Stages of Learning, 2) Self-Regulation of Learning, 3) Learning as Collective Meaning Making and 4) The Supportive Environment and Learning.

The findings emerging from this fourth category foregrounds the central role of the educator in shaping a learning environment where positive student experiences are generated through the promotion of constructive student-teacher relationships. Ultimately, this research has shown that for CCL students, learning in tertiary environment is a complex undertaking and warns against educators assuming that they know how people with intellectual disabilities learn; indeed gaining knowledge and understanding of such learning should be researched inclusively. It is finally argued that educators can be proactive in creating a classroom atmosphere that is safe, supportive and helpful if they are armed with the tools of facilitative teaching practices and emotional competencies.

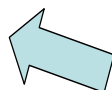
## Accessible findings made by co-researchers

### How CCL students experience learning in Trinity College.

What's most important?



1. The supportive environment and learning

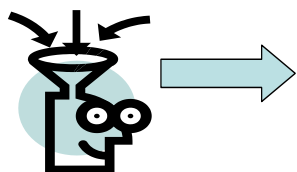


2. Learning as collective meaning making



What's least important?

4. Learning as cognitive



3. Self-regulation of learning

For more information on this research contact:

Dr John Kubiak

Teaching and Learning Officer

National Institute for Intellectual Disability, 4th floor, 3 College Green, Trinity College  
Dublin

Tel: +353 (0)1 896 3442 Email: [kubiakj@tcd.ie](mailto:kubiakj@tcd.ie) [www.tcd.ie/niid](http://www.tcd.ie/niid)