

Universal Design for Learning as a Two-pronged Approach to Inclusive Practice in Initial Teacher Education in Ireland.

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Abstract.

This paper examines Universal Design for Learning as a two-pronged approach to inclusive practice in Initial teacher Education programmes. The paper begins by examining diversity within the student population both in ITE programmes and Post-Primary classrooms hence demonstrating a felt need for a UDL approach to teaching, learning and assessment. The paper then goes on to discuss what we mean by inclusive education and how this is manifested in the Céim Standards for Initial Teacher Education. The paper then examines UDL as an inclusive pedagogical framework for practice and finally discusses how this may be utilised in ITE and in teaching at post-primary level. The paper concludes by highlighting the barriers to implementing a UDL framework in ITE programmes as well as emphasizing the opportunities and benefits.

Keywords: Diversity; Inclusion; Initial Teacher Education; Universal Design for Learning.

1. Introduction.

The Irish Education system, like other international education systems is being challenged to respond to an increasingly diverse student population. This diversification of student profile particularly at post-primary level began one could argue in the mid 1960's. The 1960's was a period of unprecedented change in Irish Educational history, with the arrival of the Investment in Education Report and Donagh O'Malley as Minister for Education in 1966. One of the most palpable outcomes of the Investment in Education Report was the raising of the school age to fifteen and the introduction of 'free' second level education. This resulted in an increased post-primary enrolment of almost 90% between 1966 and 1976. Participation rates for sixteen-year-olds jumped from 37% in 1963 to 80% in 1984. Most students now remain in post-primary

education until the age of 18. The recent Education Indicators for Ireland report found that 92.1% of students in 2023 remained in post-primary education completing a Leaving Certificate (DES, 2023). These higher retention rates as well as other social and cultural change (Crotty & Schmidt, 2014) such as Ireland's inward migration trends since the mid-1990's, curricular reform (DES, 2015a) and the inclusion of children with additional educational needs into mainstream schools and classes has gradually led to the development of a diverse student population. Therefore, Initial Teacher Education programmes prepare pre-service teachers to teach in diverse classrooms that are inclusive and responsive to increased learner variability.

The diversification of the student profile at post-primary level and increased retention rates has subsequently seen dramatic changes in the increased number of students progressing to tertiary education as well as an increase in the diverse demographic of students in tertiary education (Healy et al., 2023). However, this level of diversity is not present in the teaching profession nor present on Initial Teacher Education programmes. As Keane, Heinz and Lynch argue *'there is a dearth of diversity amongst Ireland's student teacher and teaching populations, with the vast majority of entrants being from majority ethnic groups and a high proportion from higher socio-economic backgrounds'* (2022, p.1). Therefore, the diversity within our student population in post-primary education is not mirrored with diversity within the teaching profession.

Classrooms are socially and culturally diverse heterogenous environments yet for the most part the teaching profession is homogenous both internationally (Schleicher, 2014; Donlevy et al., 2016; Ingersoll et al., 2021) and nationally (Heinz & Keane, 2018; Keane & Heinz 2015, 2016). Considering this, diversifying the teaching profession has become a priority both in policy and funding (HEA PATH 1 Initiative (2017-2023)). The diversification of the teaching profession is important not only in terms of equity of access for those from minority backgrounds wishing to pursue a career in teaching but also for students in post-primary education and indeed for society at large.

Keane et al., (2022) draw on the work of Childs et al.'s (2011) by employing the concept of *'double equity'* in highlighting the importance of diversifying the teaching profession, thus framing the diversification of the teaching profession as a social justice issue. In their examination of factors impacting the retention of students from under-represented groups in initial teacher education in Ireland (2022) Keane, Heinz & Lynch argue that identity and

belonging can be a barrier for ITE students from *'working class'* backgrounds. Their study highlights the concerns of a number of the teacher educators who commented on how *'working class'* student teachers reported that *'they did not feel they fit in well in the middle-class environment of ITE and their institutions more broadly'* (2022, p. 10).

This paper also positions the diversification of the teaching profession in terms of social justice but progresses this argument to incorporate inclusion and particularly inclusive education as it relates to affective pedagogy and voice. The paper will examine the ways in which Universal Design for Learning can be utilised in promoting inclusion and a sense of belonging and recognition not only for student teachers themselves but also for their post-primary pupils.

2. Inclusive Education and the Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education.

The Salamanca Statement and international policy such as the UN Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UN Sustainable Development Goals stress the responsibilities of countries in ensuring they provide education that is inclusive, equitable and accessible to all. Since the Salamanca statement in 1994 there has been a growing international consensus on the importance of preparing teachers to teach in increasingly diverse classrooms (OECD, 2005; EADSNE, 2011). This is also true of policy and programme changes relating to initial teacher education in Ireland.

In 2012 all ITE programmes were extended and reconceptualized and now include mandatory content on inclusive education. The new Céim Standards for Initial Teacher Education were released in October 2020. These standards *'set out the requirements which programmes of qualification for teaching in Ireland must meet in order to gain accreditation from the Teaching Council'* (Céim, 2020, p.2). The Céim standards for Initial Teacher Education defines inclusive education as *'any aspect of teachers' learning aimed at improving their capacity to address barriers and respond to the diversity of learners' needs; to enable their participation in learning; and remove barriers to education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements to enable each learner to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her attendance at school'* (Ibid, p. 4) All ITE programmes *'shall enable newly qualified teachers to facilitate quality teaching and learning for all pupils'* (Ibid, p. 10) *'this includes the fostering of appropriate learning environments, including digital ones that support*

the development of student teachers' ability to provide for the learning needs of all pupils by utilising, for example, a universal design for learning framework' (Ibid, p.14). The document also encourages all ITE programmes to provide a '*variety of assessment modes*' (Ibid, p.15)

Graduate teacher standards are outlined in the document under three broad headings: 1. Professional Values, 2. Professional Skills and Practice and 3. Professional Knowledge and Understanding. Under Professional Values Graduate Student Teachers must be able to '*demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the unique role of the teacher as professional in providing for the holistic development of students, and the complex and intricate nature of teaching, as explicated in the Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers*' (p.21). Under professional skills and practice Graduate Student Teachers are required to '*access, develop, adapt and use a variety of curriculum resources and materials for learning and teaching to support and challenge all pupils*' They are also required to '*set clear, challenging and achievable expectations for all pupils in line with the curriculum and apply knowledge of the individual potential of pupils, dispositions towards learning, varying backgrounds, identities, experiences and learning styles to planning for teaching, learning and assessment*' and '*use a range of strategies to support, monitor and assess pupils' approach to learning and their progress – including effective feedback strategies*' (p.22) The Professional Knowledge and Understanding standards demand that Graduate Student Teachers understand '*the factors that promote and hinder effective learning, the impact of pupils' backgrounds and identities on learning and the need to provide for the holistic development of the pupil, particularly through differentiated approaches. A focus on valuing learner diversity and ensuring that teaching and learning activities are meaningful for all pupils is evident here. In this context inclusive education extends to a broader framework beyond SEN and includes all students particularly those who may be at risk of marginalisation or exclusion. The Céim Standards for Initial Teacher Education also make clear that inclusion is the responsibility of all teachers. Educational policy such as the EPSEN Act (2004) and the new model of provision (DES 2017) also emphasis that ensuring all students are included in teaching and learning is the responsibility of all teachers. Therefore, all Graduate Teachers must be prepared during their ITE programmes to teach in diverse classrooms ensuring all learners are included.*

However, inclusion is a complex topic and often discussed without offering a clear definition.

3. Definitions of Inclusion.

Shakespeare (2014) identifies three different approaches to the way in which inclusion is defined and its variation in terms of scope. The social model or materialist approach relating to the conceptualisation of difference in social settings and the socio-cultural construction of difference (Slee, 2010; Tomlinson, 2014). The cultural approach focusing on economic and materialist approaches to promoting inclusion with a focus on difference as identity and lastly the biopsychosocial approach which highlights the connection between biological, social and psychological factors (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993; Reindal, 2010). However, it must be stated that these definitions of inclusion are not neatly siloed and often overlap. What is clear in all approaches towards a definition of inclusion is a move away from a deficit-based approach and a move towards embracing diversity and difference. This involves an awareness of the dangers of labelling and instead emphasises intersectionality and works towards inclusion for all. This conceptualisation of inclusion falls within a social justice framework and here one may draw on Booth and Ainscow's Index for Inclusion (2002) where they place emphasis on presence, participation, and achievement. One may also draw on the work of Fraser (2009) who highlights three dimensions of inclusion; redistribution, recognition, and representation. The work of Medina in particular in relation to inclusion as recognition and valuing of difference is important for how inclusion is positioned within this paper. Medina contends:

“Dysfunctional or morally deficient patterns of recognition attributions erode the epistemic respect that individuals and groups deserve, and they deprive these individuals and groups of environments in which they can make sense of their experiences (hermeneutical injustice) and in which they can credibly communicate their experiences (testimonial injustice)”. (Medina, 2018, p.2)

Medina goes on to explain two deficit patterns of recognition: quantitative recognition deficit and misrecognition. Quantitative recognition deficit can range from individuals and groups not being recognised at all, being rendered silent and inaudible to be given scarce opportunities to be seen or heard. Participation and access to education are incredibly important, however, examining inclusion only through this narrow lens serves to distort our view of inclusion and in fact hides the most dehumanising aspects of exclusion; not feeling heard or seen or recognised. This negatively impacts on our sense of belonging and identity. Current models of differentiation in schools are based on students' diagnosis or perceived deficits and while these processes are well intentioned and can have positive outcomes, they can also

inadvertently have negative consequences in terms of labelling and positioning students and their abilities in negative or deficit terms. This paper argues that a Universal Design for Learning approach to inclusion in ITE and in our post-primary classrooms allows us to move away from a deficit reactive approach and instead utilise a proactive approach that offers all students supports, flexibility and choice embracing learner variability and recognising and valuing difference.

4. UDL as Inclusive Practice.

In the 1960's architect Selwyn Goldsmith designed the dropped curb with the aim of increasing accessibility to the built environment for those with limited mobility. This was part of a larger movement by disability advocate to make the built environment more accessible to all people. Universal Design for Learning applies the same philosophy to all areas of teaching and learning i.e. we should design teaching and learning in such a way as to ensure it is accessible to all learners. Universal Design for Learning as an inclusive framework is based on cognitive neuroscience and aims to remove barriers to learning and increase flexibility while ensuring all learners are challenged. This requires a mindset shift away from student deficit and instead requires us to examine structural, cultural, environmental, and curricular deficits that create barriers for learning. AHEAD defines UDL as '*a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn, including Students with Disabilities. UDL aims to improve the educational experience of all students by introducing more flexible methods of teaching, assessment and service provision to cater for the diversity of learners in our classrooms.*' (AHEAD, 2012)A. This paradigm shift moves thinking from teacher centred to student centred and focuses on issues such as student voice and agency as well as intersectionality and experience.

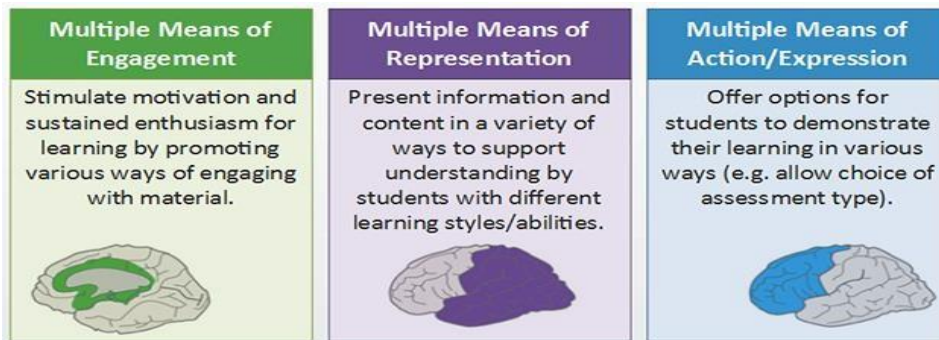
In the mid 1980's David Rose and CAST compiled the three principles of UDL:

1. Multiple Means of Engagement (Affective Network – the What of Learning)
2. Multiple Means of Representation (the Recognition Network – the Why of learning)
3. Multiple Means of Action and Expression (the Strategic Network – the How of learning)

Figure 1. UDL Principles

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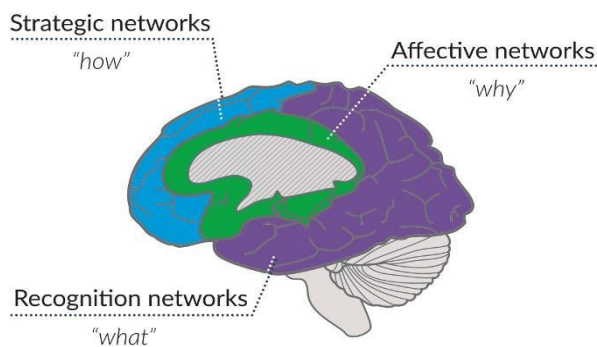
As an inclusive educational framework, UDL aims to optimise teaching and learning for all by removing barriers and increasing choice.



UDL was inspired by

advance in neuroscientific research and as such offers an educational framework that utilizes what we know about how the brain accesses, processes and retains information to inform the design of teaching and learning and learning environments that supports all learners.

Figure 2: UDL and the Learning Brain



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The above figure designed by CAST outlines the networks of the brain associated with the “*what, why and how*” of learning. Through neuroscientific research we know that incoming sensory information i.e. what we see and hear is received at the back of the brain in the recognition networks. This relates to Multiple Means of Representation i.e. perception, language, symbols, and comprehension. This sensory information is then processed and relayed for meaning to the center of the brain in the affective networks, the why of learning. This relates to the principle of Multiple Means of Engagement i.e. interest, effort, persistence, self-regulation. This information is then organised in the frontal lobes for response and action,

the how of learning. This relates to the principle Multiple Means of Action and Expression i.e. physical action, executive function, communication). Thus, underpinned by theories in education, developmental psychology, and cognitive neuroscience (Rose & Gravel, 2010) UDL provides us with a *'blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials and assessments that work for everyone – not a single, one-size-fits-all solution, but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs'* (CAST, 2011)

4.1 The importance of UDL in ITE.

The key to ensuring inclusive classrooms and inclusive environments in schools is to promote inclusive teacher education programmes where student teachers are adequately prepared to teach in diverse classroom being cognisant of each learner's needs and abilities and being able to respond to such needs in a manner that ensures all learners are challenged and experience success. ITE providers are also challenged to ensure that all aspects of teaching and learning on their programmes are accessible to all students. UDL provides us with an inclusive educational framework that allows us to respond to student variability and diversity in a way that ensures optimum outcomes for all learners. As discussed, there is an emphasis in policy and research in increasing student diversity on Initial Teacher Education programmes. That AltitUDE position paper asserts that the *'proportion of students with disabilities in tertiary education has increased significantly in recent years although inconsistencies in the data make this difficult to measure'*. The paper goes on to state that according *'to the Higher Education Authority (HEA), 18 per cent of students cite having a disability. Other data from AHEAD shows, however, that just 7 per cent are registered with supports suggesting there is a significant cohort of students with disabilities not registered with supports'* (2024, p.12). AHEAD report that there are low levels of disability reported amongst ITE cohorts (AHEAD, 2012) yet this does not equate to a lack of diversity in backgrounds, experiences and learning preferences. All cohorts of students bring with them a diversity of learning needs and preferences.

The HEA Programme for Access to Higher Education as part of the National Plan for Equity and Access to Higher Education sought to increase diversity in the student population of ITE programmes in encouraging entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups, mature students, candidates with disabilities, members of the Irish Travelling Community and those progressing from FET. This paper argues that as the student population in ITE becomes more diverse ITE providers are challenged to provide an inclusive pedagogical approach that

removes barriers enabling all students to access all aspects of teaching and learning.

As stated ITE programmes have been extended and are now a level 9 Professional Masters. This has many benefits for students in terms of their preparation for a career in teaching, however, it also brings with it many challenges and difficulties in terms of workload and time management. Basit et al. claim reasons why students fail to complete ITE programme are complex and multifaceted (2006) including difficulties in managing the workload, stress, time management, family commitments and personal reasons. The workload for ITE has certainly become much more intense with students required to complete modules in school placement, foundation studies, professional studies, inclusive education and submit a research project. Keane, Heinz & Lynch state that students '*who withdraw from ITE commonly report that they were inadequately supported in their academic programmes of study and/or during school placement*' (2022, p.2) They also found that those from underrepresented groups, particularly those from '*working class*' backgrounds felt that they did not fit in with '*the middle-class environment of ITE*' and hence felt a lack of belonging. A UDL framework can support ITE providers in ensuring all students are supported and feel that they are recognised and belong.

Underpinning ITE programmes with a UDL framework allows us to shift '*the burden of being flexible and responsive from the student to the curriculum*' (Rose et al., 2008, p. 45). The starting point for this needs to be with adequate training for teaching staff. Teaching staff need to understand the three core principles of UDL as well as the accompanying nine guidelines and 31 checkpoints if they are to truly implement a UDL approach to teaching, learning and assessment that is both authentic and meaningful. Ideally this needs to happen prior to the commencement of the programme. Teaching staff can be brought together and work collaboratively in designing a pedagogical approach to the ITE curriculum that is underpinned by a UDL framework. This involves thinking about the why, the what and the how of teaching and learning on the programme as well as formulate clear goals with flexible means for achievement i.e. at the end of the module what is it the student needs to have learned and in what ways can the student effectively demonstrate their learning. Here staff are involved in the proactive design of the programme cognisant of student variability and diversity rather than reactively responding to students who may be struggling for one reason or another. If we are truly to embrace diversity and value difference then we are ethically, and from a social justice standpoint, obliged to ensure that all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment are accessible to all students. Allowing time and resources to properly train academic staff in implementing a UDL framework can be challenging, and it is here where institutions at policy

level need to be fully committed.

Let's start by examine the first UDL principle Multiple Means of Engagement. This principle focuses on the '*why*' of learning i.e. how can academic staff use affective networks to motivate and engage students (CAST, 2011). This centres on the premise that learning environments need to be flexible allowing students to participate in learning in a way that is meaningful to them. According to Flood & Banks this involves '*designing learning experiences that the students can connect with*' where their '*identity, prior knowledge and learning*' is valued (2021, p. 2). An emphasis on identity is especially important in ITE as the development of a teacher identity is key to Céim Standards of Initial Teacher Education as well as the continuum of teacher development through Driochthead and Cósán. It is also important in terms of feelings of belonging, an issue raised by Keane, Heinz & Lynch when examining reasons for attrition at ITE. Students are encouraged to be reflective practitioners and through this process of critical reflection students can explore concepts and ideas relating to identity and belonging as well as developing their own identity as a teacher.

By providing various ways of engaging with the programme material we can, in line with the UDL guidelines, recruit interest, sustain effort and persistence and self-regulation with the goal of learners becoming purposeful and motivated. Providing students with multiple means of engagement can mean promoting opportunities for student voice in teaching, offering students opportunities to work collaboratively, providing material in a synchronous and asynchronous manner, ensuring students have all notes prior to lectures, utilising technology in offering students a variety of means in which to engage with learning, providing clear goals and a roadmap in how to get there, offering assessment support to all students i.e. assessment support webinars/lectures, modelling the use of checklists, graphic organisers and providing students with a variety of resources to support their learning.

The second principle Multiple Means for Representation relates to the '*what*' of learning, i.e. how can academic staff use the recognition networks to make learning accessible to all. In line with the UDL guidelines this relates to perception, language and symbols, and comprehension with the overall goal of students becoming resourceful and knowledgeable. These also correlates with the Céim Standards for Initial Teacher Education where graduate teachers on completion of the course are required to be resourceful and knowledgeable. This principle requires academic staff to think about the ways in which they present material as well as the

methods and materials they use. An emphasis is placed on a multimodal approach to presenting material offering alternatives to auditory and visual information. Academic staff can provide options for language and symbols by clarifying key terms and phrases and modelling ways of decoding and analysing text. For example, some students may struggle with academic writing at Masters level, this can be proactively catered for by offering academic writing supports in the form of lectures or webinars to all students. An academic writing tool kit can be developed as well as guides that students can access.

Academic staff can also utilise various ICT software in how they present material, e.g. interactive quizzes such as Nearpod, Menti, Kahoot etc. By presenting information in a variety of ways and utilising a variety of teaching and learning strategies and materials, academic staff can create a learning environment that is inclusive to all students by proactively reducing barriers and increasing flexibility and choice. This can honour students' identities and backgrounds and in doing so heighten their sense of belonging not only to the ITE programme but to the teaching profession.

The third principle Multiple Means of Action and Expression relates to the '*how*' of learning i.e. how can academic staff utilise the strategic networks to make learning accessible to all. This relates to physical action, expression and communication and executive function with the overall goal of enabling students to become strategic and goal directed. Here academic staff on ITE programmes need to consider the variety of ways in which students can demonstrate their learning. This can take place in class during discussions or collaborative learning as well as during formative and summative assessments. As stated by Flood and Banks '*for a curriculum to be inclusive, it needs to incorporate a variety of options for students to demonstrate their learning and capacity as there is no one-size-fits-all method*' (2021, p.3) Therefore, it is important to provide student with a variety of assessment types i.e. audio-visual essay, case-study, research project, collaborative task, presentations, photo-essay, reflective essay etc. Timely and constructive feedback is essential here to support students and to move their learning forward.

If implemented in a meaningful way UDL has the capacity to situate ITE programme within an inclusive pedagogical framework that is proactive, pre-emptive and flexible and allows us to authentically not only recognise difference but value it. It also has the potential to change how we teach, moving from what Freire termed a 'banking model' of education, to a critical and affective pedagogy that fosters positive student/teacher relationships and amplifies student

voice.

4.2 The Importance of UDL in Post-primary Classrooms.

The Teaching Council's review of ITE programmes prior to their reconceptualization in 2012 found that the two areas student teachers struggle with most are school placement and inclusive education. Therefore, a UDL approach at ITE is two-pronged; we must provide choice and flexibility for students on ITE programmes but of equal importance we must teach them how to underpin their own teaching with a UDL framework. This can be done through modelling best practice i.e. how we design and teach ITE programmes but also through explicitly teaching the UDL framework to our student teachers. As already discussed, the Céim Standards for Initial Teacher Education requires ITE providers to offer mandatory content on inclusive education. Much of this relates to students with specific educational needs and differentiation strategies, however, if we are to extend our concept of inclusive education to a broader framework that caters for all learners then we should also be incorporating UDL here. As highlighted student teachers are entering classrooms at postprimary level that are diverse environments. It is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that all aspects of learning are accessible to all students. This is not a hope or a wish but an ethical responsibility of the teacher. In turn it is the ethical responsibility of ITE providers to ensure that graduate teachers are properly prepared and equipped to do this.

One could argue that policy development at Post-Primary level further highlight the need to adopt a UDL approach to teaching, learning and assessment. The DEIS Plan (2017) focuses on issues of equity and diversity and stresses the rights of all students in accessing high quality education. The introduction of the Junior Cycle Framework in 2015 explicitly mentions Universal Design. The framework aims to provide meaningful and valuable learning experiences for students *'from all cultural and social backgrounds and from a wide variety of individual circumstances'* (DES, 2015, p. 26). The Classroom Based Assessments encourage inquiry-based learning the promote research and analytical skills as well as collaboration and communication skills. The learning outcomes for each Junior Cycle subject align with a UDL framework providing choice, flexibility and autonomy for both students and teachers. The changes underway due to the Senior Cycle Redevelopment also align with a UDL framework by placing greater emphasis on project work and continuous assessment, allowing for multiple means of engagement, representation and action and expression. The Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in particular target 4.7 aims to ensure

equitable and quality education for all students and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all students. Likewise, the recently launched Literacy Numeracy and Digital Learning Strategy 2024-2033: Every learner from Birth to Young Adulthood also emphasises diversity, equity, accessibility and the rights of all students.

Therefore, one might argue that if UDL is not modelled and explicitly taught during ITE programmes we are not adequately preparing our graduate teachers to teach in today's 21st century diverse classrooms. This is not only a disservice to our graduate teachers but also a disservice to post-primary pupils.

There are many ways in which graduate student teachers can embed UDL into their teaching learning and assessment utilising the three principles of UDL. Some suggestions (not by any means an exhaustive list) are as follows:

Multiple Means of Engagement – the '*why*' of learning:

- Allow students to make choices so they can remain interested and engaged i.e. tiered lessons, choice boards, tools used for gathering information etc
- Activate prior knowledge
- Make connections with students' lived experiences
- Vary teaching and learning activities so as they are culturally relevant and responsive
- Design teaching and learning activities and learning outcome that have a purpose and are clear to students
- Encourage students to assess their own learning using checklists and rubrics
- Provide varying levels of challenge
- Offer opportunities for consistent feedback like self-reflection, peer review and teacher feedback
- Allow students to participate in the design of teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks

Multiple Means of Representation – the '*what*' of learning:

- Customise the display of information using visual, auditory, and digital materials for each lesson

- Be flexible in the display of information i.e. size of text, colour, volume etc.
- Provide scaffolds to support students with reading materials
- Simplify complicated instructions and provide visuals to increase understanding
- Clarify vocabulary and symbols .i.e. use of keywords, wordwall, wordbank etc
- Support the decoding of text and notation
- Offer visuals like charts, pictures, audio clips and resources students can touch and manipulate
- Model comprehension strategies like note-taking, highlighting, monitoring, and asking questions
- Helps students see how the information is transferable to other classes and lessons.

Multiple Means of Action and Expression – the ‘*how*’ of learning:

- Allow students to use technology and assistive technology, resources, and tools to express knowledge, such as speech recognition software, graphic organisers, calculators, exemplars and so on
- Use multiple media for communication i.e. speech, drawing, music, dance, art etc.
- Give students a choice in how they express what they know or what they can do as evidence that can meet or exceed a standard
- Provide differentiated feedback while students work
- Have students reflect on their own learning and evaluate the choices they make to express knowledge
- Incorporate a variety of assessment strategies
- Provide scaffolds and model instructions

5. Conclusion.

Obvious barriers to fully implementing a UDL framework at ITE level relate to time and resources. Academic staff need training in how to implement a UDL approach in terms of their teaching, learning and assessment strategies and methodologies. Time is also required in

designing content, developing new content, creating and sourcing learning materials and resources. Academic staff already have a considerable workload and finding extra time can be challenging. There also needs to be a collective collaborative approach to implementing a UDL framework not just from a teaching perspective but at policy level in institutions and in the education system at large. The upcoming launch of the National Charter for UDL for tertiary education providers will encourage all providers to formally adopt the UDL charter and this will inevitably play a key role in shaping institutional policies and practices in catering for diversity and ensuring equity and inclusion.

The curricular changes at post-primary level, the drive towards full inclusion, the social and cultural changes in recent decades and the rapid developments in ICT in education mean that Irish education is at a critical juncture. Here we are presented with the opportunity to realise meaningful inclusive education cognisant of intersectionality, experiences, identity and abilities and to fully embrace diversity. This will not be easy and will require hard work, persistence and commitment however this paper argues that utilising a UDL framework will equip educators at all levels with a pedagogical inclusive framework that supports them in this endeavour.

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