

Being a real student: Students' perceptions of one inclusive tertiary educational experience.

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Background

- Students with disabilities are under-represented in higher education
- The completion of post secondary education has been demonstrated to increase the quality of lives of disabled people and thus their employability (Wehman, 2001).
- Article 24: United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007), calls for inclusion at all levels of education.
- Educational institutions are increasing being seen as ***learner-centred organizations.***



- The inclusion of people with learning disabilities within tertiary institutions is seen as a means of **promoting full citizenship** through the provision of educational learning opportunities (Duffy, 2003, 2008; Kennedy, Poll, & Sanderson, 2008).
- The **voice** of people with learning disabilities within educational settings is still conspicuously lacking (Goward et al, 2005).



Certificate in Contemporary Living

10 modules (8 compulsory, 2 electives)

Transferable skills

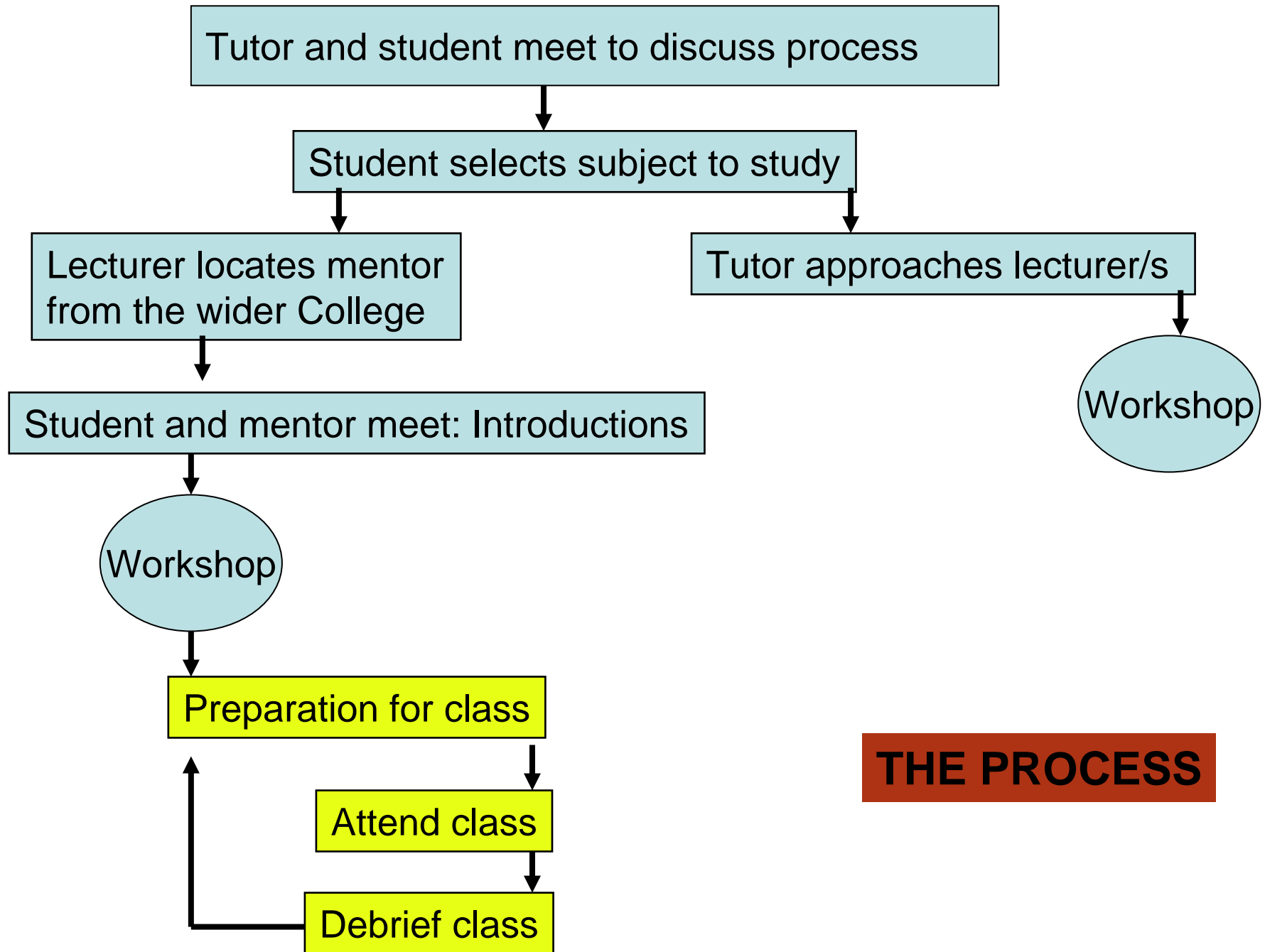
- Written and oral spoken communication
- Information and communication technology
- Personal effectiveness,
- Career development
- Mathematics and financial management
- Work placement

Humanities

- Social Sciences: an international perspective
- Inclusive studies and research

Expressive Arts (2)

- Art and design
- Drama and dance
- Creative arts appreciation and/or performance
- Special topic



THE PROCESS

Purpose of this presentation: Findings of a focus group

- Recount the experiences and perspectives of a group of students with intellectual disability who were included in classes in a tertiary institution
- Suggest ways in which the experience could be improved for future students.
- Promote the development of more inclusive practices within tertiary education institutions



Overview

- 7 students participated in the focus group, three women and four men.
- The focus group were explored different aspects of the experience.
 - the setting up
 - attending classes.
- Six different subjects
 - English literature
 - American history
 - Sociology
 - Economics
 - Computers and Information technology
 - Drama



Themes: Being real student

- Choice
- Making decisions
- Taking risks
- Personal responsibility
- Support from peers
- Learning
- Being included



Choice

- Students chose a subject they were personally interested in and had some knowledge of as it gave
 - *“something to connect to”*
 - *“It’s fun to go over and learn the topics that you’re doing and its fabulous to do something that you’re really passionate into”.*
- Subjects chosen were related to were
 - personal experience
 - study at school
 - recreational pursuit
- Multi layered
 - *“so many different types of the same subject”*
 - *“they did Irish history and American history and world history– different sorts of history”.*
 - *“then we had to decide again”.*

Making decisions

Learning

- *I saw stuff on (subject) on the web— it told me all about the course- what was going to be on it.*
- *It (worksheets) gave a way to go to the computers to find out what we wanted. We did it in the computer class.*

Timetable

- *Some of the lectures were on late and most of us did not like late lectures – we preferred during class hours.*
- *Day classes fitted in.... I didn't like 4 to 5 because I live in (town) and I have to travel in the evening and I am late getting home.*
- *I didn't mind later. I had plenty of time to get home. I live in (suburb). It is about 10 minutes away.*

Personal responsibility

- Ensured they knew where the room was before classes.
 - familiarised themselves beforehand
 - *“the different places on campus”*
 - Asked people
 - *“the security workers”*
 - arranged a meeting spot with mentor

- Where they sat
 - Front, back, middle
 - Enjoyed sitting with other students



- *“It was different, College I find is a lot different than school. School is a lot stricter and if you don’t come in you get told off. If you don’t come in College its your own problem”.*

Personal responsibility: Understanding content

No mentor was present

- *“It was a little bit difficult not having a mentor to talk it over. I don’t know about anyone else but I got stuck on some little things and I just asked (CCL student) about it”.*
- *“(CCL student) is our dictionary”.*
- *“We found it difficult because we didn’t have a mentor- if I had a mentor I could have asked if I didn’t understand what the teacher was saying- but I asked the teacher afterwards”.*

Taking a risk

Range and combination of feelings about attending the selected class.

“ Might not understand it- what they are saying- it is a different world over there” .

These feelings included *excited, scared, shaky* and *nervous*

- about what the lecturer and other students might think about them
- that they might go to the wrong room.

The students commented that while there was a degree of apprehension, overall they felt excited about learning new things and meeting new people.

- *“...so I said that I would go to mainstream lectures. I was a little [worried] because it was all new to me. And then I told myself not to worry. I also spoke to my mentor”.*
- *“I felt excited and the lectures were good. I was worried and nervous”.*
- *“It was alright. It was a bit mind boggling at the start but then I kind of got used to it. It kind of took me a couple of weeks to get used to it ”.*
- *The first time it was a little bit difficult but I kind of got through that...it was one day that it was kind of like that but that was fine.*

Support from peers

- Going to class with another student
 - *“It calmed my nerves “*
 - *“Someone to talk with”.*
- Support from mentors
 - *“We got help with mentors and this made it ten times easier”.*
 - *Well I actually enjoyed it because I actually made friends straight away with the mentors we had because they were very friendly and like one lunch time when they actually gave up some of their lunch hour and went over some study notes and helped me.*



- Siblings

- *“ I talked with my friends and talked to my sister. They kind of said be yourself and just don’t get all agitated, just be calm and try to do your best. My sister kind of helped me out with that because she does study as well. She’s in another college and I kind of talked to her about it” .*

- Support from other students

- *“Well the first time I was looking forward to it and then I was a bit nervous when I got into it so I started talking to people and they kind of helped me along. I kind of felt my way into it ”.*



Learning

- *“I loved going to them [lectures] because I’m a learner person and I love learning. Learning is my passion for learning.”*



- *“Well it gives me a chance to learn new things and the halls over there are a bit bigger than the classes that we have here. I enjoy learning here but I like learning new things so my mind expands in new ideas and creations.”*

Lecturer style : Language

- *“Sometimes there were big words that you did not know that you could use and then not understand- probably words that you might hear again and you have already heard them.”*
- *“Pictures can help explain big words.”*
- *“If the words are written on the notes you can look them up again later.”*

Lecturer style : Data show

- Words and graphics
- Space, font size
- Leaving slide displayed long enough
- *“Power points are much easier. “*
- *“...they are visual.”*
- *“Some [lecturers] use it really well and some not so well.”*

Lecturer style: Use of movie

- *“We saw bits of the film- she selected one part- we talked about it and then looked at another part and talked about it. If we watched the whole thing it would have taken hours.”*
- *“It was the important parts of the movie. I didn’t mind seeing parts of the movie ‘cos then you knew the important bits.”*
- *“She had done a lot of preparation.”*
- *“At the end of the class I thanked her.”*

Lecturer style: Notes

- Helpful notes
 - Followed the structure of the class
 - Used headings, key points, bullet points, not too much on a page, numbered
- *“Take it home and read through the notes”*
- *“Take it back to the place where I am living as my house mother is very interested.”*

Students note taking

Copying from board/datashow

- *“ Find it hard to write down if there is too much. One paragraph there is lots and in another paragraph it is smaller but it does not give you enough time.”*
- *“In (subject) I was happy to have (name of lecturer) as she went slowly and I could write it down.”*

Spidergram

- *“Spidergrams make it easier, you just take the key words out of things.”*

Key words

- *“Because you don't have to like write loads, you just take the keywords out “*

Students note taking

Pictures

- *“Its just pictures ...because my brain can’t function everything in like the lecturer is saying so I found it helpful because it helped to remind myself what to talk about in the lectures.”*

Enjoyed the experience

- *“I just sat and listened, I relaxed.”*



Being included

- *“It was a great experience to meet and to socialise with all the people who also go to the lectures”.*
- *Some of the classes were really small and then there was twice we were in a big lecture hall and I thought it was just amazing. I was looking forward to it.*
- *“We had the lecture 2 to 4, and we’d break...that was different it like opens out and a bigger hall and a bigger place and that was quite different. And socialise through other people around you”.*
- *“Some of the classes were really small and then there was twice we were in a big lecture hall and I thought it was just amazing. Just being in another class and then being a part of Trinity College and just to do your study”.*

Being included

- *“It was good to take part with all the other students. It was exciting to be with so many people.”*
- *“It was mixing with other students we didn’t know, we thought we were a bit nervous and the other students there didn’t want us but we got to know them and I found the lectures very interesting.”*



What would have made it more real?

More time/contact with mentor

- *“It was just like they were rushing- coming late from their class and then afterwards going straight off to their next class”*



What would have made it more real?

Assessment task designed and marked by lecturer

- Advantages. feeling more part of the class, to have homework related to the content, it would be better for themselves.
- *“boost your confidence”*
- *“wouldn’t feel as left out”*
- *“we would be the same then”*
- *“we wouldn’t just walk in and walk out”*
- *“be a part of the class”*
- Individual or group assignments
- *“I would love to have a group assessment- sit with the other students and do it with them – I would love that.”*

Being a real student

 Having choice

 Making decisions

 A critical approach



 Personal responsibility

 Taking risks

 Support from peers

Duffy, 2003, 2008;

Goward, P., Grant, G., Ramcharan, P., Richardson, M. (2005).
Learning disability: A life cycle approach to valuing people
Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Kennedy, Poll, & Sanderson, 2008).

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with
Disabilities (2007),