



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Learning without Limits: Challenging Assumptions



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Overview



TCPID

TRINITY
CENTRE FOR
PEOPLE WITH
INTELLECTUAL
DISABILITIES

Ionad na
Trionóide do
Dhaoine le
Michumair
Intleachta

Learning without Limits
For an inclusive society

School of Education, Trinity College Dublin

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The Good University



CONCEPT OF ABILITY CULTURALLY AND HISTORICALLY SPECIFIC

View of ability as 'inborn intelligence' deeply influential in education

General cognitive ability assumed to drive learning – ability labels explain differences in attainment

IQ tests measure what has been learned not innate ability

Ability labels refer to differences in young people's current abilities to do certain things

'An inclusive turn' (Ainscow, 2007)

Moves away from explanations of educational failure that concentrate on characteristics of individual children and their families, towards an analysis of the barriers to participation and learning experienced by students within school systems.

UNCRPD (United Nations, 2008)

The right to an inclusive education encompasses a transformation in culture, policy and practice in all educational environments to accommodate the differing requirements and identities of individual students, together with a commitment to remove the barriers that impede that possibility.

(General Comment No 4)



Recent Developments

International Frameworks: UNCRPD (2006) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Core Principles

People with intellectual disabilities must be empowered to make choices that shape their lives.

Rights-based support replaces charity-based models.

Social Inclusion Defined

A complex interaction between:

Environmental factors & Personal characteristics

Leads to:

Access; Being Valued; Respect; Participation; Strong social networks

Lessons (Ainscow, 2023)

Inclusion and equity must be seen as principles guiding and informing all education policies

- Inclusion is a process never ending search to find better ways to respond to diversity
 - Inclusion is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers
 - Inclusion is about the presence, participation and achievement of all students
 - Inclusion involves a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalisation, exclusion or underachievement.
-

Evidence is essential

- Important to know who is included, who is segregated and who is excluded from schooling
- Must 'measure what we value' rather than 'valuing what we measure'.



Ambition

Educational provision lacking ambition

Destiny

Life trajectory predetermined

Dependency

Dependency model informing transitions to adulthood

Labelling

Labelling of population inherent dangers such as low expectations, over protection and exclusion



Competing Discourses in Disability & Higher Education

1. Normalisation

- Sees people with ID as passive recipients
- Aims to help them lead a 'normal' life
- Often rooted in support and care models

2. Emancipatory (Rights-Based)

- Sees people with ID as active agents of transformation
- Promotes dignity, value, person-centredness, and independence
- Emphasises access to employment and further education

Challenges in Post-Secondary Education Access

- Assumptions about limitations
- Persistent deficit thinking
- Individualised needs ≠ inability
- Lack of engagement with adult learning theory

Call to Action

- Recognise learning as lifelong and social
- Challenge the 'perpetual child' narrative

LEARNING WITHOUT LIMITS

Free from:

Needless constraints imposed by ability focused practices

Indignity of being labelled top, middle, bottom, fast or slow

Wounding consciousness that can aspire at best to only limited achievements

CHALLENGING FIXED ABILITY THINKING



'I have found that the pupils designated as having moderate learning difficulties...can: concentrate for long periods of time; sustain protracted investigations; be systematic; reason logically; find patterns and relationships; make tests and predictions; generalize; record and explain their findings.

I have found them working in ways I had never expected them to be able to.'

What they couldn't do was perform meaningless calculations and relate them to situations which were equally meaningless to them. But then who can?'

(Hart, 2004)





Conceptual Framework:

The Challenge

Adults with intellectual disabilities are:

- Less likely to make decisions
- Less likely to be employed
- Less likely to live independently
- Less likely to enjoy equal quality of life

The Response

PSE programmes must:

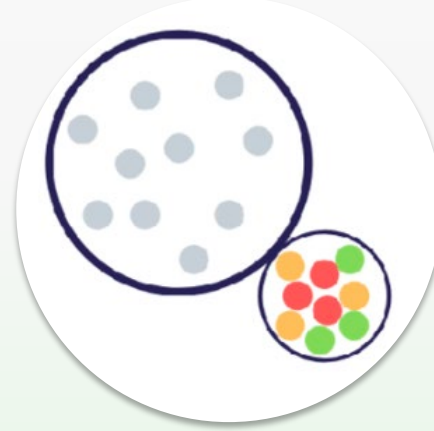
- Be educational, not care-based
- Build independence and agency
- Provide structured, success-oriented learning
- Prepare students for adulthood, employment, & full participation

Banks et al., 2022; Corby et al., 2020; Kelley & Westling, 2019



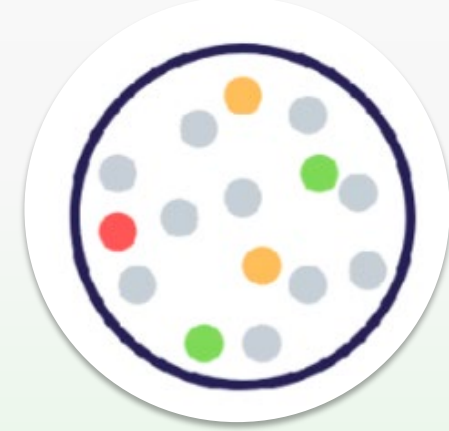
Mixed/Hybrid Model:

Combination of academic and social activities with peers.



Substantially Separate Model:

Focused support in separate classes, life skills, and transition programmes.



Totally Inclusive Model:

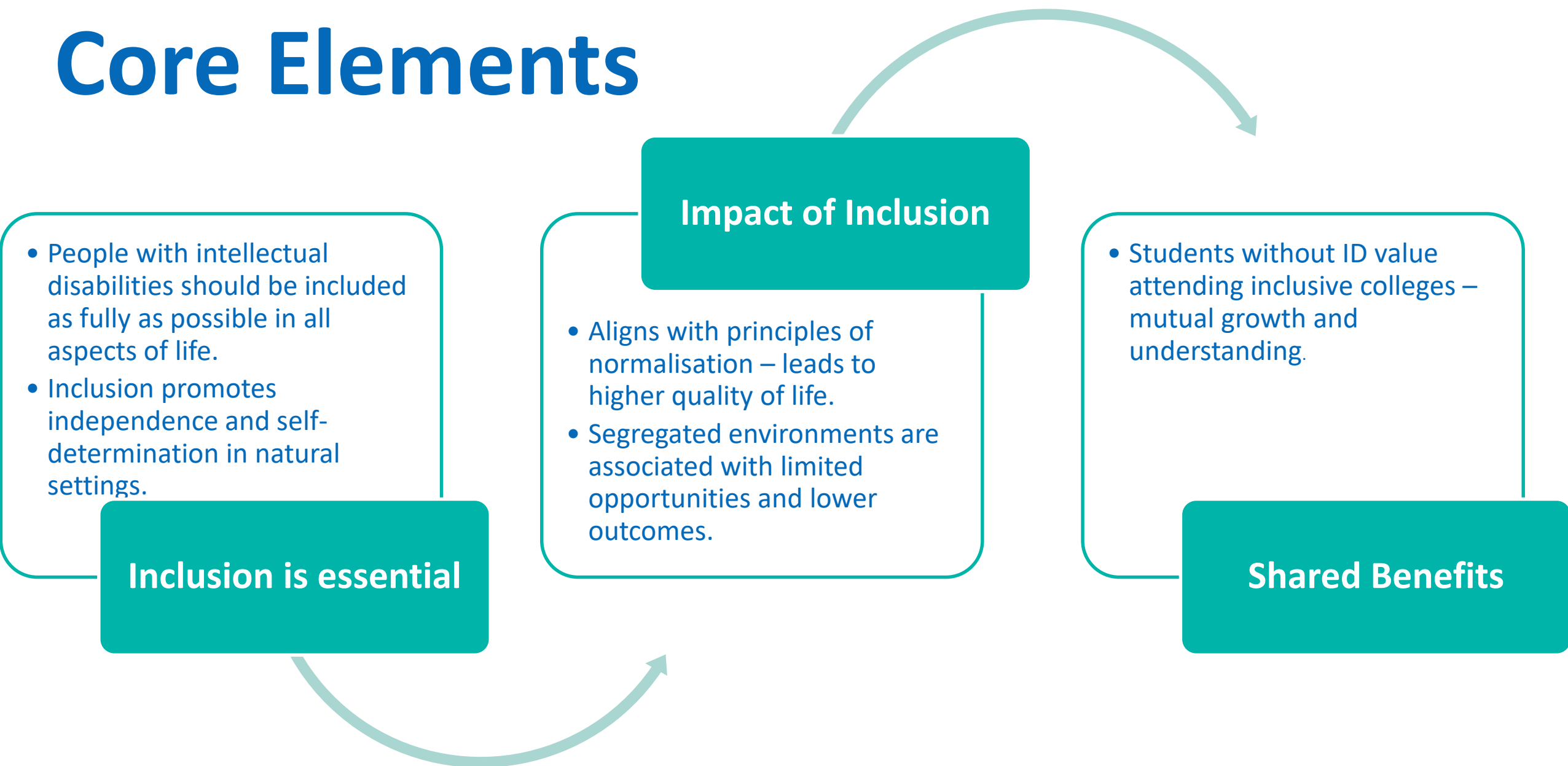
Personalised support for full integration into regular courses.

Models of Inclusive Postsecondary Education

Wide variances in programmes from model of delivery, time span and award/credential

Grigal et al., 2012

Core Elements



Person-centred planning

Personal Development



Communication skills, self-awareness, and self-determination

Social Participation



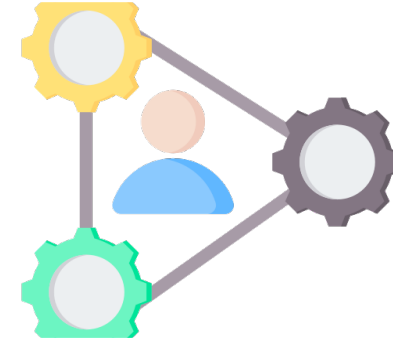
Joining university clubs, societies, and peer interactions

Academic Learning



Auditing or taking courses towards credentials

Vocational Success



Gaining specific job skills and work readiness

Community Participation



Using transport, budgeting and navigating daily life

Core Components: Self-Determination Theory

Autonomy:

Desire for self-governance.



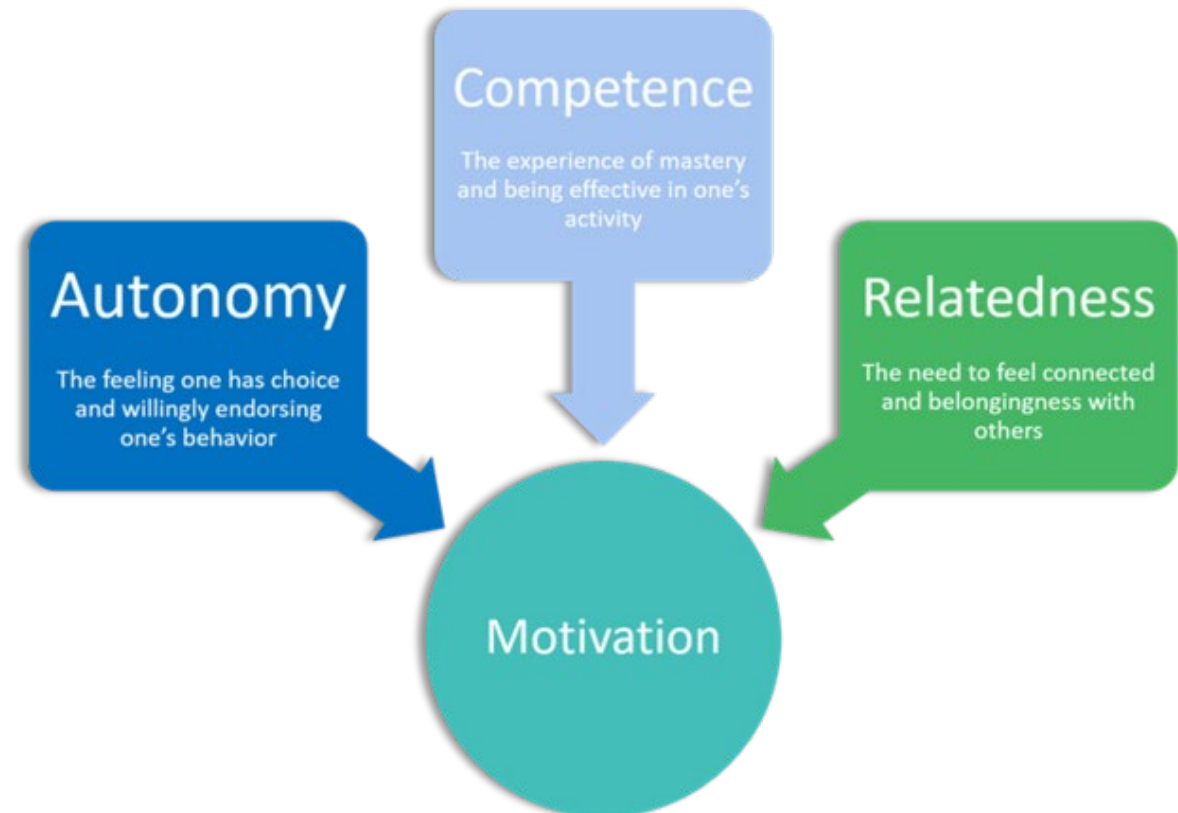
Competence:

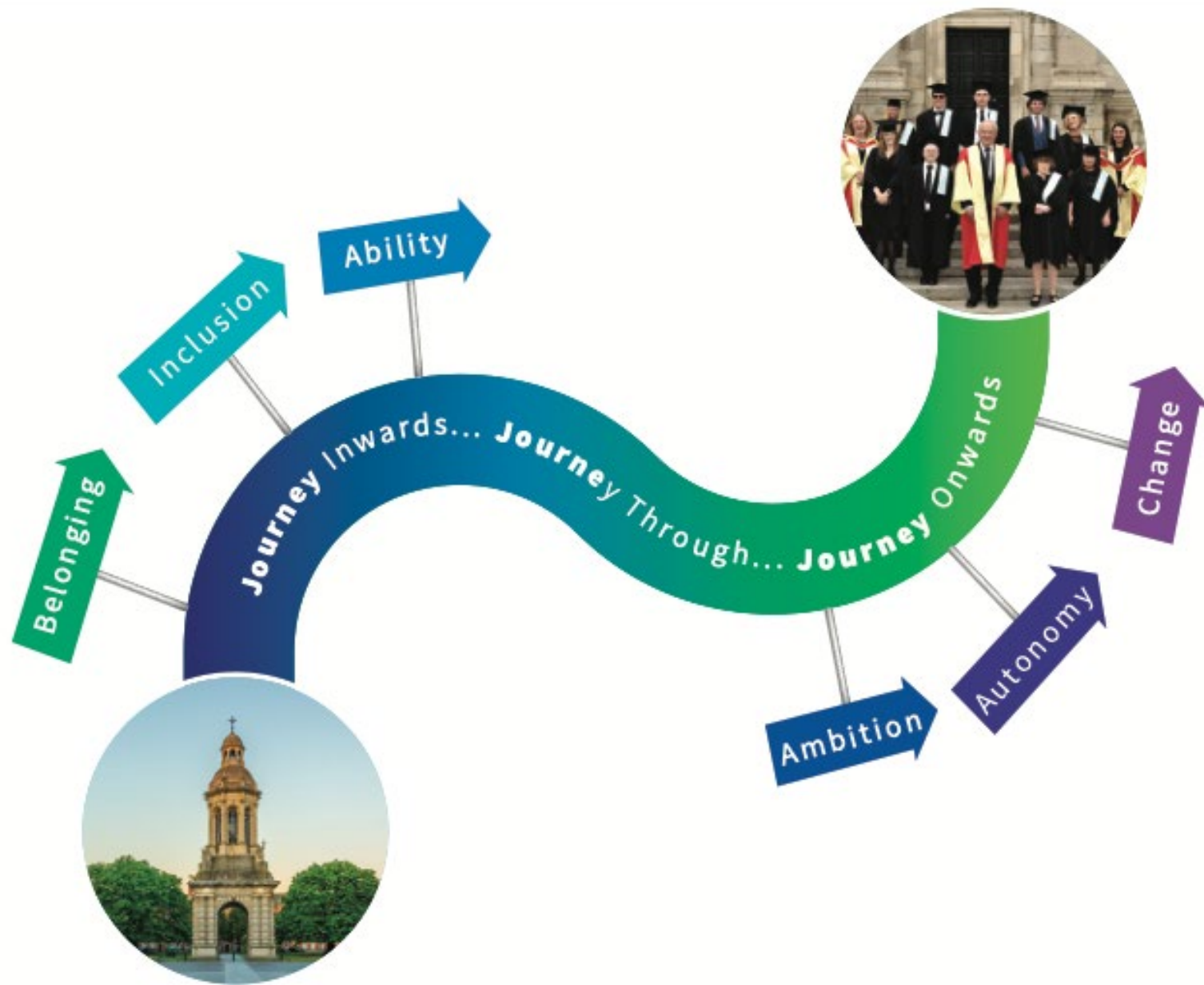
Feeling capable in one's endeavours.



Relatedness:

Meaningful connections with others.





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The Journey Inwards

Goal: Increase awareness of post-secondary education options for students with intellectual disabilities.



Outcome: Equip students, parents, and teachers with the knowledge and tools to plan transitions to higher education.



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The Journey Through

Goal: Provide a robust university experience where students feel empowered and included in campus life.

Programme Coordinator to lead delivery of the ASIAP programme.

Opportunities for co-learning with other university students.

Interdisciplinary teaching team to deliver an academic curriculum subject to external examination.

Student Union engagement

Inclusion in university life

Participation in college clubs and societies

Outcome: A quality university experience for students, fostering academic success and social inclusion.



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The Journey Onwards

Goal: Establish meaningful employment opportunities for graduates with intellectual disabilities.

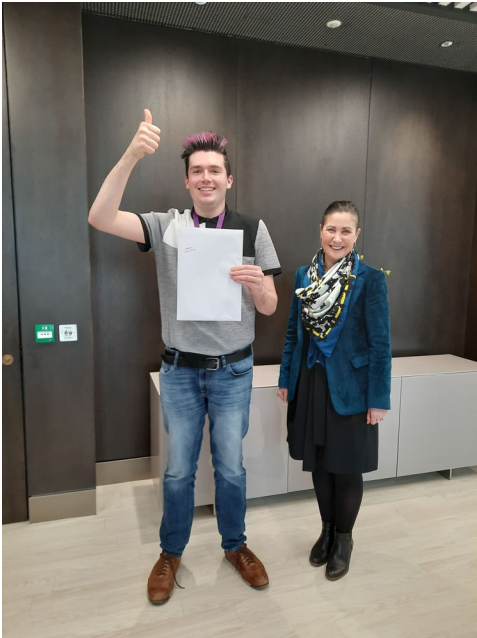
**Employment Pathways
Coordinator to enhance job
placement efforts.**

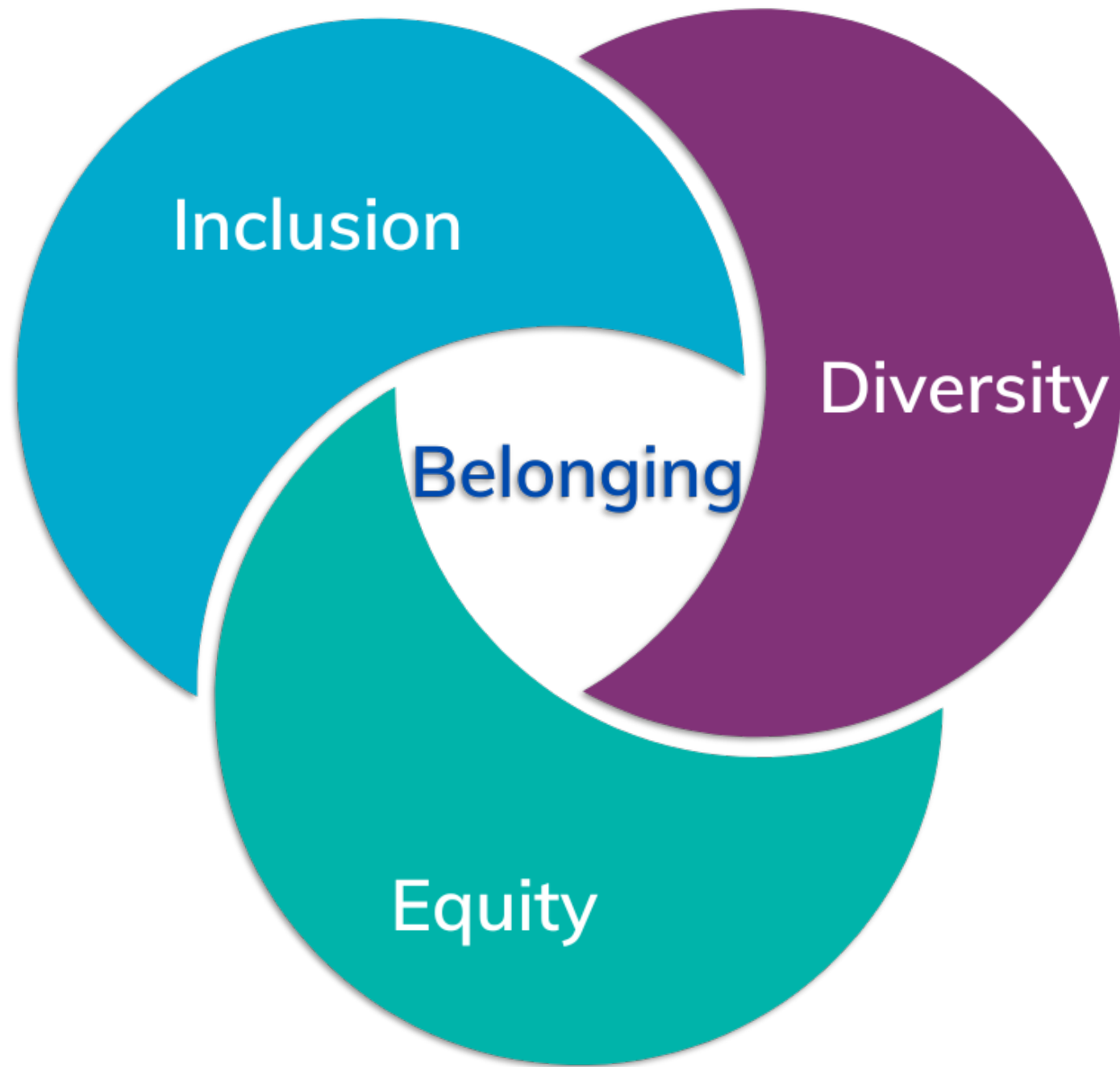
**Occupational Therapy
team to support
employment readiness.**

**Enhanced mentor
training for business
partners.**

**Scoping exercise with
City of Dublin Education
and Training Board
(CDETb) to develop
traineeships for
graduates.**

Outcome: Embed
inclusive employment
opportunities into
business culture and
provide sustainable
career pathways for
graduates.





Sense of belonging identified as a process marker of efficacy in implementation of school inclusion policy:

‘an educational aspiration...authenticated by practice and not simply a rhetorical flourish or tactical distraction.’

(Slee, 2019).

Belonging is the ‘how’ in transforming inclusion from a requirement to a practice.



How are spaces of belonging, inclusion and exclusion created in education?



Are our students 'insiders' or 'outsiders' of the learning community?



Placement in an education environment or community setting does not automatically lead to a sense of belonging.

Belonging, Spaces, Education



The Good University is:

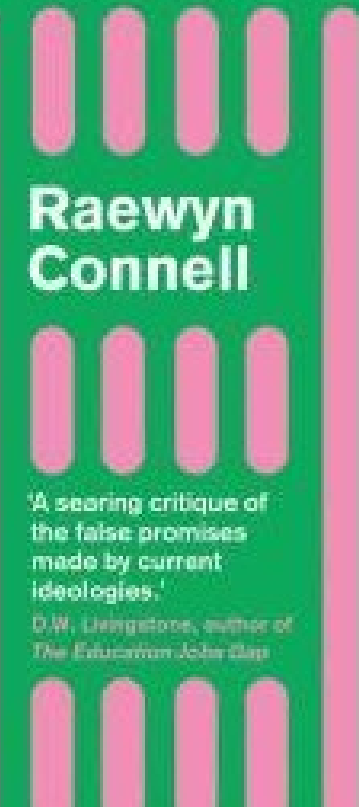
- Democratic, engaged, truthful, creative and sustainable
- Follows principles of social justice, giving priority to least advantaged social groups
- Foregrounds student agency in learning, opens pathways and expands the learning available to all

Belief in universities as a public good

- Shared social resource, a collective asset.

Good University


What universities actually do and why it's time for radical change



Courageously imagine and share fresh possibilities

Laura Czerniewicz & Catherine Cronin (2023)

- Treating the future as a site of '**radical possibility**' (Facer, 2016)
- **Extend possibilities** for all who are currently excluded, particularly marginalised individuals and communities?
- Asking **what if** instead of **what is**
working with the future as a space of uncertainty, collaborative and creative imagining/reimagining, deepening our understanding of the present and bringing capacious realities into being
(Houlden & Veletsianos, 2022, Ross, 2022)
- **Imagine beyond the given.**

A woman with long, wavy blonde hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a black top and a thin necklace. She is looking slightly to her left and speaking. The background is an office with a window showing a plant and blinds. Subtitles are at the bottom of the frame.

with just them
and in the hopes of then preparing them



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Thank you

1:30pm



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