

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

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## **Abstract**

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

This thesis explores 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 this author, co-researchers interviewed 17 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.

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Purpose and Rationale for the Study**

### **1.0 The context of tertiary education for people with intellectual disabilities**

This thesis is an inclusive phenomenographic study about adult learners with intellectual disabilities who attend a two year tertiary education programme called the Certificate in Contemporary Living (CCL) in the National Institute for Intellectual Disability (NIID) at Trinity College Dublin (O'Brien, O'Keeffe, Healey, Kubiak, Lally & Hughes, 2009). The course aims to promote full citizenship for its students through the development of learning and social networks, as well as career opportunities through work experience placements (O'Brien, O'Keeffe, Kenny, Fitzgerald, & Curtis 2008). CCL students are taught in their group as well as with other Trinity undergraduates on campus; they audit undergraduate courses of their choice to complement their CCL studies (Kubiak & Espiner, 2009; O'Connor, Kubiak, Espiner & O'Brien, 2012); they also engage in the wider campus life and access a variety of facilities within college. In February 2008, 19 students graduated, becoming the first in Ireland to complete a full-time, 2-year course within a third-level setting. Importantly, these and the 38 students who have since graduated from the programme, participated in the Commencement Ceremony with other Trinity graduands across a range of both undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

The research interest in the subject of this thesis arose from a personal need as a programme tutor and tutor trainer, to develop a greater awareness and understanding of the learning experiences of these intellectually disabled university students. The micro focus on learning for this body of students forms part of a macro picture of tertiary education for people with an intellectual disability. Since the pilot of the CCL programme was set up in 2005, the NIID has maintained a dedicated focus on developing the capacity of people with intellectual disabilities to engage in education at third level. The NIID has played a key role in developing third level opportunities for intellectually disabled people, and under a project grant from the Higher Education Authority (HEA) through Strategic Innovation Funding (SIF), the NIID has been sharing CCL course materials and the expertise of its teaching staff with other third level institutes (TLIs). There are now five partner TLIs throughout Ireland offering educational programmes to people with intellectual disabilities which are based on the NIID model.

For people with intellectual disabilities, studying for a certificate at third level is somewhat different from the study model for a more traditional student. Because most individuals with intellectual disabilities have been considered unable to gain the academic requirements for university admission, it is often assumed that they are unlikely to succeed or belong in such a setting (Eisenman & Mancini, 2010; Hart, Grigal, & Weir, 2010a), particularly by parents (Hafner, Moffatt, & Kisa, 2011).

Despite the above concerns however, tertiary (post-secondary) educational opportunities exist in many countries. Hart, Grigal and Weir (2010b, para. 2) in 2009 identified through survey 149 programs across 37 US states that enrol students with intellectual disabilities. Other examples include the On-Campus Program at the University of Alberta, Canada (University of Alberta, 2006; Uditsky, Frank, Hart, & Jeffreys, 1987) which commenced in 1987; the "Up the Hill" Project at Flinders University in South Australia (Flinders University, 2011) which has operated for over 10 years, and Deakin University briefly hosted (1999-2003) a Certificate in Adult Literacy and Numeracy program operated by Gawith Villa Inc (now Inclusion Melbourne) in Victoria (Quinn, Laghi, Bisenieks, & O'Connor, 1999).

Encouraging as these examples of inclusive opportunities may be, there is however, little or no research done on how this group of students learn while they are on campus. It is this researcher's opinion therefore that educators working with people with intellectual disabilities do not possess adequate knowledge of how this group of adult learners experience learning while in college. For this reason, the views of learners with intellectual disabilities in tertiary education deserve to be closely examined.

Having been involved for many years in adult education, first through working in Vocational Educational Colleges (VECs) in Dublin, and for the



last 6 years with the NIID, I am now seeking a fresh perspective on understanding the dynamics of adult learning. My specific intention is to find a perspective that would be empowering for adult learners with intellectual disabilities to succeed in an environment that is unfamiliar and had traditionally excluded them.

Enhancing the field of education for adult learners (whether they are intellectually disabled or not), calls for the simultaneous advancement of methodology. In the research area of adult learning there has recently been a shift from a normative paradigm to an interpretive paradigm (Bron, 2005). This paradigm shift is based on an increasing theoretical and methodological sophistication of interpretivist researchers worldwide (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Responding to this methodological shift, the current researcher sought a way to combine examining intellectually disabled adults' learning, and developing an appropriate approach to do so. An answer was found through the integration of the ideas of learning of new phenomenography (Åkerlind, 2005) and a phenomenographic research approach (Martin & Booth, 1997) which focuses on understanding the dynamics of learning through describing the variety of ways learning is experienced by college students.

Although being relatively new, phenomenography has gained a positive reputation in the last 25 years particularly in Sweden (Marton, Dall’Alba, & Beaty, 1993; Marton & Tsui, 2004; Åkerlind, 2005), its country of origin, as well as in China, (Marton, Dall’Alba and Tse, 1996), Africa (Cliff, 1998); Finland (Tynjälä, 1997), and the United Kingdom (Vermunt and van Rijswijk, 1988). Emerging from an empirical rather than a theoretical or philosophical base, phenomenography has only recently proposed its epistemological and ontological postulations and its methodological requirements (Åkerlind, 2005). These advancements have facilitated the creation of the Variation Theory of learning and anatomy of learner’s awareness with their associated implications for pedagogical practices and research (e.g. Marton & Tsui, 2004). This researcher’s objective is to engage with these recent and ground-breaking developments in phenomenography and apply this knowledge to the area of learning for adults with intellectual disabilities attending college.

### **1.1 Phenomenography becoming inclusive**

This research is also called an inclusive phenomenography. By placing the adjective before the word phenomenography, this researcher is making a deliberate statement that this phenomenographic research is underpinned by participatory and emancipatory influences.

Participatory (Reason & Bradbury, 2007), action (McTaggart, 1991; McNiff, 1988) or emancipatory (Habermas, 1973) research involves people with

intellectual disabilities not as subjects of research, but as “instigators of ideas, research designers, interviewers, data analysts, authors, disseminators and users” (Walmsley & Johnson, 2003, p.10). As a working definition of inclusive research this author uses Walmsley and Johnson’s (2003) definition that covers both participatory and emancipatory research in the learning disability context; inclusive research is therefore defined as research in which people with learning disabilities are active participants, not only as subjects but also as initiators, doers, writers and disseminators of research.

In the past, people with intellectual disabilities have been excluded from much of the research that occurs within the area of disability (Walmsley & Johnson, 2003). Increasingly some people with intellectual disabilities have indicated that they no longer wish to have research done on them or to be objects of others research but want to be equal partners or at least involved in its design, implementation and use (Walmsley & Johnson, 2000). This inclusive research project aims to explore how students with intellectual disabilities can be involved in the design and implementation of an educational research project on their own and their peers’ experiences of learning.

The terminology associated with inclusive research is exclusive to this discipline, so warrants definition. Consequently, there is a need to clarify the words used by academics that describe the roles played by themselves and disabled researchers. For the purpose of clarity this

author presents the following two main terms that have been used in previous research projects at the NIID. These are:

- Co-researcher: this term refers to a CCL student who has expressed interest in undertaking research and has consented to become a researcher in this research project.
- Lead researcher: This term refers to this author, a non-disabled researcher who is in charge of the inclusive research project and who provides training in research methods to co-researchers.

(National Institute for Intellectual Disability, 2010)

## **1.2 Contribution to research and practice**

Undertaking a phenomenographic study on intellectual disabled peoples' experiences of learning has not been done before either in Ireland or internationally. Consequently, this project has much to add to the current understanding of phenomenography as a research approach, as well as to the literature on inclusive research. Most phenomenographic studies in university settings involve mainstream students (see e.g. Tynjälä, 1997; 1999a), not those with intellectual disabilities. In addressing this shortcoming, the current project adds significantly to this research field.

This study makes use of inclusive research as defined by Walmsley and Johnson, (2003), and phenomenography both as a theoretical perspective and as an empirical research methodology. Consequently, it is realistic to

suggest that both the findings by themselves and the method by which the findings are obtained will add new contributions to the field which could be used by educators, pedagogues and researchers in the area of adult learners with intellectual disabilities attending college.

It is this author's expectation that the research will facilitate the movement towards theoretical and methodological improvements with regard to intellectually disabled adult learners and their learning at college. The CCL programme at the NIID is now in its sixth year, and has five partner TLIs running the CCL with 140 students attending overall. Consequently, it is both timely to examine this neglected area of intellectually disabled students' learning, and for the NIID, its students and other educationalists to benefit from the findings of this research.

### **1.3 Research questions**

This research has two main purposes:

1. To explore what can be learnt about involving CCL students in an inclusive research project about their own learning; and
2. To examine the variations in CCL students' experiences of their learning.

This research builds on the current descriptions of inclusive research (e.g. Walmsley & Johnson, 2003), as well as the phenomenographic approach of educational research and places its focus on investigating

learning from the perspectives of the learners themselves (e.g., Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Tsui, 2004).

This research therefore addresses the following three main questions:

1. How are people with intellectual disabilities meaningfully included in a phenomenographic research project?
2. What kinds of variation exist in intellectually disabled adult learners' ways of experiencing their learning while attending college?
3. How effective is the marriage of inclusive research and phenomenography in investigating intellectually disabled adult learners' experiences of their learning while attending third level education?

#### **1.4 Key concepts of the research**

The key concepts related to the topic of the study are presented and described below: The concepts are:

- *People with intellectual disabilities:* All CCL programme applicants receive a government Disability Allowance based on having an enduring intellectual impairment creating "a substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the State or to participate in social or cultural life in the State" (Disability Act 2005, p. 6). Typically these individuals would have attended a special school or special unit within a school. Selection to the CCL programme is based on the applicant's

educational and employment experiences, general interests, motivation to undertake the course and the support structures they have around them. Applicants are encouraged to identify people in their life who will support them on their student journey at Trinity.

- *Inclusive research:* According to Walmsley and Johnson (2003, p. 64), if a piece of research is to be viewed as inclusive it must exhibit the following characteristics:
  - 1) The research problem must be one that is owned (not necessarily initiated) by disabled people.
  - 2) It should further the interests of disabled people; non-disabled researchers should be on the side of the people with learning disabilities.
  - 3) It should be collaborative – people with learning disabilities should be involved in the process of doing the research.
  - 4) People with learning disabilities should be able to exert some control over processes and outcomes.
  - 5) The research question, process and reports must be accessible to people with learning disabilities.
- *Phenomenography:* Phenomenography is a qualitative research theoretical framework designed to answer questions about thinking and learning. Phenomenography adopts an *empirical* orientation; it examines ways of experiencing, seeing and knowing a phenomenon, and the architecture of the *variation* in terms of the different

aspects which define the phenomenon (Marton & Pang, 1999).

Phenomenography does not describe the variation in individual experience but the variation in the experience of individuals as a collective (Prosser, 2005).

- *Experience*: Experience is “the totality of ways in which human beings either make, or try to make, sense of what they consciously perceive” (Jarvis, 2004, p.104). Experience can belong to the individual and it can also have a collective dimension. On an individual level it refers to the internal relationship between the person and the phenomenon experienced (Marton & Booth, 1997). It is also a collective process because “when we experience as individuals, we also do so through a socially structured consciousness (or awareness)” (Olesen, 1996, p.8).
- *Ways of experiencing*: A way/ways of experiencing something is described by Marton and Booth (1997) in terms of human beings’ structure of organisation of awareness in a particular moment. In phenomenography and in describing how something is experienced, a ‘way of experiencing something’ is a description of the meaning that this something has for a person. Depending on different situations, this something may have different meanings for the same person. The meaning it has for a person can be understood in terms of which aspects we are aware of and can be discerned simultaneously (Runesson, 2006).



- *Variation:* This way of characterising “experiencing” implies a theoretical turn of phenomenography, and makes it possible to characterise the differences between different ways of understanding or experiencing in terms of critical aspects and dimensions of variation (Runesson, 2006). For Marton and Pang, (1999), whatever phenomenon a person encounters, it is possible to identify a limited number of varying ways in which the phenomenon is experienced. When certain aspects of a phenomenon vary, other aspects remain invariant, therefore only those aspects that vary are discerned; i.e. “we can discern only what varies” (Pang, 2003, p. 150).
- *Third level education:* In the context of this study, third-level education is the 2-year CCL programme offered by the NIID which is based at Trinity College Dublin. It is NIID’s ambition that similar opportunities for intellectually disabled people exist right across the further and higher education sectors throughout Ireland.
- *Learning:* For Marton and Both (1997), learning is a qualitative change in a way that some phenomenon is experienced by the learner. Consequently, learning has occurred when the learner exhibits a change in his/her way of experiencing the phenomenon in the world.

## **1.5 Outline of this thesis**

The structure of this research takes the following sequence:

Chapter 1 offers a rationale for the research. It outlines the aims of the study, the research questions and describes the key concepts of the research.

Chapter 2 describes the context in which the research takes place and the role of this researcher in relation to this context.

Chapter 3 offers a brief review of the theoretical underpinnings of learning and compares phenomenography to constructivist perspectives on learning.

Chapter 4 examines the development of inclusive research. It is argued that inclusive research is closely related to participatory and emancipatory influences. The theoretical underpinnings of inclusive research are then discussed by analysing the philosophical arguments of Jürgen Habermas.

Chapter 5 deals with methodology; it justifies a use of a qualitative approach and the use of phenomenography over phenomenology.

Chapter 6 deals with methods used in this research; it outlines the sampling strategies, data collection methods and protocols utilised in the data analysis.

Chapter 7 presents the findings of Stage 1 of the research – the process involved in training co-researchers.

Chapter 8 presents the findings of Stage 2 of the research – the phenomenographic categories of description and the outcome space.

Chapter 9 offers a discussion of the key findings of this research.

Chapter 10 This chapter summarises the project under two themes: 'Inclusive research and learning' and 'Learning empowerment and the supportive environment'. The implications of these results for practitioners and theory development is also addressed. Finally, the shortcomings of this study future research directions are outlined.

References

Appendices

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Research Context**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, the context for this research is presented on the CCL programme at the NIID is presented. The position of the CCL in the landscape of educational opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities in Ireland is examined to give the reader relevant background to the research context and the teaching methods and strategies used by this author. The reader is also made aware of the researcher's position in relation to the research context with a commentary on both the privileged position of the author as an "insider" researcher (Stenhouse, 1975) and the importance of including students in the generation of knowledge.

#### **2.1 The right to a third-level education**

The desire for inclusive tertiary education for people with intellectual disabilities has increasingly gained traction in recent years and has become a reality not only in Trinity College Dublin but also in other countries such as the U.S., Canada, and Australia (Hart, Grigal & Weir, 2010b; University of Alberta, 2006; Uditsky, Frank, Hart, & Jeffreys, 1987; Flinders University, 2011; Quinn, Laghi, Bisenieks, & O'Connor, 1999). The model used by advocates of tertiary education in these countries combines the principals of full inclusion, informed by a human

rights perspective, with an understanding of the social model of disability (Oliver, 1996, 1998). Rather than seeing impairment as tragic and difficult for the person involved (as in the medical model), the social model of disability is based on the view that society is responsible for preventing the full participation of disabled people. More recently, the disability movement has followed the lead of other minority groups who have experienced discrimination and exclusion from society. A rights-based model has begun to emerge with declarations such as the United Nations Draft Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) affirming the right of disabled people to full participation in all aspects of societal life. This shifts the emphasis from individual needs towards civil rights.

## **2.2. The context of the CCL in the landscape of educational opportunity for people with intellectual disabilities in Ireland**

Over the last number of years in the Republic of Ireland, the numbers of third level courses for intellectually disabled people have grown. The first two courses were established in 2004: the now discontinued course at University College Dublin (U.C.D.), and the CCL at the NIID, Trinity College Dublin, which is now the longest running course of its kind in Ireland. A part-time course in advocacy is available at Dublin City University (D.C.U.) and more recently in 2011, NUI Galway announced the commencement of “Going to College”, a two-year university course that aims to support the civic engagement of people with intellectual disabilities through access to inclusive higher education.

Besides the university sector, there exists other Further Education and Training Accredited Courses (FETAC) for adults with intellectual disabilities. Some of these courses are provided through a service provider, where others are provided in mainstream settings for general adult learners, for example literacy courses at the National Adult Literacy Association (NALA), Killester College Dublin, and Fingal Adult Education Service.

Many of the educational opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities in the third level sector in Ireland are closely aligned with service providing agencies. For example, the course at the Institute of Technology (IT) in Blanchardstown offers college enrolment to service users of the Daughters of Charity in the region of Dublin 15. Some courses (for example the “Life” programme at IT Tralee) were moved from inside the service agency onto a university campus in order to create a more inclusive experience for learners. However, when courses are aligned to a service provider, ultimately the choices of courses are narrowed for the service user, as to avail of these courses requires membership of a particular service agency on the part of the adult who has an intellectual disability.

### **2.3 The case of the CCL at the NIID**

The context of this study is the CCL, a two-year course offered to adults with intellectual disabilities in Trinity College Dublin. This Certificate programme which was approved by the Trinity Council in 2006 is offered

through the NIID which is part of the School of Social Work and Social Policy. The CCL is aimed at promoting full citizenship for students with intellectual disabilities through development of learning and social networks, as well as career opportunities (Duffy, 2003, 2008; O'Brien et al., 2008). CCL students are taught in their group as well as with other Trinity undergraduates on campus. They engage in wider campus life; they audit undergraduate courses of their choice to complement their CCL studies and access the Trinity dining hall, The Buttery (university cafeteria), coffee docks (coffee shops), library, Student Union, societies and gym. In February 2008, 19 students graduated, becoming the first in Ireland to complete a full-time, 2-year course within a third-level (tertiary education / university) setting. Importantly, they participated in the Commencement Ceremony with other Trinity graduands across a range of both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. A further 38 students have since graduated from the program, which provides a rich tapestry of social capital for all students to learn from one another regardless of their abilities (O'Brien et al., 2008).

The core values of the NIID are threefold:

1. A belief in the capacity of individuals with intellectual disabilities;
2. A respect of the contributions of people with intellectual disabilities;
- and
3. A belief in the equality of opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities.

The objectives of the CCL are to promote lifelong learning opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities through offering meaningful inclusion in a third-level environment for this group of marginalised adults. Further objectives of the CCL include developing the social skills of its students by promoting occasions to interact with other Trinity students; this has the potential to lead to a broadening of horizons for CCL students and ultimately the enhancement of individual employability.

An evaluation carried out by the National Disability Authority (NDA) in 2008 to document the development of the CCL found that for students, participation in this programme increased their development in three main areas: academic, independence and social growth. The report also showed that a third level setting provides a rich tapestry of social capital upon which all students can gain from learning from one another regardless of their abilities (O'Brien et al., 2008).

#### **2.4. Engaging with partner sites throughout Ireland: the National Rollout**

Given the success of the CCL in Trinity College, the potential of the programme as a transferable model was explored by the NIID and the Higher Education Authority. In 2009, the National Rollout was funded through the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) and this has ensured that the CCL is currently being transferred from T.C.D. to five other third-level institutions. To date these include:



1. University College Cork (UCC)
2. Dundalk Institute of technology (DkIT)
3. Mary Immaculate College, Limerick (MIC)
4. St. Angela's College, Sligo (STAC), and
5. Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT).

The NIID are working together with the above mentioned sites to increase the number of third-level institutions running the CCL; for the very first time in Irish history, there are now 135 students with intellectual disabilities enrolled in six third-level institutions through Ireland.

## **2.5 Teaching and facilitation strategies within the NIID**

### **2.5.0 Action methods in learning**

Through the last two decades there has been a revolution in the thinking associated with the way adults learn and how they interact with course material (Boyd, 1988; Heron, 1989). Underlying this thinking is the premise that learning occurs best if it is self-directed. According to Heron:

Teaching is no longer seen as imparting and doing things to the student, but is redefined as facilitation of self-directed learning. How people learn, and how to bring about this process, becomes the focus of concern, rather than the old-style pre-occupation with how to teach things to people.

(Heron, 1989, p.12)

Action methods of learning (Espiner, Hartnett & Lyons, 1991; Murray, 1993) can enable students to learn social skills and to clarify their opinions and perceptions on what are, often, controversial issues. This author's preferred method of teaching on the CCL programme uses a variety of action methods that encourages socialization for intellectual disabled students both in the classroom as well as in the wider college community. The context of learning is therefore foregrounded, and the influence that the social environment has on the learner and in turn the impact the learner has on the environment itself is recognised.

#### 2.5.1 Teaching as facilitation

Within the NIID is a commitment to the use of facilitation as a leadership and teaching style. The modules of the CCL have been developed in the belief that what the students bring to the learning environment is of equal value to what they take from it. By promoting normalisation and social role valorization (Wolfensberger, 1991), the NIID aims to enhance social roles for people with intellectual disabilities both inside and outside the college environment. Course material is therefore delivered in a way that enables participants' experiences to be the basis from which they move to clarify concepts, gain new information and acquire changed perceptions. Selections of the types of facilitation techniques that have been used throughout the CCL programme over the last five years has been provided by O'Brien et al. (1996), and are outlined below.

1. *Lectures:* Course tutors believe that the straight lecture format exemplifies what Heron (1989) refers to as the old model, where 'the teacher is principally responsible for the student learning' (p. 12). When lectures are used in the NIID they do not exceed 20 minutes and are accompanied by visual aids such as power point slides as well as course notes and materials. After (*and* often during) a lecture the tutor invites students' comments and questions; this is usually followed by a group discussion with specific questions set to elicit responses to the content presented. Exercises testing (such as the use of spidergrams or mind-mapping) for specific retention of information are also given.
  
2. *Action methods:* Action methods are techniques which involve the learner actively in a number of structured experiences. A brief summary of the most commonly used techniques are outlined below:
  - Warm-ups/ ice breakers: Warm-ups are used at the beginning of almost all sessions taught on the CCL. They are techniques used at the beginning of sessions that allow participants to become acquainted with one another in a way that identifies the individual's attitudes, values, personality and concerns. Warm-ups help build trust and show students that the tutor's style will be one of facilitation rather than that of leader or lecturer.

- Rounds: The group sit in a circle and everyone is given a turn and the opportunity to 'comment' or 'pass' without interruption.
- Continuums: Continuums are a technique of placing people in an imaginary line along a continuum in relation to where they stand on a particular issue or topic. Participants state where they are at a particular point along the continuum. They are then paired up with individuals from opposite ends of the continuum so they can hear statements from others with the possibility of changing their stand on the continuum.
- Opinion maps: Encourages students to take a stand on a particular topic. Individuals make statements and simultaneously place themselves in a position in the room. Other participants place themselves in relation to the person (far or close) according to their opinion which they state.

3. *Graphic facilitation*: Graphic facilitation (Sibbet, 1991) involves the drawing of images and captions to illustrate the words used by a person. Two people are involved in graphic facilitation: the graphic facilitator who interprets everyone's contribution as a word or image, and the group facilitator. Graphic facilitation is a means of "enabling a group memory to be formed of the events recorded, the images of a concept, the plan to be followed, and the feelings of the group" (p.1). Within the NIID, an example of graphic facilitation is PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope), (Pearpoint,

O'Brien & Forest, 1993). In this process a student (the pathfinder), with family and friends, staff of service providers, participate in planning for the future. One facilitator talks to the pathfinder while the second facilitator draws images of what is suggested by the pathfinder and his / her family.

4. *Role play:* Role play is a technique that can actively involve the student to act out roles of people involved in everyday or more challenging situations. Role play can provide an opportunity to practice new skills and allow the student to make mistakes in a supportive environment.

5. *Discovery learning:* In discovery learning, students are invited to explore course content through one or all of the following methods:

- Working in a small group, students discuss what a topic from a course module means to them. Each group is then asked to present the essence of their discussion in a form such as, graphic representation, dramatic representation, short lecture, and debate or body sculpture (Heron, 1989). Group discussion follows during which the tutor presents theoretical input.

- The tutor has devised an activity where course members, working as individuals, then pairs, then small groups or a large group, discover the meaning of a concept through their own actions.

In this section this author has outlined the type of facilitative teaching and experiential learning that takes place within the NIID. Learning through experience has been adopted in this environment in the belief that people with intellectual disabilities learn better when regarded as individuals with a valued social role (Wolfensberger, 1991). Within the context of the learning situations of the CCL programme, students' past experiences are acknowledged with new understandings and insights arising from the exploration of who they are and what they already know.

## **2.6 Situated learning in the NIID**

The action methods (Heron, 1989) and experiential approaches to learning within the context of the CCL programme described above recognise that the individual and the world are not separate and independent: knowledge is gained from the interaction between people and the "historically and culturally constituted contexts in which they are embedded" (Gruber et al, 1998, p. 216, cited in Murphy, 1999).

Knowledge therefore is not conceived as an abstract entity that resides in the heads of individuals and is independent of situations. Rather, knowledge is principally bound to situations. For clarification, the term

situated learning is defined by this author as a "learning process in which the learner is actively involved in authentic problem solving" (p. 227).

#### 2.6.0 Jean Lave and community of practitioners

Researchers such as Jean Lave and Barbara Rogoff, both cognitive anthropologists, have explored situated cognition and the role of transfer in situated learning. For Lave (1991), learning is not to be identified with the acquisition of structures or in gaining a discrete body of abstract knowledge, but takes place through legitimate peripheral participation in ongoing social practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The process of changing knowledgeable skill is subsumed in processes of changing identity in and through membership in a community of practitioners: mastery therefore is an organizational, relational characteristic of community of practice. Lave advocates a social theory in which dialectic relations among persons, their activities and contexts are implicated in success (and failure) of portability of learned skills across situations rather than merely cognitive strategies (Gruber et al., p. 217). One of Lave's central achievements is recasting problem solving from "a cognitive psychological perspective that tends to treat problems as givens, to a dialectical one that sees problem-solving activity in everyday situations as arising from conflict-generating dilemmas that require resolution" (Pea, 1990, p. 29).

#### 2.6.1 Barbara Rogoff and guided participation

Many of Rogoff's ideas originate from the Vygotskain notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Rogoff & Wertsch, 1984). The central tenet

of Rogoff's theory is that children's cognitive development is inseparable from the social milieu in which children learn according to a cultural curriculum; from their earliest days, children augment skills and perspectives of their society with the aid of other people. Rogoff's theory extends one step further from Vygotsky's by including non-verbal communication as well. Guided participation is the kernel concept of Rogoff's theory and implies that both guidance and participation in culturally valued activities are essential to children's apprenticeship in thinking. Guidance is either tacit or explicit, and participation may vary in the extent to which children or care-givers are responsible for its arrangement (Rogoff, 1990).

Rogoff's guided participation has implications for teaching with the active learner participating in a culturally organized activity with a more skilled partner with both formal and informal social interactions being essential for bridging old and new concepts. Further, Rogoff remarks that the apprenticeship system should involve a group of peers who serve as resources for each other in exploring the new domain and helping and challenging each other (Gruber et al., 1998). An example of such a system has been described above in the author's use of action learning (O'Brien et al., 1996) and experiential learning within the NIID.



### 2.6.2 The importance of exploring situated learning and social practice within the NIID

A search by this author in a number of higher educational journals from the 1980s to the late 2000s, has shown that no phenomenographic research has been undertaken which focuses directly on the context of tertiary education *and* people with intellectual disabilities with regard to their experiences of, or conceptions of learning. Säljö (1997) in his critique of Marton, recommends however, that the phenomenographic researcher would learn more about people's definitions of the world if s/he "viewed their accounts primarily as attempts at communicating in *situated practices* rather than ways of experiencing" (p. 188, emphasis this author's). Heeding this advice, for this thesis this author has paid attention to the situated learning and the situated learning environment of both the CCL programme and the wider college community, with the aim to explore the mutual constitution of human situated experience.

## 2.7 The researcher's position

Mohr, Maclean (1987) and Bissex and Bullock (1987) urge teachers to disengage from traditional research paradigms and identify their own questions, document their own observations, analyze and interpret their own questions, interpret data in light of current theories and to share their results primarily with other teachers. However, this movement away from traditional research paradigms puts the teacher in a privileged position; their combined roles as teacher/researcher now embrace the teacher as

theorisers, interpreters and critics of their own practice. Teachers in this position function as architects of study and generators of knowledge. This radical shift from “receivers to researchers, users to knowers, and subjects to participants transforms the ...notion of research on teaching and makes necessary a redefinition of what we mean by a professional knowledge base” (Cochran-Smith & Lythe, 1993, p.2).

This privileged position gives teachers who are researchers and participants in the generation of knowledge the wherewithal to define what legitimate form knowledge can take, as well as what illegitimate form knowledge can take. In undertaking this qualitative research project this researcher does not assume to be a neutral mechanical data gatherer; rather this author sees himself as the main research instrument (Kvale, 1996) that influences the course of the research. Therefore, instead of ignoring this influence, the aim here is to make this researcher’s role and position in this research explicit. In the following paragraph an account of this researcher is offered in order to give the reader the opportunity to understand the interest and relationship this author has in relation to this research.

At this time of writing I have been working at the NIID as Teaching and Learning Officer / Curriculum for six years. In this context I undertake a wide variety of roles ranging from tutoring, curriculum design and researcher on the CCL programme, to supervising postgraduate students

on the NIID's Master in Disability Studies (MSc) programme. I also co-ordinate an extra mural course entitled 'Person-Centred Facilitation Skills' which I deliver on an annual basis with a colleague from the School of Business Studies. On the CCL programme I co-ordinate a number of modules, namely: Inclusive Studies and Research (ISR); Art and Design (AD), and Creative Arts Participation and Performance (CAPP). Over the last number of years I have also tutored on the Written and Oral Communication (WOC) and the Personal Effectiveness (PE) modules. Other roles at the NIID include on site training for staff from roll-out partners through Ireland on teaching and learning methods and strategies. In May 2012, I was awarded the prestigious 'Provost Teaching Award' from Trinity College, a scheme which is designed to recognise and reward staff who has made an outstanding contribution in the pursuit of teaching excellence.

I came to this position from a background in adult education; for over eleven years I worked in community based City of Dublin Vocational Educational Committee (CDVEC) Colleges in Dublin's North inner city, tutoring students ranging in ages from late teens upwards. My Master's degree is in Education; the thesis addressed how adults returning to education can be empowered to engage in self-reflection as a learning tool. Subsequent to my work in community education, I worked as a Programme Educator for people with intellectual disabilities for a service provider in the south of Dublin.

As I mentioned above, teachers / tutors who undertake research, function as architects of study and generators of knowledge. This privileged position gives me as the researcher and participant in the generation of knowledge, the wherewithal to define what a legitimate form of knowledge is. It is for this reason that I have decided on making this research inclusive: for co-researchers and me, the only legitimate form of knowledge in relation to students' experiences of learning, is knowledge that is co-produced by both this author, CCL students and co-researchers.

The following chapter advances this coming together of minds and justifies this author's use of a phenomenographic approach for this research project. In contextualising phenomenography, it is argued that learning and learning processes refer to the interactions between individuals and their material and the social environment. The constructivist perspective is examined and compared with phenomenography and the differences between the two are outlined.

## Chapter 3

# The theoretical underpinnings of learning

### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter begins with an account of the development of the phenomenographic theory of learning and looks at conceptions of learning that were based in empirical studies of learning among Swedish university students (e.g. Säljö, 1975; Svensson, 1976). The phenomenographic theory of learning consists of several constituents, but only two are selected and discussed by this author: the anatomy of awareness and the theory of variation. While it is beyond the scope of this research to contextualise phenomenography in relation to all theories of learning, it is the intention of this author however to offer a description of the phenomenographic theory of learning and compare it with one other theory, that is, the constructivist perspectives on learning. The chapter therefore concludes by comparing phenomenographic theory of learning with the constructivist perspectives, that is, individual and social constructivism. There has been much debate in the literature as to the nature of learning, whether learning is *constructed* (learners construct their own private reality which is separate from the real world), or, *constituted* (the learner grows into a world already constituted). The differences between these two are significant for phenomenography and are discussed later in the chapter.

### **3.1 A brief background to the theory of learning**

Endeavouring to understand learning can be a complex task which is dependent on a combination of factors, for example, the learning environment, the learner's background and teaching practices the learner may experience. Illeris (2002) discerns four main meanings for the word learning: 1) learning as the results of an individual learning process; 2), learning as an individual psychological process; 3), learning and learning processes referring to interaction processes between the individual and his/her material and social environment; and 4), both learning and learning processes used more or less simultaneously with the word teaching, which may be interpreted as what is taught and what is learned (Illeris, 2002). The third meaning above is the view of learning that the current phenomenographic research resembles most.

Many theories of learning exist: during a substantial part of the 20th century research on learning has been dominated by behaviourism which demands that we restrict ourselves in our inquiry into what is directly observable, that is, what people do – their behaviour (for instance, see Skinner, 1953). From the mid-1950s and for three decades onwards, behaviourism was pushed aside by the cognitive revolution in which analogies between humans and computers were central features of research on learning (see Gardner, 1985). By the mid-1980s however, learning was moving from being a phenomenon of the psychology of the individual towards a more social, cultural, discursive and historical one in which the situated nature of learning and its contextual complexity were

emphasised (e.g. Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990).

### **3.2 Learning from the perspective of phenomenography**

In this section an explanation is offered as to how learning is understood from a phenomenographic perspective, as presented by Marton and Booth (1997), Säljö (1979a, 1979b), Bowden and Marton (2004) and Marton, Runesson & Tsui, (2004). The origins of this tradition are found in empirical studies of learning carried out in the Department of Education at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden in the 1970s.

During the 1970s the development of phenomenography took place after the initial work on the epistemological level, but it has had an even stronger influence on thinking about student learning (Entwistle & Peterson 2004). Säljö (1979a; 1979b) focused on the experience of the learner and described people's conceptions of learning by interviewing 90 individuals between the ages of 15 and 73 years. An initial analysis suggested that for many respondents learning was taken for granted and was tantamount to little more than rote memorisation. For others however, learning had become "thematised", in other words, "something which can be explicitly talked about and discussed and can be the object of conscious planning and analysis" (Säljö, 1979a, p.446). For Säljö, these people had become aware of the influence of "the context of learning on what you should learn and how you should set about it" (p. 448).

On the basis of a more thorough analysis of the respondents' replies to the specific question: "What do you actually mean by learning?", Säljö's (1979b) study showed that students come to learning situations with very different preconceived views of what is meant by learning. He identified five qualitatively different and hierarchically related conceptions of learning conceived as:

1. Increasing one's knowledge;
2. Memorising;
3. Acquisition of facts, procedures etc. which can be retained and /or utilised in practice;
4. Abstraction of meaning, and
5. An interpretative process aimed at the understanding of reality

In the final two conceptions, the reproductive nature of learning was replaced by conceptions emphasising learning as a constructive activity.

Säljö's categorisation of students' conceptions of learning showed similarities with the work of Perry (1970) who investigated students' intellectual development during the course of their tertiary study at Harvard and Rathcliffe Colleges in the USA. Perry was the first to suggest that students' conceptions of knowledge develop progressively through their educational experiences (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). Through interviews, Perry invited students to talk about their experiences of studying in ways that indicated how they were construing the nature and origins of knowledge, values and responsibilities (Entwistle & Peterson, 2004). From



these interviews, Perry was able to describe nine positions (or views) that are typically clustered into four sequential groups or stages: "dualism; multiplicity; relativism and commitment within relativism" (Entwistle & Peterson, 2004, p. 409). These range from a certainty that all knowledge is either right or wrong (dualism), to an awareness that there are many ways of looking at a situation (multiplicity), to a realisation that views rest on interpretations from objective evidence with a variety of possible conclusions being drawn (relativism), and leading eventually to a readiness to make personal stands on issues, while accepting that all knowledge and ideas are ultimately relative (commitment within relativism) (p. 409). Perry noted that the initial recognition of relativism was pivotal to subsequent development and that few students took this final step and commit to a personal perspective. Arguably the most important theoretical aspect of Perry's work was the recognition that the development process involved an expanding awareness of the nature of knowledge, "created through a broader conception of learning that integrated earlier conceptions within a more meaningful whole" (p. 410).

As Säljö's (1979) study built on Perry's (1970) work, later studies on learning by Marton, Dall'Alba, & Beaty (1993) built on Säljö's (1979) and described the same five conceptions of learning as Säljö. However, Marton et al. (1993) identified a sixth conception of learning: learning as seen "a personal change". This was found only during the later years of study and only in students who had previously displayed Säljö's fifth conception of learning. It appears to reflect the kind of personal commitment that was implicated in the later stages of Perry's (1970) model of intellectual development.

The Säljö framework, as modified by Marton et al. (1993), is summarised in Table 1

Table1. Conceptions of Learning (Säljö, 1979; Marton et al., 1993. pp. 283-284)

|                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Learning as increasing one's knowledge          |
| 2. Learning as memorising and reproducing          |
| 3. Learning as applying                            |
| 4. Learning as understanding                       |
| 5. Learning as seeing something in a different way |
| 6. Learning as changing as a person                |

These six sections can be divided into two groups: quantitative and qualitative conceptions (Boulton-Lewis, Marton, Lewis, & Wilss, 2000). The first three conception are all essentially reproductive, and reflect a lower-level, quantitative view of learning (Boulton-Lewis 1994). The latter three conceptions reflect a higher-level, qualitative view of learning as an active process of seeking meaning, leading to some kind of transformation in one's view of things, or bringing about a more fundamental change: in other words changing as a person (Marton, Dall'Alba, & Beaty, 1993). Several subsequent studies in which changing as a person (Marton et al., 1993) has also been identified are those reported by Pratt (1992), Wakins and Regmi (1992), and Dahin and Regmi (1997). More recently another

conception of learning has been learning as collective meaning-making (Paakkari, Tynjälä, & Kannas, 2011). These and other authors, such as Jackson (2009) and Rauhala (1981) who used the phenomenographic approach in investigating perceptions of learning, attributed their findings to the increased use of constructivist and socio-constructivist theories in education. Conceptions of learning as “merely increasing one’s knowledge may have largely been abandoned, and correspondingly the idea of learning as social meaning-making has become more general” (Paakkari et al., 2011, p. 711).

It is significant to note however that researchers in countries outside Europe have found somewhat different results. For example, in Nepalese students, Watkins and Regmi (1992) found that a conception of learning as changing as a person had been induced by local cultural and religious traditions and this did not represent the most sophisticated development level. In China, Marton, Dall’Alba and Tse (1996) interviewed teacher educators and found that most distinguished between mechanical memorisation and memorisation with understanding. Some regarded memorisation with understanding as a way of retaining what had already been understood, while others regarded memorisation with understanding a way of attaining a deeper understanding. Marton et al. concluded that the conceptions of learning that he identified in the West were not adequate to describe learning in Chinese culture.

In Finland, another study conducted by Tynjälä (1997) identified seven conceptions and found that these did not have a clear hierarchy. In South Africa research carried out by Cliff (1998) found that conceptions of learning did appear to fit the categories described in the European research, however, some students expressed the notion of learning as a moral obligation to God, an authority figure or a community. Research carried out with students of the Open University (Vermunt & van Rijswijk, 1988) found the five conceptions of learning described by Säljö (1979). However, a more detailed analysis by Vermunt (1996) of this research resulted in four rather different conceptions of learning:

1. Co-operating with fellow students and being stimulated by teachers;
2. Absorbing knowledge in order to pass examinations;
3. Constructing knowledge and taking responsibility for one's own learning; and
4. Acquiring knowledge in order to apply it in practical situations.

To summarise, research in mainstream higher education has produced descriptive categories of conceptions of learning that initially seem universal and hierarchically organised. However, other research has produced different accounts with some questioning whether their categories amounted to developmental hierarchies. There are clear

messages from the above studies that learning varies across different cultures and systems of higher education.

### **3.3 Learning as constitution**

Proponents of phenomenography use the term to *constitute* rather than, for example, to *construct*, when referring to learning. For Marton and Booth (1997) "The world is not constructed by the learner, nor is it imposed upon her; it is constituted as an internal relation between them", Marton & Booth (1997, p.13). Phenomenographers therefore make the assumption that reality is constituted through a reciprocal and intertwined emergence of human beings and their world (Bowden & Marton, 2004). Human understanding is a human-world relation (Pong, 1999) in which, according to Anderberg (2000), experience is seen as internal relationships between the individuals and their surroundings, described in terms of learners' meanings of objects.

Anderberg (2000) further clarifies an experience: in constitutional thinking an experience is not regarded as a kind of introspective, mechanical, objectified procedure, rather it is a "constitutive, creative and reflective act" (p. 18). Experience is seen as a constitutive potential that has a capacity to justify relationships between human beings and reality, that is, the learner and the object of learning. For Marton and Booth (1997) this means that the way in which a human experiences a phenomenon does not constitute the phenomenon itself, rather it constitutes "one view of

the phenomenon as seen from the perspective of an individual human being, with his/her biography as a background" (p. 124).

For phenomenography, individuals in the act of learning do not discover an independently constituted reality; rather learners participate in an ever ongoing constitution of that reality that is a part of a human's sense making (Rauhala, 1989). In this constitutionalist perspective on learning, the division between the external and internal worlds of the learner disappears; this means that the "knower and the known, the subject and the object are not seen as separate" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p.138), but possess an internal relationship that is "internally related through the individual's awareness of the world - the world is an experienced world" (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999, p.139). In this phenomenographic line of reasoning, knowledge is considered to exist in the "relation constituted between an individual and the world" (Cope, 2004, pp. 9-10).

### **3.4. The structure and anatomy of awareness in phenomenography**

The issue of awareness lies at the heart of phenomenography; for phenomenographers there is a link between a human being's way of experiencing something and the structure of one's awareness (Martin & Booth, 1997). For the current phenomenographic study, this means investigating and finding out the differences in CCL students' structure of awareness of the phenomenon of learning in the NIID. What follows is a brief definition of the concept of awareness at a general level before the

structural characters of awareness are offered from a phenomenographic perspective.

A common problem in research on consciousness and awareness is that researchers usually do not make a clear distinction between the two concepts but rather use them interchangeably (i.e. the synonymous use of the terms by Marton and Booth (1997). However, Marton and Booth (1998) later define consciousness as being "the opposite of unconsciousness", and awareness being "the opposite of, or lack of awareness" (p. 538). The two terms are employed by Marton and Booth (1998) as hierarchically differentiated constituents:

1. Unconsciousness (noun), unconscious (adjective) – outside the interest of this research
2. Consciousness (noun), conscious (adjective) – inside the particular interest of this research.
3. Awareness (noun), aware (adjective) – inside the particular interest of this research
4. Unawareness (noun), unaware (adjective) – outside the interest of this research

Consciousness is seen by Turunen (1998) as a "special energy unity that is divided into numerous qualities: experiences, senses, feelings, images, thoughts and more" (p. 74). These qualities are inside the world of the human being and can be confirmed only from the perspective of awareness: "consciousness exists only for awareness" (p. 158).

Awareness is a relation between subject and object (Marton, 1997), and the “totality of a person’s simultaneous experiences and her relatedness to the world” (Marton & Booth, 1998, p. 43) at a given point in time; awareness therefore implies a human being’s total experience of the world at that time; it is a subjective state which is difficult to explain to another person.

#### 3.4.0 Awareness from a phenomenological perspective –the influence of Gurwitsch

A student of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the phenomenologist Aron Gurwitsch (1901-1973) developed his theory of the field of consciousness out of a background of *Gestalt* psychology. According to Jarvis (2004) the term *Gestalt* means shape or form, perceived by the individual as a totality rather than as a combination of the constituent elements of a phenomenon.

The work of Gurwitsch’s (1964) field of consciousness is integral to Marton and Booth’s (1998) view of the structure of awareness (for these authors the term awareness is synonymous with Gurwitsch’s term consciousness). Marton and Booth’s (1998) view is that awareness is multi-layered by nature: “although you are aware of innumerable things at the same time it would be wrong to imagine that you are aware of everything in the same way. Your awareness has a structure to it” (Marton & Booth, 1998, p. 538-539).



Gurwitsch (1964) suggested that the field of consciousness was made up of three overlapping areas: the margin, the thematic field and the theme. The theme "occupies the centre of the circle; it stands in the thematic field, which...forms the area of the circle; and around the thematic field...the objects of marginal consciousness are arranged. (Gurwitsch, 1966, pp. 267-268)

For Gurwitsch (1982) the theme is "that which engrosses the mind of the experiencing subject, or...which stands in the 'focus of attention'" (p.4). The thematic field is defined as "the totality of those data, co-present with the theme, which are expressed as materially relevant or pertinent to the theme" (p. 4). The third includes data which "though co-present with, have no relevancy to the theme, and comprise in their totality what we propose to call the margin" (p. 4).

#### 3.4.1 Awareness from a phenomenographic perspective – the internal and external horizon

Gurwitsch's field of consciousness (awareness) as explained above has also been described by Marton and Booth (1997, p. 87) in terms of an internal and external horizon. The latter authors use a metaphor to illustrate these horizons:

The external horizon of coming on the deer in the woods extends from the immediate boundary of the experience – the dark forest against which the deer is distinguished – through all other contexts in which related occurrences have been experienced (e.g. walks in the forest, deer in the zoo, nursery tales, reports of hunting incidents, etc.). The internal horizon comprises the deer itself, its parts, its stance, its structural presence.

At any one point in time and context, people discern and experience different aspects of a phenomenon to a variety of degrees; the different ways of experiencing a phenomenon may be understood in terms of which aspects of the phenomenon are discerned, and *not* discerned, in people's awareness of it (Åkerlind, 2008). In answering the question "what is a way of experiencing something?" Pang (2003) refers to Marton and Booth (1997) who posited that a way of experiencing something is related to how a person's awareness is structured: it contains both a what aspect (which corresponds to the object), and a how aspect (which refers to the act). These two aspects can be thought of in terms of the dynamic relationship between the two aspects of human awareness, the structural and the referential / meaning aspects (Pang, 2003).

Making reference to the use of *Gestalt* theory and the work of Gurwitsch (1964) discussed above, Marton (1988) argues that to experience something as an identifiable whole from its surrounding context, something must be perceived as a gestalt, a thematic whole, which is discerned from its context. Since a whole is made up of its parts, Marton and Booth (1997) argue that its parts and the relationship between them must also be discerned in a simultaneous manner.

This structural aspect of a way of experiencing denotes the relationship between the different aspects of a phenomenon, which constitute its overall meaning (Pang, 2003). This can be elucidated in terms of what Marton and Booth (1997) calls the internal and external horizon. The internal horizon refers to the parts and their relationship, together with the part-whole structure discerned therein; a figure is made up of its

component parts and the interplay of each part contributes functionally to the whole figure, which carries an overall meaning (Pang, 2003).

The external horizon refers to "the way in which the phenomenon we experience in a certain way is discerned from its context ... [and] how it is related to its context as well" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 89). To experience something in a particular way a person must discern a whole from the context, and at the same time understand its relationship to the context as well as to other contexts.

However, in order to discern something from its context, a person identifies that which is discerned as a particular thing and assigned a meaning to it. This "referential aspect" (Pang, 2003, p. 148), denotes the overall meaning assigned to a phenomenon and can be also analysed in terms of its internal structure: an object that has been identified as a table must also be seen in possession of such aspects as legs and table top, all contributing to the concept of table. Structure presupposes meaning and meaning presupposes structure; structure and meaning thus mutually contribute to each other in the act of experiencing. For Åkerlind (2008), each way of experiencing may be understood as part of a larger whole, the "collective sum" (p. 635) of experiencing. These different ways of experiencing are commonly ordered in terms of inclusivity of awareness, in which more inclusive ways also represent more complex ways of experiencing the phenomenon, indicated by an "increasing breath of awareness" (p. 636) of different aspects of the phenomenon.

### 3.4.2 The collective sum of experience – collective awareness

From a phenomenographic perspective, learning at a collective level can be understood in terms of the “collective sum” of experiencing, a collective awareness “where individuals’ awarenesses are linked to each other” (Bowden & Marton, 2004, p.90). Indeed Bowden and Marton’s (2004) framework of the university as a learning community involves learning both at an individual level and at a collective level. Collective awareness emerges when “different people are aware of the same phenomenon and are aware as well to a greater or lesser extent, of each others’ ways of experiencing, seeing, (and) thinking about that phenomenon” (p. 206). For these authors, if we become aware of others’ ways of experiencing a phenomenon, then we have a certain degree of collective awareness.

Collective awareness implies that when we become aware of someone else’s experiencing a phenomenon, “our own experiencing of the phenomenon is likely to be enriched” (p. 201). From this perspective, collective awareness can have an advantage over individual awareness: when we become aware of someone else’s experiencing of a phenomenon which is different from our own, what we become aware of is enriched by this experience – enrichment therefore is reciprocal. The richer and the more interconnected the collective awareness is, “the more likely it is that the variation both between and within individual capability will increase” (p. 204).

For Bowden and Martin (2004), learning should strive to increase collective awareness by means of pooling individuals’ ideas, thoughts and

ways of experiencing phenomena of shared interest. In this way phenomenography can help us gain a fuller understanding of the world and the phenomenon to be learned, and in keeping with the objective of phenomenography, it can provide a description of the variation in the experience of individuals as a collective group of learners. In a recent study Paakkari et al. (2011) identified collective awareness as a "collective meaning-making" (p. 710) and a "mode of learning [in which] the group of pupils plus a teacher form a community in which they ponder...issues together, through a dialogue" (p. 710).

The following section expands the concept of new phenomenography and introduces the theory of variation (Pang, 2003).

### **3.5 New phenomenography and the theory of variation**

Phenomenography is an ever changing, growing specialisation and recent developments in this field have created some confusion among researchers because their links with the research tradition is not immediately obvious. It has been argued above that the ultimate aim of phenomenographic research is to offer a description of different ways of seeing the same phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997). The object of research is thus the qualitatively different ways in which people are aware of the world, and the ways in which they experience various phenomena around them. In phenomenography, the categories of description Marton (1981) and outcome space (Åkerlind, 2005) are instrumental in

characterising how people experience reality. Phenomenography in this sense is descriptive and methodologically orientated.

In recent years in phenomenography a growing shift in emphasis has occurred from a methodological orientation to theoretical concerns (i.e., from *how* to describe, to *what* is described). With the advance of the theory of variation, ontological significance has been given to ways of experiencing something that offers a theoretical base for studying the qualitative ways of experiencing various phenomena in a dynamic manner (Pang, 2003).

This way of characterising “experiencing” implies a theoretical turn of phenomenography, and makes it possible to portray the differences between different ways of understanding or experiencing in terms of critical aspects and dimensions of variation (Runesson, 2006).

Consequently, phenomenography has moved on from trying to describe ways of experiencing various phenomena, answering questions such as: “What is a way of experiencing something?” and “What is the actual difference between two ways of experiencing the same thing?” (Pang, 2003, p.147).

This is a shift in primary emphasis from questions concerning how different ways of experiencing can be captured methodologically to theoretical concerns and questions about the nature of the differences, i.e. the theory of variation (Bowden & Marton, 2004; Pang, 2003; Marton & Tsui, 2004).

For Pang (2003) the thread that runs through the phenomenographic movement is this interest in variation and new phenomenography emerged as a result of phenomenography drawing attention to different senses of variation at different times in its history. As new phenomenography shifts the primary focus from methodological to theoretical questions, it characterises "a way of experiencing something in terms of the critical aspects of the phenomenon as discerned by the learners" (p. 145).

This theory puts a strong emphasis on variation as epistemologically fundamental to all learning. According to Bowden & Marton (1998), in preparing learners for a future that is "unknown... [with] degrees of uncertainty" (p.26), they regard variation in learning as crucially important. The cornerstones of the theory are the concepts of 1), discernment, 2) variation and, 3) simultaneity (Marton & Pang, 1999; Pang, 2003) and for learning to happen, the learner must experience the world in terms of these three concepts. In order to discern, one must experience variability, for discernment assumes experienced variation. When certain aspect of a phenomenon vary while other aspects remain invariant, those aspects that vary are discerned; for example, "we can discern only what varies" (Pang, 2003, p. 150). Without variation we would not be able to tell what is common across the instances encountered and see the "common critical aspect" (p. 150). For example, one could not be able to discern the aspect of gender should there be only one gender in the world; one could not be able to discern the aspect of colour without an awareness of the variety of colours in the world, or what it is to be hairless without a knowledge of more or less hairy objects in the

world. According to Bowden and Marton (1998, p. 35), "When some aspect of a phenomenon or an event varies while other aspects remain invariant, the varying aspect will be discerned. In order for this to happen, variation must be experienced by someone as variation".

### 3.5.0 Diachronical and synchronical variation

The experience of variation implies that a person is aware of the critical features of the phenomenon simultaneously either at different points in time (diachronically), or at one specific time (synchronically) (Pang, 2003, p. 151). For Bowden and Marton (1998, p.38), "As far as the time aspect is concerned, our awareness is at every moment a reflection of what we have experienced earlier".

Pang (2003) recognises that there is no simultaneity without discernment. To have a simultaneous experience of a critical aspect of a phenomenon across time, this aspect must be in a person's focal awareness, and the experience must discern it as an aspect. For example, to experience the height of a person, an awareness of dimensions must be discerned. Through the diachronic experience of simultaneity, the different instances of an aspect of the phenomenon are synthesised to constitute a dimension of variation, and discernment depends on the variation that is experienced: for example, one can talk of a "tall" person by having experienced individuals of different heights, for example, height is a feature that can vary. According to Runesson (2006, p.402), "the discernment of height, which is an aspect or a dimension of the individual,



takes an experienced variation of that particular dimension. So what is discerned are actually dimensions of variation”.

For a phenomenon to be experienced in a particular way, certain aspects that correspond to the dimensions of variation of that phenomenon must also be discerned at one time, synchronically. Marton and Booth (1997) illustrate this by referring to Archimedes’ principle: to develop a complete way of understanding this principle, one must be focally aware of the weight of the body immersed in water as compared to its weight when not immersed, and the weight of the water at the same time. In this way, a particular way of experiencing something thus represents a set of related aspects that are discerned and focused upon in a simultaneous manner, for example, synchronically. A particular way of experiencing a phenomenon thus represents a set of related aspects, which are “discerned and focused upon in a simultaneous manner (i.e. synchronically) (Pang, 2003, p. 151).

From this argument it follows that simultaneity, (diachronic and synchronic) (Pang, 2003), is one of the cornerstones of variation theory: in order to experience variation in a certain respect, one has to experience the different aspects that vary in that respect simultaneously. In other words, a person has to experience those aspects that s/he has encountered at different points in time, at the same time, for example, diachronically, as well as co-existing aspects of the same thing at the same time – synchronically.

To summarise the theory of variation, it has been shown that the limited number of qualitatively different ways of experiencing something can to be understood with regard to 1) the discernment of aspects – in Booth and Hultén's (2003) words, discernment is "the act of seeing this no-longer-taken-for-granted phenomenon or aspect of a phenomenon in a new light" p. 69); 2) the simultaneity of aspects discerned (in order to experience variation one has to experience the different aspects that vary in that respect simultaneously (Marton et al. 2004), and, 3) the potential for variation in discerned aspects of the phenomenon in question (Marton & Fai, 1999).

The following section addresses how the phenomenographic perspective is situated in comparison with other learning perspectives. As it is not the aim of this study to compare phenomenography with all learning theories, the following section restricts the comparison with constructivism, a learning perspective much discussed by the founders of phenomenography, Marton and Booth (1997).

### **3.6 Phenomenography and constructivism – a comparison**

Constructivism is not a unified theory – rather it includes a number of various strands. For Tynjälä (1999a), constructivism is a conglomeration of different positions consisting of "radical or cognitive constructivism, social constructivism, the sociocultural approach, symbolic interactionism, and social constructivism" (p. 364). However, the unifying thread among these various strands is the acquisition of knowledge which is

metaphorically described as a building process through which knowledge is actively constructed by either individuals, or social communities; the difference between these two groupings is the role they assign to the individual and the social nature of learning.

Matthews (1997) argues that the original core of constructivism is located in psychological theory about how beliefs are developed; this has expanded however to include philosophical, educational and social constructivism. In focusing on educational constructivism, Matthews divides it into personal / individual constructivism (also called cognitive constructivism), and social constructivism. Individual constructivism sees learning as "an active individual construction" (Cobb, 1994, p. 136), whereas social constructivism views learning as "a process of enculturation into the ... practices of wider society" (p. 136).

Social constructivist theorists typically link activity to participation in culturally organised practices, whereas individual constructivists give priority to individual students' sensory-motor and conceptual activity. Social constructivists assume that cognitive processes are subsumed by social and cultural processes, adhering to Vygotsky's (1979) contention that "the social dimension of consciousness is primary in fact and time. The individual dimension of consciousness is derivative and secondary" (p. 30).

In contrast to social constructivists' frequent references to the works of Vygotsky and Leont'ev (as cited in Cobb, 1994), individual constructivists usually trace their intellectual lineage to Piaget's genetic epistemology (1970, 1980), to ethnomethodology (Mehan & Wood, 1975), or to

symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). In addition for Cobb (1994), it is possible to distinguish between "psychological and interactionist" (p. 137) variants of constructivism. Von Glaserfeld's (1992) psychological variant incorporates both the Piagetian notions of assimilation and accommodation, and the "perturbations" that the cognising subject generates relative to a purpose or goal are posited as "the driving force of development" (p. 384). As a consequence, von Glaserfeld defines learning as self-organisation: individuals' constructs of their own ways of knowing and this is characterised as a process of self-organisation in which the subject reorganises his or her activity to eliminate perturbations (von Glasersfeld, 1989b).

Social constructivism takes the individual-in-action as their unit of analysis (Minick, 1989). Vygotsky (1962, 1978) suggested that knowledge is first constructed in a social context and is then appropriated by individuals. Vygotsky (1978) stressed the social bases of the mind, for example, cognition should be understood in a social context and human development treated as a process of acquiring culture. Human growth is seen as a process offering in which intellectual tools that culture provides are used to promote development, "the guidance provided by interaction with people who have achieved some skills in the use of those intellectual tools" (Rogoff, 1990, p. 140). The "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86) can "generally be looked upon as guidance into particular cultures' or subcultures' ways of perceiving a phenomenon" (Säljö, 2000, p.122).

In contrast to Vygotsky, Leont'ev (1981) argued that thought develops from practical, object-oriented activity or labour. Several American theorists have elaborated upon Vygotsky's ideas and speak of cognitive apprenticeship (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Rogoff, 1990), legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), or the negotiation of meaning in the construction zone (Newman, Griffin & Cole, 1989). Each of these theories locates learning in co-participation in cultural practices, consequently, educational implications focus on the social interactions that increasingly enable students to participate in the activities of the expert rather than on the cognitive processes and conceptual structures involved (Hanks, 1991).

### 3.6.0 Phenomenography and social constructivism

Certain writers have criticised phenomenography for its neglect of social and contextual factors (Säljö, 1994; Uljens, 1993). The literature on social constructivism should, in principle be of interest to phenomenographic researchers, since it suggests that thinking (both in everyday life and in educational situations) is influenced by the immediate situations and cultural contexts in which it occurs (e.g., Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990).

In his early writings concerning approaches to learning in higher education, Marton (1976) appeared to suggest that every day and educational thinking were cultural phenomena that were socially constructed. Subsequently Marton (1978, 1981) acknowledged an affinity between his

investigations and constructivist approaches in educational research, citing Magoon (1977) who characterised these approaches as accounts in which cognitive activities reflected the deployment of culturally mediated and personally meaningful knowledge.

However, in their later writings, Marton and Booth (1997) categorically rejected individual and social constructivism by defining humans and the world as inextricably intertwined, and regarding phenomenography as transcending the person-world dichotomy suggested by the traditions of individual and social constructivism. In a phenomenographic constitutionalist perspective on learning, the division between the external and internal worlds of the learner disappears; the knower and the known, the subject and the object are not seen as separate (Marton & Booth, 1997). Prosser and Trigwell (1999, p. 139) elaborate:

From a constitutionalist perspective...the individual and the world are not constituted independently of one another. Individuals and the world are internally related through the individual's awareness of the world. The world is an experienced world.

A phenomenographic non-dualistic perspective therefore is fundamentally different from individual and social constructivist perspectives of learning: phenomenographic research on learning is based within a constitutionalist framework where learners participate in an ever ongoing constitution of that reality (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). This phenomenographic perspective differs significantly from a constructivist framework on learning in which learners construct their own private reality, and grow into a world already constructed.

To conclude this section, the core features of phenomenographic, individual and social constructivist perspectives on learning using Lave's (1996) three kinds of stipulations:

1. Telos – a direction of movement or change of learning
  2. Subject-world relation – a general specification of relations between subjects and the social world
  3. Learning mechanisms – ways by which learning comes about.
- (Lave, 1996)

These stipulations are captured in Table 2 below.

Table 2. A comparison of the core features of phenomenographic, individual and social constructivist perspectives on learning (adapted from Roisko (2007)).

| <b>Stipulations</b>    | <b>Phenomenography</b>                                                 | <b>Social constructivism</b>                                                                   |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Telos                  | Change in the structure of individual's awareness                      | Changes in meaning associated with social practices                                            |
| Subject-world relation | Non-dualistic: one world exists, that of the experienced               | Dualistic/non-dualistic                                                                        |
| Mechanism              | Constitution of knowledge through variation, discernment, simultaneity | Construction of knowledge through language and discourse and participation in social practices |

The following chapter addresses the justification for adding the adjective *inclusive* to the word phenomenography in the title of this thesis. It examines the theoretical nature of inclusive research and argues for the promotion of a more balanced partnership between disabled and nondisabled researchers.

## Chapter 4

### Inclusive research: theory and practice

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the growth of inclusive research and looks at how and why it has developed over the past 20 years. It is firstly outlined that in attempting to address the inequalities in the power relationship between non-disabled and disabled researchers, people with disabilities (in theory at least) have been gradually moving towards experiencing a more balanced partnership between themselves and professional researchers. It is argued that the knowledge and skills gained from these experiences have the potential to lead to cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) on the part of disabled researchers (for example, in the field of education an academic degree would be considered cultural capital [Webb, Schirato & Danaher 2004]). It is also established that inclusive research is closely related to participatory and emancipatory influences. Stemming from this, the theoretical underpinnings of inclusive research are discussed by analysing the philosophical arguments of Jurgen Habermas' *Theory of 'knowledge constitutive interests'*, together with the historical shift in research approaches, from positivist to interpretive to critical / emancipatory. The section concludes with an examination of participatory action research (PAR) with the aim to illustrate how it informs inclusive research and emancipatory research. This chapter culminates with the work of Turnbull, Friesen and Ramirez (1998), where six levels of



stakeholder participation are presented in participatory action research that illustrate an ever-increasing extent of stakeholder decision making related to the research enterprise. Finally, this research project is placed within the context of this framework where levels of stakeholder involvement are identified.

#### **4.1 The development of inclusive research**

Inclusive research in intellectual disability took on the form it currently has because of developments such as normalisation, social role valorisation (Bank-Mikkelsen, 1969; Wolfensberger, 1972; Wolfensberger & Thomas, 1983; Wolfensberger & Tullman, 1982), the social model of disability (Oliver, 1992; Zarab, 1992; Keith, 2001) and the growth of self-advocacy (Bersani, 1998; Goodley, 2001).

However, inclusive research has taken some time to gain traction. Traditionally much research addressing intellectual disabilities and learning disabilities have been undertaken from the perspective of professionals such as teachers/educators, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists (Klotz, 2004). Over the last 20 years however, there has been an increase in emphasis from some scholars to gain an insight into the perspectives of people with intellectual and learning disabilities, for example, Ramcharan, Roberts, Grant and Borland, (1997); Goodley (2000); Walmsley (2002); Atkinson (2002); Sigurjónsdóttir (2004); Johnson and Traustadóttir (2005) and Boxall (2007).

The move to include people with intellectual disabilities in research as more than just “objects of study” (Walmsley, 2003, p. 55) can be traced back to the mid 1980s when two British researchers, Margaret Flynn and Dorothy Atkinson, included direct testimony from people with learning disabilities in their research and published articles on the methodological implications (Flynn, 1986; Atkinson, 1989). Alongside this, people with disabilities have sought to address the inequalities in the power relationship between non-disabled and disabled researchers (Björnsdóttir, 2008). It has been argued that this move has increasingly led to a more balanced partnership between researchers and research participants with disabilities (Traustadóttir, 2006), with a number of attempts been made to carry out research with people with disabilities, for example Boxall, Carson & Docherty (2004); Carson & Docherty (2002); Chapman & McNulty (2004); Johnson & Traustadóttir (2005), National Institute for Intellectual Disability (2010) and the Inclusive Research Network (2010). Indeed a number of significant grant-giving bodies in the U.K. such as the Department of Health, and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation insist on inclusion of users/carers as a major prerequisite for funding (Walmsley, 2003).

Inclusive research is closely related to participatory (Chappell, 2000; Reason & Bradbury, 2007), and emancipatory influences (Barnes, 2004), the latter having strong connections with the social model of disability and the disabled people’s movement in the UK (Björnsdóttir, 2008). The main distinctions between participatory and emancipatory, according to

Chappell (2000) lie in the relationship between disabled people and researchers: participatory entails a commitment to researchers working alongside people with intellectual disabilities as allies, whereas in emancipatory research, the stakes are higher with the requirement being that disabled people control the research agenda, a development associated with the UK disabled people's movement (Zarb, 1992). The slogan 'Nothing about us without us' (People First 1993) epitomises the moral imperative to include people with intellectual disabilities as active shapers of the research.

For Walmsley (2001) the term inclusive research covers both participatory and emancipatory strands. However, most inclusive research has been participatory in which researchers seek to work alongside people with intellectual disabilities in a variety of roles. Since the early 90s, inclusive research has covered many different kinds of topics, for example, policy (People First 1993); service evaluation (Flynn with Liverpool self-advocates 1994); (Whittaker 1997); sexual health (McCarthy, 1999), menstruation (Rodgers, 1999); life-stories and autobiography (Atkinson & Cooper 2000); safety and prevention of abuse (McCarthy with Anastasia, Pam and Deborah 2000); labelling (Williams 2002); accessible information (Change 2001; Ledger & Shufflebottom 2003; Greenhalagh, 1994); the menopause (McCarthy & Millard, 2003) and history (Townson 2004). Most of this research has been done through interviews with people with intellectual disabilities, and some, such as Rogers study, have used an advisory group to help shape the research.

Other researchers have set demanding more goals for themselves, setting out to demonstrate that people with intellectual disabilities can interview (Williams, 1999), frame research questions (Atkinson, McCarthy & Walmsley, 2000), author papers (Walmsley & Downer, 1997), theorise (Williams, 2002) and analyse data (Rolph, 2000). Building in these worthy achievements, yet recognising the difficulties of the process, is one of the objectives of this research.

#### 4.1.0 The characteristics of inclusive research

It has been argued above that inclusive research embraces a range of approaches that traditionally have been termed 'participatory', 'action' or 'emancipatory' (Freire, 1972; McTaggart, 1991); it involves people not as subjects, but rather as "instigators of ideas, research designers, interviewers, data analysts, authors, disseminators and users" (Walmsley & Johnson, 2003, p.10).

For the sake of a working definition of inclusive research, a good starting point is the set of categories as defined by Walmsley and Johnson (2003, p. 64) which cover both participatory and emancipatory research in the learning disability context. If a piece of research is to be viewed as 'inclusive' it must exhibit the following characteristics:

- The research problem must be one that is owned (not necessarily initiated) by disabled people

- It should further the interests of disabled people; non-disabled researchers should be on the side of the people with learning disabilities
- It should be collaborative – people with learning disabilities should be involved in the process of doing the research
- People with learning disabilities should be able to exert some control over processes and outcomes
- The research question, process and reports must be accessible to people with learning disabilities.

The current research project does not exhibit all of the characteristics listed above. However, it is still regarded by this author as being an inclusive research project for three reasons:

1. I, (a non-disabled person), am “on the side of” (p. 64) the people with intellectual disabilities that I am researching with; the research question will further their awareness of their own learning, an essential tool in life- long learning;
2. Although the research problem is not initiated by people with intellectual disability, it will be collaborative (people with intellectual disabilities will become co-researchers and will design the ‘Co-researchers’ Handbook’ [Appendix 1]). They also will advise on dissemination;
3. All questions, information and reports relating to this project will be co-designed by and made accessible to people with intellectual disabilities.

#### 4.1.1 Terminology of inclusive research clarified

Inclusive research has its own terminology that doesn't readily lend itself to readers unfamiliar to this strand of research. Consequently, there is a need to clarify the words used by academics that describe the roles played by themselves and disabled researchers. For the purpose of clarity this author uses the same terms that were used in recent research undertaken at the NIID, for example, *Family Voices* (Chadwick, Finlay, García Irarte, Greene, Harrington, Lawlor, Mannan, McConkey et al., 2010); *All We Want To Say*, (NIID 2010) and the *Relationships and Supports Study* (Inclusive Research Network 2010). These terms are:

- Co-researcher: this term refers to a researcher with an intellectual disability who expressed interest and consented to become a co-researcher in this project
- Lead researcher: This term refers to this author, a non-disabled researcher who is co-ordinating this inclusive research project, and who provided training in research methods to co-researchers.

This project is divided into main stages: Stage 1 and Stage 2. The latter stage (presented in Chapter 8) identifies variation in the ways CCL students experience their learning. Stage 1, (see Figure 1) has two main objectives:

1. *Learning the 'craft' of research*: Empowering co-researchers to become confident and competent researchers through "scaffolding" (Bruner, 1984) their use of the language and

culture of research, with the author giving procedural autonomy to co-researchers through a shared understanding of the expectations of the 'craft' (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

2. *Co-researchers' Handbook*: The author and co-researchers developing a handbook which will be used to support the development of the CCL curriculum.

*Figure 1: Stage 1 of the research process*

**Stage 1:** Research training for co-researchers & developing a 'Co-researchers' Handbook.

Timeframe: Jan – April 2011

Objective: To gain an understanding of how to support people with intellectual disabilities to carry out an inclusive research project.

#### **4.2 The tension between content and process in inclusive research**

According to Walmsley (2004), one of the hallmarks of inclusive research to date has been "a near obsession with process" (p. 56) which is particularly the case for emancipatory research but also applies to participative research. Braye (2000, p. 9) comments:

Three things are clear. First, the language of participation is complex: the same thing means different things to different people, and the same concept may be known by a number of different terms. Second, the apparent consensus that participation is a good thing masks major differences of ideology between different interest groups. Third, ends and

means are confused; participation is presented both as a means to an end, and at times the purpose and the process appear invisible.

In co-editing and co-authoring a book over a period of five years, entitled *Good Times: Bad Times. Women with learning difficulties telling their stories* (Atkinson, McCarthy & Walmsley, 2000), Jan Walmsley commented on the lengthy process and difficulties of inviting women with learning difficulties to participate in this type of project. Walmsley (2004, p. 56) comments:

We had consciously set out to demonstrate that women with learning difficulties had something important to communicate about their lives, and that the process could be enhanced by the inclusive process in which the power of the academic gaze was at least tempered by sharing it with some people who were usually gazed upon...the book successfully demonstrated that women did have a perspective which was worth having.

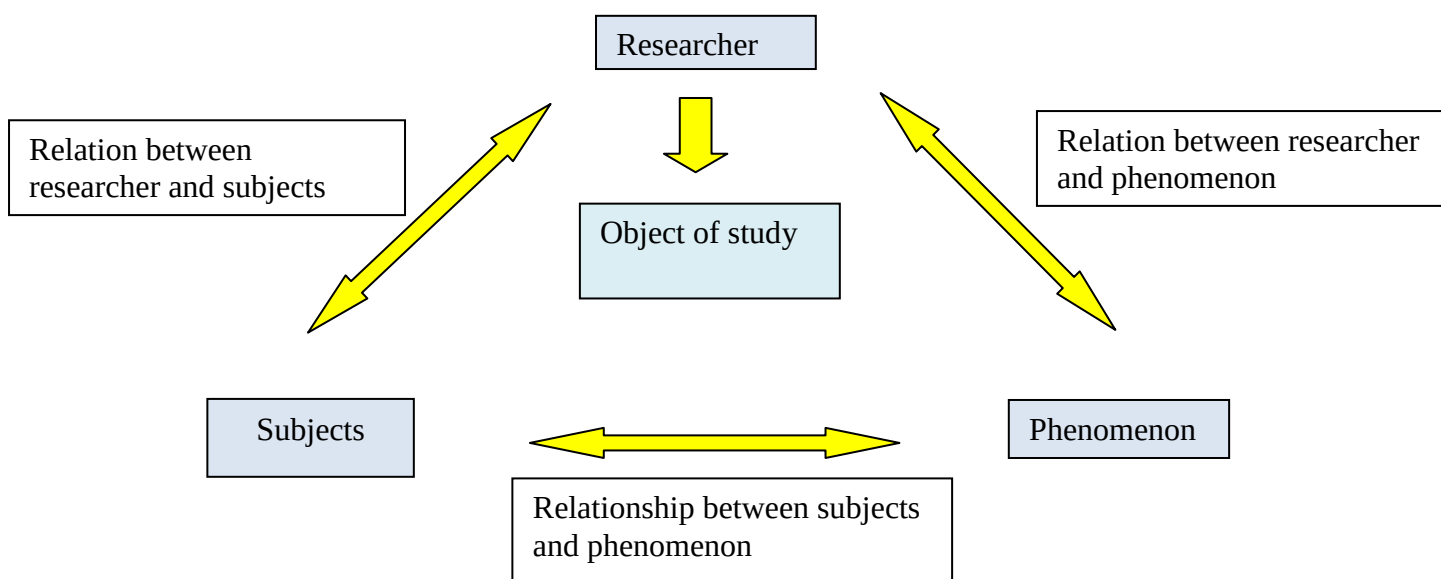
This entire project set out to subvert the traditional 'researcher/researched' relationship by working alongside women with learning disabilities. However, for Walmsley, like a lot of inclusive research projects, it was the methodological issues, and the processes, that interest the academics, rather than the findings.

In an effort to address this concern of Walmsley's, this author had two objectives: to build and develop a constructive and productive research relationship between the author as a professional 'expert' and intellectually disabled people. However, heeding Walmsley's observations above, reporting on the *process* of inclusive research alone should not be



the end product. For this reason an approach was sought by this author to explore the complex nature of students' experiences of learning. The answer was found in phenomenography (Marton 1981, 1986) as it is a vehicle that is considered "particularly appropriate for engaging with complex, controversial or deeply held issues or viewpoints" (Cherry, 2005, p. 62). A further strength of the use of phenomenography as a research approach is that it is "based on a relational view of the world" (Bowden, 2005, p.11); the focus of this study is the relation between learning and the CCL students, the relation being the experiences they have of learning. In addition to the internal relation that is personal to the individual student, the researcher's perspective as interpreter is also involved, with the object (see Figure 2), being "the relation between the subjects and the phenomenon" (Bowden, 2005, p. 12) - in this case, the relation between CCL students and learning.

*Figure 2. Phenomenographic Relationality (Bowden, 2005, p. 13)*



### **4.3 Social capital and people with intellectual disabilities**

Inclusive research (and the field of disability studies) is a site of struggle and is structured in terms of power relations (Bourdieu, 1977; Jóhannesson, 1993; 2006). For Bourdieu (1984, 1991), different people have unequal access to capital and are in uneven positions to acquire it. 'Cultural capital' is described by Bourdieu (1978, 1984) as a form of value associated with knowledge, skills and taste; some forms of knowledge are highly valued and those who possess that knowledge are more connected to mainstream social institutions.

It is argued however that people with intellectual disabilities do not possess the capital needed to acquire power to participate in disability research (Björnsdóttir, 2008). This is largely due to lack of access and opportunities not only to participate in research but also to have ownership over the various stages of a research project, for example, being involved in an advisory committee, framing the research questions, collecting data, discussing, and disseminating the findings. According to Björnsdóttir (2008), there are only a few people with learning disabilities who hold research positions and are underrepresented at universities, on editorial board for disability journals and on ethics committees. Furthermore, this author argues, most publications in learning disabilities are written by nondisabled scholars.

Bourdieu (2000) argues that people in a social field employ strategies to increase their capital and positions within the field. For people with intellectual disabilities, there are limited opportunities to get involved in research and increase their capital. However, the argument is advanced

that there are ways to overcome this issue of social exclusion for people with intellectual disabilities and for them to improve their position within the field of disability studies. One such way is being involved in inclusive research and participating in conferences that address intellectual disability issues. Regarding the current project, it is argued that co-researchers are in a potentially better position to obtain capital in the field of academia and as a consequence increase their capital within the field of disability studies. In this way these individuals can work towards gaining recognition and respect so they can obtain the capital needed to transform their place within this field.

#### **4.4 Theoretical underpinnings of inclusive research - emancipatory and participatory research**

##### **4.4.0 Introduction**

It has been outlined above that inclusive research is an umbrella term for participatory action research (PAR) and emancipatory research (Walmsley & Johnson 2003). Underpinning emancipatory disability research are critical theory precepts that centre historically on the Frankfurt School, in particular the philosophical arguments of Jurgen Habermas and his theory of 'knowledge constitutive interests'. In this following section this theory is analysed, together with the historical shift in research approaches, from positivist to interpretive to critical / emancipatory. As each research approach is associated with a distinctive view of disability – individual, social and political, it is outlined how traditional research is criticised for

reinforcing a personal tragedy approach to disability. A social model approach is advanced which is complemented by an emancipatory research paradigm. Habermas' emancipatory cognitive interest is re-introduced as an interest associated with a political approach to disability and geared to praxis-oriented research. By promoting self-reflection, emancipatory learning and critical thought, it is argued that this approach attempts to expose social oppression and facilitate political action through emancipatory research methods. Finally, this section critiques one such participatory and emancipatory method - inclusive research (Walmsley & Johnson 2003) by applying and engaging with Hall's (1981) seven characteristics of participatory research. The section concludes with an examination of participatory action research (PAR) and identifies six levels of stakeholder participation that illustrate an ever-increasing extent of stakeholder decision making related to a research enterprise. This project is then placed within the context of this framework where levels of stakeholder involvement are identified and elaborated on.

#### 4.4.1 Habermas' theory of knowledge-constitutive interests

*Knowledge and Human Interests* was published by Habermas in 1968. In this book Habermas contends that knowledge is historically rooted and interest bound before proceeding to develop the theory of cognitive interests or knowledge-constitutive interests, the important first stage in his elaboration of the relationship of knowledge to human activity. The theory of cognitive interests is concerned with uncovering the condition for the possibility of knowledge: Habermas aims to locate knowledge in

light of the problems man encounters in his efforts to “produce his existence and reproduce his species being” (Held, 1980, p.255). For Habermas, the conditions of the constitution of knowledge which determine “the structure of objects as possible experience” (p. 255) are the historical material conditions in which the development of the species has occurred.

It is Habermas’s contention that the human species has a “basis of interests” as both a tool-making and a language-using animal: they must “produce from nature what is needed for material existence through the manipulation and control of objects and must communicate with others through the use of intersubjectively understood symbols within the context of rule-governed institutions” (p.255). Therefore humans have an interest in the creation of knowledge which would enable them to maintain communication and control objectified processes. As well as the two “basis of interests” mentioned above, there is, according to Habermas, a third interest – an interest in the “reflective appropriation of human life without which the interest-bound character of knowledge could not itself be grasped” (p.255). This is an interest in the human capacity to be self-reflective and to act rationally that ultimately results in the generation of knowledge which enhances autonomy and responsibility, what Habermas calls *Mündigkeit*; hence it is an emancipatory interest. The end-point of this analysis is a trichotomous model of the human species’ *interests* – the technical, the practical and the emancipatory. These unfold in three media, work (instrumental action), interaction (language) and power (asymmetrical relationships of constraint and dependency) and give rise

to “the conditions for the possibility of three sciences, the empirical-analytic, the historical-hermeneutic and the critical” (p.255).

If emancipation is to remain a project for humanity, it is essential, Habermas argues, to counter the influence of ‘scientism’ in philosophy and other spheres of thought. Since Kant, Habermas sees epistemology as the critique of knowledge as something that is progressively undermined. As a result epistemology has become increasingly restricted to an examination of questions internal to methodology: the possibility of philosophy “taking a critical approach to knowledge has dissolved” (p.297).

If critical theory is to remain a possibility, Habermas maintains that it is necessary to understand the moment of reflection, and of self-understanding of the knowing subject. In *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1987) Habermas seeks to do this by analysing the connection between each of these interests. In this regard, he maintains, knowledge must discard the illusion of objectivism, “the world appearing objectively as a universe of facts” (p.297). This illusion conceals the processes in which facts are constituted and consequently “prevents consciousness of the interlocking of knowledge with interests from the life-world” (p.297).

Knowledge according to Habermas (1987) is formed in virtue of three interests: information that expands our power of technical control; interpretations that make possible the orientations of action within common traditions; and, analyses that free consciousness from its dependence on hypostatized power. These knowledge-interests or knowledge-constitutive interests are grouped under three main categories: the technical cognitive interest of the empirical-analytical

sciences, the practical cognitive interests of the historical-hermeneutic sciences and the emancipatory cognitive interest. These are, for Habermas the underlying modes of thought through reality is disclosed and acted upon, and yield a view-point from which reality is constituted. If the overall task of critical theory is to disclose the interests that lie behind the various exercises of knowledge, it is worthwhile to examine each of these three knowledge-constitutive interests in turn.

***The technical cognitive interest of the empirical-analytical sciences: positivism and the empirical-analytic sciences***

In *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas does not simply offer a negative assessment of positivism; he recognises that positivist philosophy had an initially liberating intent which was to dispel all dogmas, all modes of thought that placed themselves beyond empirical test and relevant independent controls (Held, 1980). In the empirical-analytical sciences knowledge is valued if it is based on observable facts or experience and the fundamental concern is in controlling the environment through rule-following action based on empirically grounded laws (Grundy, 1987). This type of knowledge can be equated with positivism as it favours objectivity, the observation, classification and application of 'objective' rules.

Natural science in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries appeared to offer the road to salvation but, Habermas maintains, its "cognitive interest in technical control over objectified processes" (Kearney, 1994, p.225)

and preoccupation with an examination of its methodology, impaired the understanding of the 'meaning' and 'import' of knowledge. Science's concepts, methods and theories is seen by Habermas as an insufficient basis from which to understand the very element of scientific activities that it presupposes, namely, human interaction and language. To grasp this domain more fully requires a different form of knowledge which, Habermas claims, is grounded in a different orientation to life. Habermas criticises positivism as it presumes to be the only or the all-englobing interest and scientific knowledge of this nature on its own is certainly not sufficient for human emancipation.

### ***The practical cognitive interests of the historical-hermeneutic sciences***

The historical-hermeneutic cognitive interest is "designed to guarantee, within cultural traditions the possible action-orienting self-understanding of individuals and groups as well as reciprocal understanding between different individuals and groups" (Habermas, 1987, p.176). The key concept in this interest is the concept of understanding. Habermas refers to it as 'the Knowledge-Constitutive-Interest of the cultural sciences' which is concerned with interpretation of phenomena; it is the meaning that is attributed to a text that is important, rather than the text itself.

This second category of interest, the practical cognitive-interest, favours a model of communicative action and refers to a field of intersubjective action. It endeavours to understand the inherently human dimension of meaning achieved through the interpretations of messages exchanged in



everyday language as well as the “symbolic interaction” of human meanings transmitted by the texts of our cultural traditions and embodied in our social norms and institutions (Kearney, 1994, p.225). Habermas recognises that it makes good sense “to conceive of language as a kind of metainstitution on which all social institutions are dependent” (Held, 1980, p.315).

However, Habermas continues, language can conceal as well as reveal the conditions of social life: “Language is *a/so* a medium for domination and social power: it serves to legitimate relations of organised force...language is *a/so* ideological” (p.316, italics original). The very possibility of a critique of ideology, in Habermas’ view, was recognised by Marx when he separated the “relations of production” and the “forces of production” (p.225); a critique of ideology depends upon recognition of the split between the technical-analytic interest and the practical-communicative interest. This however, in Marxism is something that is concealed as soon as it’s acknowledged, by ultimately subsuming both the interests of *relation* and *force* under the same “scientific” category of “production” (Kearney, 1994, p.225). As a result, Marx’s claims to scientific positivism undermine the recognition of the difference between the opposed orders of interest which made possible the Marxist critique of ideology in the first place. By pointing out this crucial difference between the interests of technical control and practical communication, Habermas endeavours to restore the possibility of genuine Critical Theory.

### ***The emancipatory cognitive interest***

As well as the technical interest in controlling objects in the environment and the practical interest in furthering intersubjective understanding, humans have, Habermas argues, a third interest: the "interest in emancipation" or "critical reflection" (Kearney, 1994, p.225). Habermas viewed this third cognitive interest as being dependent on the other two but going beyond them: "all logic presupposes the need for emancipation and an originally accomplished act of freedom, in order that man elevate himself to the idealist standpoint of autonomy and responsibility" (Habermas, 1987, pp.180/181). Thus freedom which is perceived as freedom of the ego stemming from "comprehension and liberation from dogmatic dependence" (p.208) is viewed as the ultimate aim of all three knowledge interests. The emancipatory interest for humans is the effort to secure freedom from "hypostatized forces and conditions of distorted communication" (Held, 1980, p.317).

History, Habermas acknowledges, embodies "domination, repression and the ideological framing of action" (p.317), therefore it becomes apparent that self-understanding is often limited by these often unacknowledged conditions. For Habermas, if the full potential of the rational capabilities of people are to be realised, a form of knowledge, generated through self-reflection, becomes necessary in order to guide the elucidation and abolition of the conditions of domination, repression and the ideological framing of action: "Self-reflection...leads to insight due to the fact that what has previously been unconscious is made conscious in a manner rich in consequences: analytic insights intervene in life" (Held, 1980, p.317).

In this self-reflective process, Habermas maintains, structures of domination can be “revealed, isolated and, under proper, specifiable conditions, eradicated” (p.317). Self-reflection, although a private activity, also has a social dimension; because of the “interactive nature of human society, individual freedom can never be separated from the freedom of others” (Grundy, 1987). According to Habermas, the act of speech itself contains ‘the evolutionary principle’ of emancipation; the type of knowledge emanating from the process of self-reflection is insight that ultimately leads to empowerment.

#### **4.5 Research paradigms and Habermas’s three knowledge-constitutive interests**

Habermas (1973) distinguishes three main paradigms in the history of research: positivist, interpretive and critical-emancipatory. These are aligned with distinctive ways of producing knowledge (instrumental/technical, practical and critical/emancipatory), as well as specific forms of policy making (engineering/prediction, enlightenment and struggle). Moreover, each paradigm is associated with a characteristic approach to disability: “individual, social and political” (Mercer, 2002, p.120), and the emergence of an emancipatory approach was a response to the perceived shortcomings of the positivist and interpretive paradigms in contesting the social exclusion of disabled people.

The deep division that emerged between competing perspectives in the 1980s is reflected in the literature on research (Blaikie, 1993). This was captured in references to "paradigm wars" (Mercer, 2002, p.230). When Oliver (1992) articulated a new approach to disability research, it took as its reference point the contrasting ambitions and assumptions associated with the main positivist, interpretive and critical theory accounts.

In the following section, these three research paradigms are examined with a view to focus on Habermas's third interest - the "interest in emancipation" or "critical reflection" as a paradigm for my own approach to inclusive research in the area of intellectual disability.

### 1. The positivist paradigm

Until the last decades of the twentieth century, positivism (or a revised post-positivism), dominated social research and guided answers to ontology, epistemology and methodology (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). At the ontological core of positivism is the assumption that the social and natural worlds contain a single reality and discernible patterns and uniformities that vary over time and across cultures. This is generally linked to a quantifying approach to establish cause-and-effect relationships between social phenomena (Mercer, 2002). In the methodology of positivism there is a distinct series of stages: "specify theory, derive hypotheses, operationalise concepts and develop measures, collect data, test hypotheses and reassess theory" (p.230). The criteria of validity, reliability and objectivity for judging the quality of knowledge

generated is also brought into the equation (Hammersley, 1992). Its epistemology is secured by a commitment to value neutrality and objectivity, even if, as Hammersley states, that these are difficult to secure in practice.

## 2. The interpretative paradigm

Interpretivism is often linked to the thought of Max Weber (1864-1920) who suggests that the human sciences are concerned with "*Verstehen* (understanding)" as opposed to the explicative approach "*Erklären* (explaining)" that is found in the natural sciences (Crotty, 1998, p.67).

The theoretical perspective of interpretivism emerged in contradistinction to positivism in attempts to understand and explain human and social reality (Crotty, 1998). A positivist approach follows the methods of the natural sciences and, by way of allegedly value-free, detached observation, it seeks to identify universal features of society and history that offer explanation and hence control and predictability. The interpretivist approach, on the other hand, looks for "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (p.67).

The interpretative paradigm emphasises clear-cut differences between the natural sciences and the social sciences; the theoretical and research orientation is moved from establishing causal explanations to exploring the situation-specific interpretation of social action. Its unifying belief centres on the "social construction of reality and the existence of multiple versions (ontological pluralism)" (Mercer, 2002, p.231). The importance of these multiple versions and the 'authenticity' of lay accounts is particularly important as well as the knowledge that is 'produced' (rather than

'discovered') between researcher and research participants (Schwandt, 1994). The emphasis is on interpretative / qualitative data with an inductive build-up of concepts, research questions and theories; information expressed in feelings and attitudes is valued as is the concept of the researcher and researched becoming fellow participants in the research process (Lincoln and Guba, 2000).

### 3. The critical-emancipatory paradigm

If interpretative researchers possess unalloyed confidence in accounts of authentic 'lived' experience turned up by their research, critical researchers hear in these experiences the voices of an inherited tradition and a prevailing culture. Many years ago this was noted by Dewey as "incorporated results of past reflection" that are likely to "obfuscate and distort" unless they can be detected (1929, p.34.). The objective of critical researchers is to make a sustained effort to detect these obfuscations and, in addition, emphasise that the tradition echoing through personal accounts of experience is "a tradition founded on exploitation that resounds with overtones of domination and un-freedom" (Crotty, 1998, p.159).

Mike Oliver's development of a social model approach to disability (Oliver, 1983) was complemented by the promotion of an emancipatory research paradigm that was to exert a dominant influence in the disability literature and has made Oliver one of the most influential contributors to the emancipatory disability research literature in Britain (Oliver, 1992, 1997, 2002). According to Oliver the emancipatory cognitive interest is associated with "a political approach to disability" (Barnes & Mercer, 2004,

p.119); it is geared to a praxis-oriented research that attempts to expose social oppression and to facilitate political action in order to transform society (Humphries, 1997).

The central criticism of 'mainstream' social science research by disability theorists was that it ignored or rejected analyses of disability as a form of oppression and domination. Emancipatory disability research, which is allied to the social model, adopted a radical critique of traditional 'scientific' research claims such as objective and impartial processes for validating knowledge. People engaged in emancipatory disability research stressed the importance of the participation of disabled people throughout the research process and the significance of this engagement in their own politicisation and of their experiences in producing knowledge about disability (Barnes & Mercer, 1997; Bersford & Evans, 1999). A key contribution of critical social theory is that it reinterpreted many seemingly 'personal troubles' of people in need of 'care and protection' as 'public issues' that have their origins in the wider social structures and processes (Oliver, 1992). Moreover, successful knowledge claims were linked with dominant interests and social relations in specific and historical contexts (Mercer, 2002).

#### **4.6 The social model approach – competing discourses**

The orthodoxy that has been the social model of disability focused on socially constructed barriers; its early literature was inclined towards a universal 'standpoint' position in which disabled people's experiences and

knowledge claims were regarded as 'authentic'. However, alternative interpretations of the social model pointed disability research down different paths. It was claimed that the pre-occupation with the basic divide between disability and impairment ensured that research focused on the *structural bases* of oppression (Mercer, 2002). The ontological gaze was then widened to incorporate the feminist maxim that the 'personal is political' and include the *experience* of impairment (Morris, 1992). Coupled with this, the focus also began to shift increasingly to diversity and differences in the experiences of oppression among disabled people, for example, of gender, ethnicity and social class as well as type of impairment; deaf people, people with learning difficulties and mental health system users / survivors all questioned the inclusiveness of the social model (Barnes & Mercer, 2004). The notion of a homogeneous category of 'privileged knowers' into disability gave way to competing discourses, voices and experiences within the disabled population (Corker, 1999).

#### **4.7 The legacy of Habermas' emancipatory cognitive interest**

##### *(1) Self-reflection*

A form of knowledge that is generated through self-reflection becomes necessary in order to "guide the elucidation and abolition of the conditions of domination, repression and the ideological framing of action" (Held, 1980, p.317). It is in this self-reflective process, Habermas maintains, "that structures of domination can be revealed, isolated and, under proper, specifiable conditions, eradicated" (p.317).



## *(2) Emancipatory learning*

Self-reflection, although a private activity, also has a social dimension (Grundy, 1987); the act of speech itself contains 'the evolutionary principle' of emancipation. This type of emancipatory learning is derived from Habermas's emancipatory cognitive interest and has been interpreted by adult educators (i.e. Collins, 1985; Hart, 1985; Apps, 1985) who see it as a process where learners become aware of the forces that have brought them to their current situation and take action to change some aspect of these situations. For Apps (1985), emancipatory learning is that which "frees people from personal, institutional or environmental forces that prevent them from seeing new directions, from gaining control of their lives, their society and their world" (p. 151).

## *(3) Critical thinking*

As a concept, critical thinking has been interpreted in a variety of ways. It has been equated with the development of logical reasoning abilities (Hallet, 1984), with the application of reflective judgement (Kitchner, 1986) and with the creation, use and testing of meaning (Hullfish & Smith, 1961). As the central component of critical thinking, O'Neill (1985) proposes the ability to distinguish bias from reason and fact from opinion.

Critical thinking is also generally conceptualised as an intellectual ability suitable for development by those involved in higher education (Drake, 1976, Young, 1980, Meyers, 1986). Empirical studies of the development of critical thinking capacities have focused on young adults (King,

Kitchener & Wood, 1985; Kitchener, 1986) or college students (Perry, 1970; 1981). The setting of the higher education environment for critical thinking is crucial; the rational concepts of critical thinking, analysis and reflection as well as the emotive aspects of feelings, intuitions and sensing that are central to critical thinking, can find fertile ground in the mind of adults involved in tertiary education, or from my own perspective as a teacher / researcher, adults with intellectual disabilities undertaking tertiary education *as well as* being involved in inclusive emancipatory research.

#### (4) *Emancipatory research*

Emancipation as a research outcome can be measured in different ways, as the self-empowerment of disabled people can take several forms: documenting social barriers and oppression, re-evaluating perceptions of disability and taking political action (Barnes & Mercer, 2004). This author's choice of using inclusive research is to put research capacities in the hands of people with intellectual disabilities so they can be empowered to transform their lives for themselves, particularly with regard to understanding their experiences of learning while in tertiary education. The rigid, linear design of most conventional research (Rifkin, 1994) is broken by inclusive research which encourages participation, because it focuses on a process of self-reflection, critical thinking, emancipatory learning and action that is carried out *with* and *by* participants, rather than *for* them.

In the following section participatory action research (PAR) is discussed with the aim to illustrate how it informs inclusive research and emancipatory research. The section culminates with the work of Turnbull, Friesen and Ramirez (1998), where six levels of stakeholder participation are presented in PAR that illustrate an ever-increasing extent of stakeholder decision making related to the research enterprise. This current research project is placed within the context of this framework where levels of stakeholder involvement are identified.

#### 4.7.0 Participatory Action Research (PAR) and emancipator research

PAR is a collaborative process where researchers and stakeholders collaborate throughout the entire research sequence (Turnbull, Friesen & Ramirez, 1998). It is argued by Carr and Kemmis (1986) that the 'action' element of PAR stems from the definitions of Action Research; these authors see PAR as "a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understandings of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out" (p. 162). The 'teacher as researcher' movement was a response to a variety of social conditions, political pressures and professional aspirations. For this reason, according to Carr and Kemmis (1986) the movement had been pragmatic, uncoordinated and opportunistic and its pace of change allowed little opportunity for careful reflection on the significance of its developments. The movement also lacked the sort of theoretical rationale that "clarified its meaning, promote its progress and arm itself against criticism" (p.1).

In publishing *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research*, Carr and Kemmis (1986) sought to address this lack of a theoretical framework with regard to teachers as researchers. Their aim was to offer “a philosophical justification for the view that teachers have a special role as researchers and that the most plausible way to construe education research is as a form of critical social science with its own unique theory-practice relationship” (p.2). By exposing and critically assessing key philosophical positions in the field of educational research, Carr and Kemmis aimed to give teacher educators access to the language and arguments with which they may resist the claim that “educational research should be the sole preserve of the academic experts”(p.2).

The form of action research which best embodies the values of a Carr and Kemmis’s critical educational science as described above is “*emancipatory action research*” (p.203). This is an empowering process that engages participants in the struggle for a more rational, just, democratic and fulfilling form of education. The empowerment which action research produces is significant because action research “initiates processes of the organisation of enlightenment and the organisation of change and realises them in the concrete practices of groups of practitioners who are committed to the critical improvement of education” (p.206).

In the following section the metaphor of participation is discussed in relation to participatory action research (PAR). The use of PAR’s interactive and dialogic methods as reflected in its potential to ‘empower’ is examined; it is argued that the key difference between PAR and

conventional methodologies lie in the location of power in the research process.

#### 4.7.1 The development and background of PAR

PAR is informed by a number of research traditions that have emerged in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Researchers such as Freire (1972) broke with established approaches of gathering data *on* oppressed people; what he advocated instead was a process of reflection and action that is carried out *with* and *by* participants.

The overall attitude to conventional 'scientific' research was 'hit and run' or 'fly in fly out' (Park, 1993) research. 'Dead reports on dusty shelves' (Park, 1993) refer to the needs assessment that is *seen* to be done, when in fact the political agenda is *not* to respond to the need. By contrast PAR is a means of putting research capacities in the hands of the deprived and disenfranchised people so they can transform their lives for themselves. The rigid, linear design of most conventional research (Rifkin, 1994) is therefore broken by PAR as it focuses on a participatory perspective that is "both situated and reflexive ...and sees inquiry as a process of coming to know" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006, p.7).

Throughout the literature on PAR, many terms are used interchangeably with sometimes similar and sometimes conflicting definitions. Reason and Bradbury have named this approach and its practice as an "action-research family" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006, p.xxiv). Terms to describe this approach include *participatory research*, *classroom action research*,

*industrial action research, participatory action research, emancipatory research and empowerment research.* All terms however, have a common focus on greater participation and influence of stakeholders in the research process. Hall's (1981) definition of PAR as a combination of social investigation, educational work and action is also worth noting.

#### 4.7.2 Dialogue and disagreement in PAR

It is also worth noting however, that action research grounded in the emancipatory aspects of research has received much criticism. For example Adelman (1989) considers it to be 'inward looking and ahistorical' and of poor quality. Atkinson and Delamont (1985) also have been critical of how action research approaches have developed in educational research, largely ignoring systematic methods and assuming an atheoretical posture. Participatory research also has become embroiled in the unproductive debate surrounding the qualitative-quantitative divide, with critics regarding its methods as 'soft' (Hammersley, 1992). For the current author however, the value of participatory research lies in its power as a change agent, as well as its ability to encourage reflection, inclusion and empowerment.

#### 4.7.3 Key features of PAR

Participatory methodologies are often characterised as being reflexive, flexible and iterative, in contrast with the rigid, linear designs of most conventional science (Chambers, 1992). It has been summed up as 'bottom-up approach' (Scherer & McKee, 1993) with consumers (that is,

PAR research participants) active in the research and evaluation process rather than passive providers of information. PAR therefore changes subject-object relations, empowering the subjects and engaging the objective researcher with the subjects, whether they are families or practitioners. Whyte (1989) sees PAR as a powerful type of applied social research that mutually profits researcher and those traditionally seen as subjects being studied. This form of role-blending for the subjects – as subjects and as co-researchers – results in parallel role blending for the researcher where the traditionally professional, objective researcher becomes more both the educator of subjects and the research consultant, 'learning from and learning about' the subjects (Rogers & Palmer-Erbs, 1994).

#### 4.7.4 Uses of PAR

PAR is now well established as a social science methodology (Beamish & Bryer, 1999). The term 'participatory research' covers a welter of approaches and applications. A brief look at the literature illustrates this. For example, it has been used in: educating health care professionals (Martin, 1997); on family research, (Turnbull, Friesen & Ramirez, 1998, Santilli, Singer, Di Venere, Ginsberg, & Powers, 1998); on empowering participants on both a conceptual and applied level, (Barnes, 1992; McTaggart, 1991; Sample, 1996; Yeich & Levine, 1992 ;Zarb,1992); in workplace practices (Whyte, 1991, Elden, 1993) and the application of action research in an international context, McTaggart (1997).

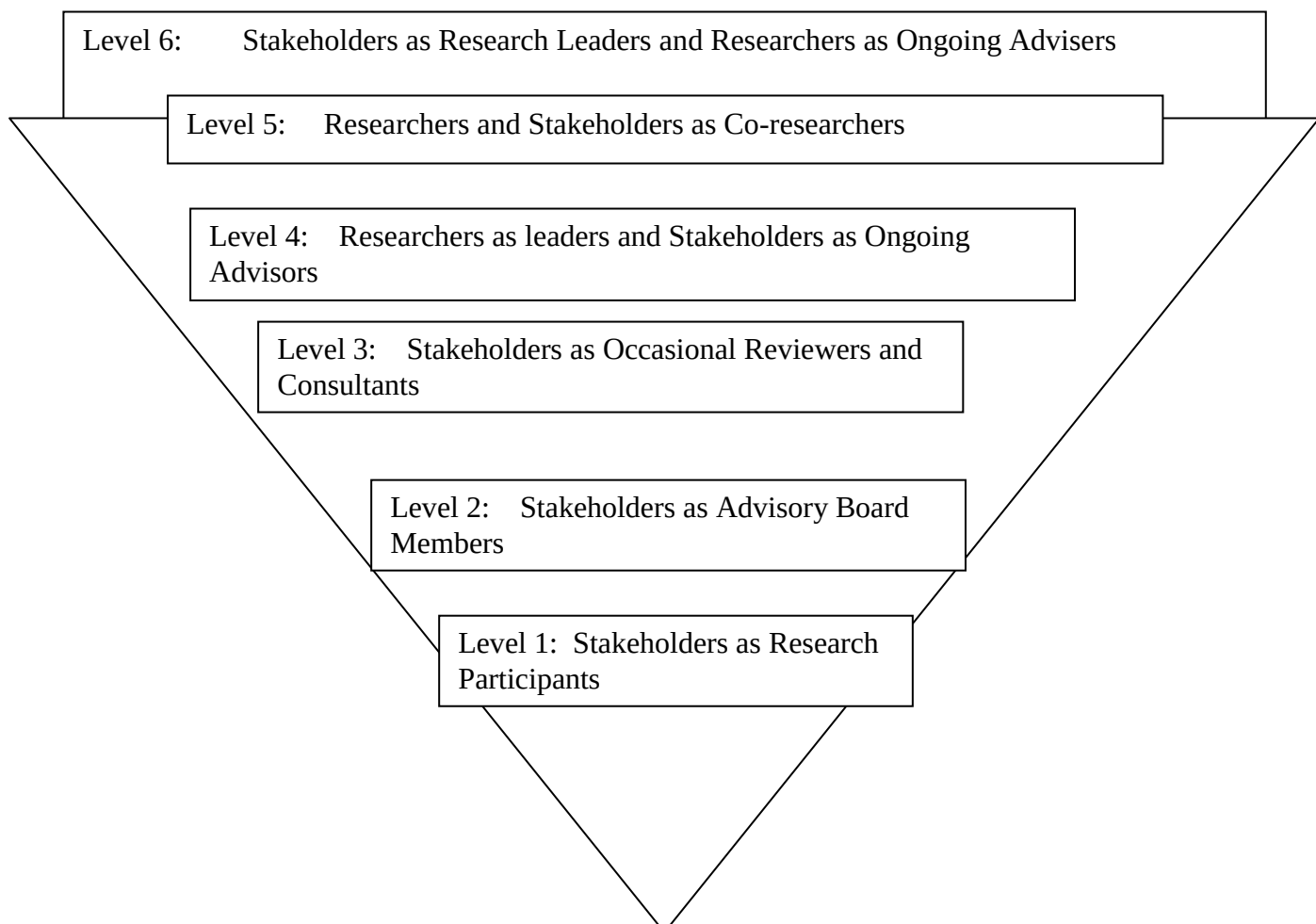
In more recent years PAR has proved to be a successful method to explore: theoretical and philosophical underpinnings, (Reason & Bradbury

2006); position action research as a fundamental component of teaching and classroom management as well as student research, (Mills 2006) and (Stringer 2004); and the transformational potential of focus groups is examined by Chiu (2003).

#### 4.7.5 Levels of stakeholder participation in PAR

Implementing PAR requires attention to the relative distribution of decision making between researchers and members of the stakeholder groups. Drawing on the work of Turnbull, Friesen and Ramirez (1998), six levels of stakeholder participation are presented that illustrate an ever-increasing extent of stakeholder decision making related to the research enterprise (Figure 3).

*Figure 3. Continuum of stakeholder participation in PAR*





Level 1: reflecting minimal involvement and no decision making is the role of stakeholders as research participants.

Levels 2 and 3: stakeholders as advisory board members as well and stakeholders as occasional reviewers and consultants. This entails increasing levels of involvement but relatively little influence with regard to the design and implementation of the research plan.

As the goal of PAR is to move in the direction of stakeholder decision making, levels 4-6 represent offer various degrees of PAR implementation. These include:

Researchers as leaders and stakeholders as ongoing advisors, (level 4);

Stakeholders as co-researchers (level 5);

Stakeholders as research leaders with researchers serving as ongoing advisors (level 6).

PAR therefore has different manifestations, with the bottom line of each being strong collaboration among researchers and stakeholders so that the expertise that each brings carries equal weight or at least meaningful weight.

In the context of this inclusive research project the author places co-researchers' involvement within levels 2 and 3, (i.e. stakeholders as advisors, reviewers and consultants). This is mainly due to the fact that the current research forms part of a structured D.Ed. programme where the author is the lead researcher and designer as well as the initiator of

the research question, and co-researchers had relatively little influence with regard to the design and implementation of the research plan.

#### **4.8 'Problematizing' Participation: Restrictive and facilitative processes**

The practice of participatory research raises personal, political and professional challenges that go beyond the bounds of the production of information. As a doctoral student it is important for this author to be constantly aware of this and to address these three challenges:

##### *Personal*

The challenge of the clash of identities between me and the co-researchers of the inclusive research process, for example, my position as a tutor and as a researcher. Also, the concept of reflexivity, voice and 'internal dialogue' (Anderson, 1991), and the constant scrutiny of "what I know" and "how I know it".

##### *Political*

My location of 'self' within power hierarchies; my position of power as a researcher and the epistemology resulting from this (the Foucaultian argument of knowledge and power being inextricably bound together) (Smart, 2002).

##### *Professional*

How I impose my own professional position and interests in the various stages of the research process - from the questions I ask to those I ignore, from problem formation to analysis, representation and writing in order to produce less distorted accounts of the social world (Harding, 1987). Also:

- My resistance to the classical 'colonial' anthropological approach.
- The challenge of participation and my attempt to 'problematise' participation (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).

To respond to these challenges, I use Hall's (1981) seven characteristics of participatory research as a way of responding to these questions:

### **Characteristics 1**

*The 'problem' originates within the community or workplace itself.*

There is the tension of the hierarchical nature of my role with the NIID. I, as the research doctoral student and the CCL course tutor will be initiating this research, not the community of CCL students I aim to research with. External issues such as funding priorities, as well as my own personal and professional interests (i.e. an interest in understanding the experience of learning for CCL students) play a major part in dictating how appropriate areas for research are identified.

### **Characteristic 2**

*The people in the community are involved in controlling the entire research process.*

The consumer-driven and consumer-responsive 'everybody' characteristic of participatory research has been summed up as a 'bottom-up' approach (Scherer & McKee, 1993) with all researchers active in the research and evaluation process rather than passive providers of information. By initiating and taking control of the research process I jeopardise this defining partnership of participation and may contradict the concept of community engagement where the people in the community are involved in controlling the entire research process (Hall, 1981). How do I mitigate this control in the cooperative inquiry process? According to Cornwall and Jewkes, (1995) control over the research is rarely developed completely onto the 'community', nor do 'communities' always want it.

The 'community' of CCL students have not initiated this research: nevertheless I have endeavoured to engage them as fully as possible as I worked through the process of the research, in particular with regard to the areas of training, data collection, and dissemination. This objective to engage and activate CCL students aims to address the concern of Walmsley and Johnson (2003) that inclusive research has become stalled and is in danger of being discredited; they criticise non-disabled researchers who claim that their role in inclusive research is little more than providing practical support. Other critiques of non-disabled researchers or supporters who have down played their skills are seen across the literature (Barnes, 1996; Chapman & McNulty, 2004). According to Goodley, (1996) researchers have been claiming a lack of clarity and honesty about the roles played by both the disabled researcher and the non-disabled researcher. This could result in the inclusive research agenda being trapped in a cycle of sentimental biography or

individual anecdotes and where here is ambiguity surrounding co-authored papers, making it difficult to figure out who did what work (Goodley, 1996).

### **Characteristics 3**

*The research goal is to fundamentally improve the lives of those involved, through structural transformation.*

If I am the initiator of the research process, therefore I'm the one who decides that a 'community' needs to be improved. Do I, with my professional approach and qualifications consider myself 'superior' in my knowledge and will the 'community' have the knowledge or confidence to challenge the guidance of me the 'expert'?

Walmsley and Johnson (2003) argue that researchers have become so preoccupied with finding inventive ways to enable people with intellectual disabilities to undertake research that they can inhibit development. Even though the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities have led to some creative and empowering projects (Walmsley, 2001), nevertheless, it has also acted as a 'straightjacket', inhibiting researchers in the inclusive camp from crossing words with others, for fear of 'speaking for' people with intellectual disabilities.

The role of supporter is a contentious one: Chappel and McNulty (2004) questions that "if people with learning disabilities need non-disabled allies in the research process...how can integrity of their accounts be maintained? How do we prevent non-disabled researchers...from assuming a dominant role in the research process?" (P. 41). Gates and

Waight (2007) caution that the principles of inclusive research can be compromised depending on the level of direction the facilitator needs to initiate and command. My own attitude to this inclusive research project is that people with intellectual disabilities are experts of their own experience; my role is a delicate one where doing too much, or too little is a trap I need to be conscious of and if possible, avoid.

#### **Characteristics 4**

*Participatory research plays a role in enabling by strengthening people's awareness of their own capabilities.*

How would members of the 'community' deal with tensions within the 'community' as their awareness is raised and solutions sought? There is often an assumption that local 'communities' exist as distinct entities: small, well-bounded, homogeneous and integrated and within these are shared needs, values, sentiments and ideologies (Schwartz, 1981). Unfortunately for researchers/ community developers this is invariably not the case. What is thought to be a 'community' is invariably found to be a very heterogeneous group of people with multiple interrelated axes of difference, including wealth, gender, age, religion and, by implication, power. The very act of 'community' engaging with outsiders necessitates a simplification of their shared experiences into a form and generality which is intelligible to an outsider. This simplification may imply notions of sameness which border on fictions and often would not pass within the community" (Cohen, 1985).

In a recent reflective account of emancipatory research by Bigby and Frawley, (2010), the perspective of disabled researchers having an 'insider perspective' is questioned; what can result, according to the authors, is a situation where a vocal few monopolise the agenda and hard to reach groups languish on the margins. In a similar vein, Ward and Townsley, (2005) consider their research which focused on people with intellectual disabilities working to develop accessible information. They remarked on the challenges that arose when trying to identify whom they should work with and in identifying people representative of their target audience. What they found was that the same people were asked to work on information, becoming 'information experts', while resulting in their removal from the real target audience. The authors argue of the need "to be mindful that the people that you work with are roughly representative of your target audience as research has shown that people will ignore information if it fails to reflect their lives" (pp. 60-61).

## **Characteristics 5**

*The focus of participatory research is on oppressed groups whose issues include inaccessibility, colonisation, marginalisation, exploitation, racism, etc.*

For a researcher having awareness of who to work with within a 'community' is essential. Research is more easily facilitated if it is organised through the dominant local stakeholders or 'leaders' who are often most able to mobilise resources and articulate concerns. Yet research has shown that the poorest and most marginalised are rarely represented among them (Williams & Satota, 1983). Working through

local power structures invites manipulation of the research according to the agendas of the powerful. If knowledge and truth are socially constructed then the more powerful participants determine which discourse type(s) may be legitimately drawn upon to construct this knowledge with the more powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants.

Disabled people, like other groups, vary in the degree of power they wield, and most people with intellectual disability are particularly disadvantaged, even in comparison with other disabled people. Bigby and Frawley (2010) illustrate an interesting point where a disabled co-researcher conducted research with people with intellectual disabilities living in group homes. They discuss how this researcher was confronted by his difference from residents with severe and profound intellectual disabilities and subsequently became more comfortable speaking to staff. The authors debated whether or not this disabled researcher was better placed than any other non-disabled researcher to undertake his research; they argued that the hierarchy of impairment he had encountered in his institutional experiences (i.e. those with the most severe impairments were least valued), may have reinforced his distance from people with more severe disability rather than developed his empathy for the group he was researching.

## **Characteristics 6**

*The people themselves are researchers, as those involved who have specialised training.*



In its purest form, the co-researching subjects of participatory research become full participants who identify the research questions and collaborate with the researcher in all phases of the research investigation: design, data collection and analysis, dissemination and utilization. However, within 'communities' not everyone will be able to participate, nor will everyone be motivated to become involved (Chaud, 1989). Even though there may be interest there may be barriers of time; people lead busy lives, securing the basic necessities of life. Considerable efforts are needed by researchers to involve marginalised groups in research: participating communities are 'made' rather than 'born' (Madan, 1987). The 'powerless' can be relatively inaccessible, unorganised and fragmented and can easily be left out.

According to Greenwood, Whyte and Harkavy (1993), discussions of participation generally fail to distinguish two important dimensions: the participatory intent of the research process and the degrees of participation actually achieved by a particular project. Participation therefore is a process that must be generated: to view participation as something that can be imposed is both naive and morally suspect. According to the above authors, participation needs to be treated as an emergent process, placing it on a continuum ranging from 'expert research' (where all authority and execution of research is controlled by the expert researcher) to participatory action research (where authority over the execution of the research is a highly collaborative process between expert researchers and members of the organisation under study). It is only by looking at the conditions and actions that help move research processes along the continuum in the direction of participatory

action research. Researchers therefore must continually evaluate the way their activities, in the context of relevant conditions, serve to enhance participation in the research.

For this author, it was vital to engage with the emergent process of participation in this research: co-researchers of this project collaborated with me and as I've outlined above they had a large input into how to control and disseminate the data collected. This is in keeping with McClimens (2010) who postulates that fundamental change is needed from educational institutions, dedicated research centre, charities and funders, self advocacy and user organisations to produce rules of engagement that could govern collaborative research. For this author dissolving the boundaries to knowledge and construction that currently fences off academia to all but the brightest and best would be a good starting point. She further suggests that if user involvement enhances practice then maybe it can similarly enhance education. Barton (2005) stresses the need to develop an inclusive research culture in which disabled and non-disabled researchers can share, support and act as critical friends to each other is an ideal. However, this ideal can and is often inhibited by unhelpful forms of competitiveness, restrictive boundaries of relationships including disability allegiances and other status driven priorities.

## **Characteristics 7**

*The researchers with specialised training may be outsiders to the community but are committed learners in a process that leads to militancy (fighting for change) rather than detachment.*

Commitment and interest can wax and wane over time. Participants can experience task exhaustion and the composition of research groups will fluctuate over time (Minkler, 1992). Identifying honestly the limitations of what can be achieved at the outset is an important part of establishing trust and this takes considerable time (Kirkpatrick, 1990). The process of 'fighting for change' can also have unintended negative consequences for those who participate. Newly empowered communities may challenge established power structures and in hostile environments this may unleash brutal repression on them (Woelk, 1992).

This chapter has examined the growth and development of inclusive research in the context of participatory and emancipatory influences. The following chapter builds on the above discussion by justifying the use of a phenomenographic approach for this qualitative research project.

# **Chapter 5**

## **Methodology**

### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter firstly explicates this author's use of a qualitative research methodology for this study. A justification is then advanced for choosing a phenomenographic approach over a phenomenology. Finally, the techniques within phenomenography are explained and critiqued.

### **5.1 Justification for using a qualitative methodology**

Smith (1983) points out that the two approaches of quantitative and qualitative research have different epistemological implications: specifically, the quantitative approach takes a subject-object position, separates facts and values and searches for laws; the qualitative approach takes a subject-subject position, views facts and values as inseparable and seeks understanding.

A qualitative research methodology therefore was employed in this research as it sought to explore and understand the phenomenon of learning. Using a qualitative research approach also enabled this author to engage with the research questions and meet the following research requirements of:

1. Enabling CCL students to relate the lived experiences of their learning at the NIID;
2. Describing the multiple dimensions of their learning;
3. Offering an alternative paradigm of inquiry to more traditional quantitative methods by allowing CCL students' individual and collective voices to be heard through inclusive research.

Qualitative research therefore was considered by the current author as an appropriate research methodology for exploring and describing the holistic nature of CCL students' learning. This type of research can be thought of metaphorically as an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, with many colours and textures and various blends of material (Becker, 1998). The term *bricoleur* has been used to describe the qualitative researcher who is a "maker of quilts, (using) the aesthetic and material tools of her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods and empirical materials (that) are at hand" (p.2). The choices that the qualitative researcher employs are not necessarily made in advance; Nelson, Treichler, & Grossberg (1992) notes that the "choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked and the questions depend on their content" (p.2), what is available in the context and what the research can do in that setting. The 'fabric' of qualitative research cannot be explained easily. The quilter who stitches, edits and puts slices of reality together creates a pattern of 'unity' to an interpretive experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This unity is a "complex, holistic picture" that "takes the reader into the multiple dimensions of a problem or issue and displays it in all its complexity" (Creswell, 1998, p.15).

One of the objectives of this study is to display a complex, holistic picture of CCL students' experiences of their learning. Traditionally within the NIID the issues and concerns of people with intellectual disabilities have been researched using a participatory (Turnbull, et al. 1998) and inclusive research (Walmsley & Johnson, 2003) approach. These approaches offer an alternative paradigm of inquiry to the more traditional quantitative methods and the epistemology of logical empiricism that, according to Paul & Marfo (2001), is dominated by an emphasis on technical methods and procedures as well as the epistemology of logical empiricism.

## **5.2 Choosing between two approaches: phenomenography or phenomenology?**

Initially, this author considered using a phenomenology for this study as this was a recommendation made by the examiner of the upgrade for this doctorate in September 2010. Phenomenology (i.e. Moustakas, 1994; Giorgi, 1999, 2005) is a qualitative research approaches that guide human science research and claim to provide access to individual experience. In elaborating the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenography, Marton (1994b) referred to the work of the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1859—1938) and established that there is a relationship between phenomenology and phenomenography. For Marton (1994b) the two terms phenomenology and phenomenography overlap and the description of *epoche*, *noema* and *noesis* by Husserl (1913, 1931) is a thread that runs through both traditions. A number of other commentators have implied (i.e. Gibbs, Morgan & Taylor, 1982; McKeachie, 1984; Morgan,

1984; Prosser, 1993; Taylor, 1983) that phenomenology is the same as phenomenography and agrees with Marton (1994b) that both phenomenographic and phenomenological research is relational, experiential, content-oriented and qualitative.

However, even though there are similarities between phenomenography and phenomenology, Svensson (1997) maintains that despite these similarities, phenomenography has to be given its own specific foundation and cannot be “reduced” to phenomenology or any other established school of thought. According to Svensson, from a historical point of view, phenomenography was not developed on the basis of phenomenological philosophy and, although there are similarities between phenomenography and phenomenology, it is problematic to include phenomenography as part of the phenomenological tradition.

### **5.3 Justification for using phenomenography**

Phenomenography is aimed at seeking a collective meaning (Barnard, McCosker, & Gerber, 1999). Phenomenography, with its suffix “graph”, seeks to describe what comes to light; phenomenology, on the other hand with its suffix “logos”, seeks to draw together that which is manifest in order to clarify its logic or structure (Giorgi, 1999). In phenomenology the search for a singular essence is central; in phenomenography the variation of the world as experienced is the focus (Marton, 1996b).

I first encountered the term phenomenography in the book entitled *Teaching for Quality Learning at University* by Biggs (1999); this discovery

prompted me to carry out research on its uses and its origins. When I discovered that phenomenography is an educational research approach that specifically addressed learning, I concluded that this approach was exactly what I was looking for: both phenomenography's traditional subject matter of study (learning) and the approach (a specific, tested and proven way of researching learning) offered me a way of exploring learning that focuses and draws upon students' ideas and opinions. As a person-centred approach is part of the culture of the NIID, phenomenography, with its emphasis on describing the variation of individual experiences, also offered me a means of undertaking research in an inclusive way with people with intellectual disabilities.

Phenomenography also allowed "mapping qualitatively different conceptions" (Dall'Alba, 2000, p. 97) to form a hierarchical structure. Having knowledge of such a structure that outlines the hierarchy of ways CCL students experience learning has the potential to be used as 1), a reflective tool for CCL students to understand and reflect on their own learning, and 2), a means for educators to understand how people with intellectual disabilities learn.

To summarise, this author chose phenomenography as it focused on identifying qualitatively different ways of experiencing the phenomenon of learning and offered the potential to answer the requirements of one of the questions of this study, that is, to explore:

- The variation in experiencing a phenomenon (rather than the singular essence of a phenomenology) - research question 2;



- The collective experience (rather than the singular experience of a phenomenology), thus providing a holistic view of the phenomenon of learning within the sample group - research question 2.

#### **5.4 The methodological underpinnings of the phenomenographic research approach**

The basic ideas of phenomenography's methodological roots as an evolving research approach since the late 1970s has largely remained stable (Marton, 1978, 1981, 1986). Writing in 1978, Marton stated that

[t]he kind of research we wish to argue...is research which aims at description, analysis, and understanding of experiences; that is, research which is directed towards experiential description. (Marton, 1978, p. 6)

In these early days Marton did not use the word phenomenography but like qualitative research in general, saw the purpose of this kind of research as a way to "explain ...to find and systematise forms of thought in terms of which people interpret aspects of reality" (p. 6).

By 1986, phenomenography as a term was in use with Marton (1986, p. 31) defining the approach as

a research method adapted for mapping the qualitative different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them.

By 1997 however, Marton and Booth (1997, p. 111) redefined phenomenography:

Phenomenography is not a method in itself, although there are methodological elements associated with it...Phenomenography is rather a way of – an approach to- identifying, formulating, and tackling certain sorts of research questions, a specialisation that is particularly aimed at questions of relevance to learning and understanding in an educational setting”.

However, the earlier approaches as well as the later descriptions of phenomenography share a common focus on variation and experience - a way of experiencing a phenomenon being described as a relation between the individual and reality (Marton 1981; Marton & Booth, 1997).

Phenomenography continued to develop in the 1990s and 2000s with the emphasis shifting from a methodological orientation to theoretical concerns with the advance of the “theory of variation”, for example Pong, (1999); Bowden and Marton, (2004); Pang, (2003) and Marton and Tsui, (2004). Pang (2003) argues that the thread that runs through the phenomenographic movement is this interest in variation, and that ‘new’ phenomenography emerged as a result of phenomenography drawing attention to different senses of variation at different times in its history.

As new phenomenography shifts the primary focus from methodological to theoretical questions, it characterises a way of experiencing something in terms of the critical aspects of the phenomenon as discerned by the learners.

## **5.5 Techniques within phenomenography**

Although Marton (1994) allows for a variety of techniques for data gathering, he expresses a preference for the one-to-one interview because it is individual experiences which are his primary concern. Transcripts from the interviews are typically transcribed verbatim and become the focus of the analysis. The set of categories or meanings that result from the analysis are not determined in advance; rather they 'emerge' from the data in relationship with the researcher. Regarding analysis, Marton is highly prescriptive regarding the procedures to be adopted and describes it as a step-by-step process; each step has implications for both the step which follows and for the steps that precede. The steps are that the researcher:

- Should bracket pre-conceived ideas
- Transcribe verbatim
- Bring transcripts together to make an undivided data set
- Search for similarities of understanding / experiencing of the phenomenon
- Search for variations of understanding/experiencing of the phenomenon
- Develop pools of meanings, i.e. what all the participants have to say about the same thing
- Reintroduce individual boundaries to determine what the same person has said about other related things. This is required to make sense of particular expressions in terms of the collective as well as

of the individual context. It is what Marton (1994) calls the *hermeneutic element*

- Group relevant quotes together – this establishes the critical attributes of each group of quotes and allows the focus to change from relationships between individual quotes / expressions to relationships between the critical attributes of groups of quotes
- Compare the critical attributes of the groups of quotes it is possible to characterise the variation in how a certain phenomenon is experienced, conceptualised and understood
- Emerge sets of 'categories of description' (Marton, 1994) which represent different capabilities for seeing the phenomenon in relation to a given criterion
- Order a complex of categories referred to as the 'outcome space' (Marton, 1994).

The outcomes of phenomenography are the *categories of description* and the *outcome space*. Outcomes for Åkerlind, (2005b, p. 322) are

represented analytically as a number of qualitatively different meanings or ways of experiencing the phenomenon (called 'categories of description' to distinguish the empirically interpreted category from the hypothetical experience that it represents), but also including the structural relationships linking these different ways of experiencing. These relationships represent the structure of the 'outcome space' in terms of providing an elucidation of relations between different ways of experiencing the one phenomenon.

Phenomenography's outcomes consist of categories of description and the outcome space which serve as "tools to capture and communicate the features of the experiences or the phenomenon they represent (Bruce, 1997, p. 87). The following section examines each of these two outcomes in turn.

#### 5.5.0 Categories of description

Categories of description denote "forms of thought, and are brought together in order to characterise the perceived world and are arrived at by separating forms of thought both from the thinking and the thinker" (Marton, 1981, p. 181). These categories can be considered as "abstract instruments to be used in the *analysis* of concrete cases in the future" (p. 196), or alternatively, the focus could be on the "*applicability* of ...categories in concrete cases...in order to make a statement" (p. 196). A favouring of abstraction, reduction and condensation is based on the assumption about the objects that they have "whole-characteristics which are representing the central meaning of the objects and the most important similarities and differences between objects and between conceptions" (Svensson, 1997, p.167).

A conception exists in the real world only in terms of a mental act and it is exhibited by someone who does something in a certain setting. In talking about categories of description, Marton suggests that we *bracket* the dynamic-activity perspective and we consider the categories almost as if they were *frozen* forms of thought. An analogy can be used by referring to

the relationship between Lewis Carroll's smiling cat and the smile left behind when the cat is separated from the smiling (Carroll, 1992).

Bracketing the dynamic-activity perspective and placing emphasis on the categories as *frozen* forms of thought allows the phenomenographical researcher the opportunity to look at the complex possible ways of viewing various aspects of the world, and highlighting not only different but even alternative and contradictory forms of a phenomenon. In human culture, Blakemore (1977) regards this activity as something that leads to the "emergence of a kind of communal intellect – the Collective Mind of man" (p. 117). This collective intellect can thus be used as a "structured pool of ideas, conceptions and beliefs underlying the possible interpretations of reality...and it is enhanced steadily, as new possibilities are continually added to those previously available" (Marton, 1981, p.198).

The categories of description may mean a reduction of data to a limited form, however, the aim is to reach a summary abstract expression of the content or meaning of data that is as close to the data as possible. The category is a description of what is the common meaning of the meanings of the phenomena grouped together and are based on comparison and grouping of data representing expressions of conceptions (Svensson, 1997). The categories may be said to stand for themselves by accurately describing each conception in the category.

Thus the most fundamental assumption in relation to the results of phenomenography research is that conceptions may be described in terms of their reduced content, "where the reduction which is also an abstraction is a reduction of the meaning of the main parts of the phenomenon

conceptualized, with preserving of the main content of the parts as parts of a organized whole” (p. 168). The description will be dependent on the perspective of the researcher and the empirical and theoretical context of the research.

Marton and Booth (1997) have established three criteria for the quality of a set of categories of description:

- a. Each category should contribute something unique about a particular way of experiencing the phenomenon;
- b. The categories have to be in a logical hierarchical relationship with each other where there should be “a series of increasingly complex subsets of the totality of the diverse ways of experiencing various phenomena” (Marton and Booth, 1997, p. 126).
- c. The categorisation should include “as few categories as it is feasible and reasonable to capture the critical variation in the data” (P. 126).

#### 5.5.1 The outcome space

It has been shown above how the categories of description are constructed by the phenomenographic researcher. However, the ultimate aim of phenomenographic analysis is to constitute a logical inclusive structure relating to the different meanings of the phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2005). This structure is a different way of experiencing a phenomenon

and represents a structured set called the “outcome space” (p. 323), defined by Åkerlind as a way of looking a collective human experience of phenomena holistically.

Even though the same phenomena may be perceived differently by different people under different circumstances, the contents of the outcome space represent the “full range of possible ways of experiencing the phenomenon in question, at (a) particular point in time, for the population represented by the sample group collectively” (p. 323). The focus on the collective is important: phenomenographic research aims to explore the range of meanings within a sample group, consequently no one interview transcript can be understood in isolation from the others. Every transcript is interpreted within the context of the group of transcripts as a whole, in terms of similarities to and differences from other transcripts.

In addressing the quality of a phenomenographic outcome space, Marton and Booth (1997) present three criteria:

1. That each category in the outcome space reveals something distinctive about a way of understanding the phenomenon
2. That the categories are logically related, typically as a hierarchy of structurally inclusive relationships
3. That the outcomes are parsimonious, that is, that the critical variation in experience observed in the data be represented by a set of as few categories as possible.



According to Järvinen & Järvinen (2000) there are three types of outcome spaces in which relations between different categories may be viewed:

1. An inclusive, hierarchical outcome space in which the categories further up the hierarchy include the previous or lower ones;
2. An outcome space in which the different categories are related to the history of the participant's experience of the phenomenon; and
3. An outcome space which represents a developmental progression in the sense that the experiences represented by same category have more explanatory power than others, and thus may be seen as better than others.

The ultimate aim of this phenomenographic analysis was to constitute an outcome space that represents the core aspects of the collective ways of experiencing learning among CCL students in the NIID. With reference to Järvinen & Järvinen's (2000) three types above, the outcome space described in this study is an inclusive, hierarchical outcome space in which the categories further up the hierarchy include the previous or lower ones.

## **5.6 Critiquing phenomenography**

In any phenomenographic study, a critical engagement with its principles and practices is an essential element. For Boulton-Lewis et al, (2004), as long as the researcher is aware of the limitations of phenomenography, it can be a powerful way of describing how a group of individuals within a specific context experience a particular phenomenon.

One of the foundation stones upon which much of the theory, practice and phenomenographic research in higher education has been built over the last 40 years has been the notion of *deep* and *surface* approaches to learning originated by Marton and Säljö (1984, 1987). The surface elements involve processes aimed at the “reproduction” of facts and information; deep elements involve “transformation” processes, one of which is understanding, an “intention to develop personal understanding of the subject matter presented” (Entwistle & Entwistle 1992, p.1). Gorsky, Caspi and Trumper (2006) maintain that discussions about research into student learning in higher education are mainly centred on these ideas and one of the main concerns of this research is to find out what is wrong with students who do not engage with the deep approach (Haggis 2003).

Having made its main impact in Sweden, the United Kingdom and Australia, phenomenography has played an important role as educators aim to improve their practice; indeed, a large number of practitioners in higher education have become familiar with and refer to the deep/surface metaphor in the phenomenographic literature (Webb 1997). The longevity of the metaphor may be linked to the simplicity, universality and power of the term. With such a paradigm shift brings new professors, journal editors, PhD supervisors and topics; however, the growth of a new paradigm should not be universally accepted – it requires critique and analysis.

#### 5.6.0 Humanistic philosophy informing phenomenography

Webb (1997) argues that phenomenography appears to have no particular view of humanity and the social consequences of education; no responsibility is placed upon lecturers to “produce social reformers; to motivate transformative intellectuals; to argue the oppressive nature of education within an unequal society or to call for de-schooling” (p.198). Similarly, Webb continues, there is no requirement on the part of the lecturer to expand the humanity of his or her students in line with the traditions of humanistic education. Indeed, phenomenography’s relationship to the learner appears to claim neutrality in terms of such value positions.

According to the current author, one way of addressing Webb’s critique of phenomenography is for practitioners in higher education to engage with the considerable body of research in the area of adult education, which is underpinned by humanistic learning theories (i.e. Rogers 1980; Knowles 1990). These theories stress the more active nature of the learner and place an emphasis on “the compulsion towards growth and development, the active search for meaning, and the fulfilment of goals which individual set for themselves” (Rogers 1996, p.99). However, the teaching methodologies and ideas of humanistic adult education (i.e. self-directed learning, experiential learning, learning contract and ideas such as ‘learner responsibility’ and ‘autonomy’) are still relatively new to higher education; if they do exist, they often exist in these contexts in rather simplistic and reduced forms. It is this author’s suggestion that the literature of phenomenography and the field of higher education have

much to gain from humanistic learning theories so they can begin to deal with the many aspects of learning that are still not well understood – what Law and Urry (2003, p. 10) call “the fleeting”, “the multiple” and “the complex” learning situations in higher education.

#### 5.6.1 The discourse of higher education and intellectually disabled people

It is further argued by Webb (1997) that phenomenography “continues to reproduce the discourses within which it is embedded” (p. 203). In its failure to “screen out” the historical experience of the researcher, the person undertaking the phenomenographic study fails to “have pristine perception, make neutral observations, build objective categories and give neutral interpretations” (p. 201). As the phenomenographic researcher aims for bracketing their pre-conceptions (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000), the real difficulty for the researcher lies in their effort to maintaining a second-order perspective (Prosser, 2000) as they enter into the life-world of the learner (Greasley & Ashworth 2007).

It has been argued by Webb (1997) above that one of the difficulties of phenomenography is that it reproduces the discourses within which it is embedded. This discourse is the discourse of higher education and is organization and defined by power relations (Foucault 1972); in this structure individuals are authorised to speak by gaining entrance to the media of its speech, such as academic journals and conferences.

Gaining such access is problematic for people with intellectual disabilities as traditionally much research addressing their concerns has been done

from the perspective of social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists and other professionals (Klotz 2004). Disabled people have increasingly stressed the importance of equal power relationships between disabled people and non-disabled researchers (Boxall 2007). One way to gain entry to the discourse of higher education, the current author argues, is for intellectual disabled people to become more aware of the power relations of the discourse, and to challenge, contest and ultimately gain some control of discursive practice.

However, as Webb (1997, p.210) warned "before we join a particular club... we could do well to examine its membership, or more particularly, its non-membership". One of the ultimate objectives of this research project is to empower people with intellectual disabilities to intimately challenge, contest and gain entry to the world of academia, and its media of journals and conferences. In this way the interest and views of those who are considered the 'Other' ('Otherness' being defined by the degree of variation from the "norm"), can be more represented and accepted in academic journals and at conferences. Informed by these powerful insights, the discourse of higher education may begin to develop alternative approaches to the interpretation of teaching and learning.

The following chapter describes the research methods used in the data collection. The two main stages of this research are described (Stage 1 and Stage 2) and the methods for gathering data are outlined. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the ethical concerns of this

research and the need for researchers to be creative while seeking consent from people with intellectual disabilities.

# **Chapter 6**

## **Research Methods**

### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter firstly describes how this author used purposeful sampling to select participants who could describe the target phenomena in a maximum of qualitatively varying ways. Secondly, the two stages of the research are introduced and the methods for gathering data are outlined. Stage 1 outlines the process of collecting data during the training of co-researchers; Stage 2 focuses on and critiques the interview method as an effective tool for phenomenographic data collection. As one of the great challenges in doing research with people with intellectual disabilities is communicating the purpose of the research and what participation will involve, this section concludes with a discussion on the ethical concerns of this research and the need for the issue of consent to be fully explored.

### **6.1 Sampling strategy**

When selecting research participants for a phenomenographic research study, Moustakas (1994) states that an essential criterion for choosing participants is that these individuals have experienced the phenomenon that the researcher is interested in and, that these individuals are willing to participate in the research and are keen to explore the phenomenon in question.

Taking this recommendation into account, this author adopted a purposeful sampling strategy (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002); the idea behind this type of strategy is based on the assumption of Merriam (1998, p. 48)

that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn most.

Adopting a purposeful sampling therefore involved aiming for maximum diversity in the characteristics considered most important to the research questions. To ensure maximum variation sampling was obtained from the CCL students within the selected context of the CCL programme, the author purposefully picked "a wide range of cases to get variation on dimensions of interest" as well as picking "all cases that meet some criterion" (Patton, 2002, p.243). As the objective of this research was an interest in variation in CCL students' experiences of their learning, the sample was selected with the purpose of highlighting such variation.

## **6.2 Sample selection**

Three main groups of individuals participated in this study:

1. CCL students - eight females and seven males (n=17)
2. Co-researchers – three males and three females (n=6)
3. This author



Regarding the correct number of participants for a phenomenographic research project, Sandberg (1994) is of the opinion that it should be sufficient to yield adequately rich descriptions of the varying experiences. A total of 35 CCL students attended the co-researchers' presentation (Appendix 2). Out of this group 15 CCL students declined to take part in the research. This resulted in 20 students willing to participate and who signed the consent form and undertook the research comprehension quiz, the purpose of which was to ensure that these students understood the nature of what they were signing up for. As three students failed (with support) to answer the quiz correctly, they were deemed to be unsure regarding what they were signing up for. Consequently, the resulting 17 CCL students who took part in the research (see Table 3) included eight females and seven males, all of whom had been attending the CCL programme for over one year. For the purposes of anonymity, participants are referenced in the findings in the following manner: P1 (Participant 1); P2; P3 – P17.

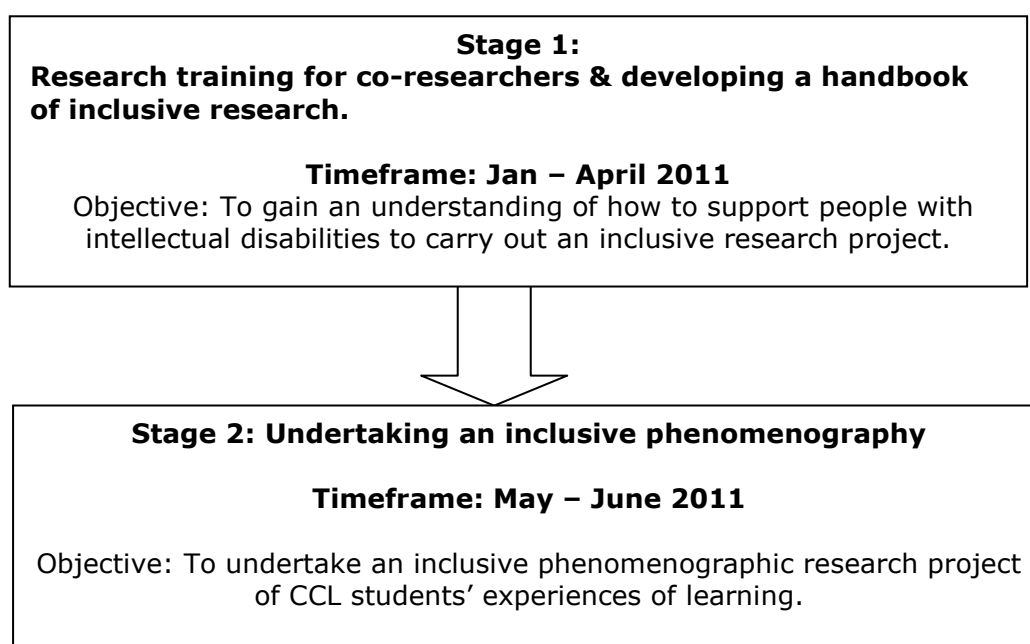
*Table 3. Total number of CCL students who participated in this research*

|                                                    |    |
|----------------------------------------------------|----|
| Total number of CCL students attended presentation | 35 |
| Declined to participate                            | 15 |
| Signed consent form                                | 20 |
| Failed to answer the quiz correctly                | 3  |
| Total number who participated in the project       | 17 |

### 6.3 The two stages of the research

There were two main stages to this research: in Stage 1 this author trained CCL students to become co-researchers. This process involved them undertaking training in inclusive research and facilitation theory, as well as one-to-one interview methods and practice. (For reporting results in Chapter 7 co-researchers are identified as: CR1, CR2 – CR6). For Stage 2, co-researchers undertook an 'inclusive' phenomenographic research project on the topic of 'How CCL students' experiences learning' (Figure 4) under the guidance of this author. This process was supported with the "Co-researchers' Handbook" (Appendix 1).

*Figure 4: Two stages of the research process*



In this section the methods employed when gathering data are discussed. As outlined in Chapter 1 the purpose of this research was twofold:

1. To gain an understanding of how to support people with intellectual disabilities to carry out an inclusive research project, and
2. To undertake an inclusive phenomenography on intellectually disabled learners' experiences of learning while attending tertiary education.

#### 6.3.0 Stage 1: Research training for co-researchers and compiling a co-researcher's handbook

In Stage 1, data were collected during the final two semesters of the academic year in the period January – April 2011. As discussed above, a purposeful sampling strategy was adopted in which six students who had experienced the phenomenon of learning on the CCL programme were invited to be part of the research. Within the context of the CCL group, this author aimed to include equal numbers of male and female participants as well as maximum variation in ages.

As recommended by Ashworth and Lucas (2000) it is essential to inform the participants beforehand about the purpose of the research. This author firstly invited students to participate in an informal conversation after class in which the purpose of this research project was outlined and discussed. The content of this conversation included 1), this author's doctoral study; 2) the topic of interest (i.e. CCL students' experiences of learning), and 3), this author interest to make the research inclusive.

When students heard about the topic of the research, students showed a keen interest and spoke passionately about the importance of having their voices heard in this research. At the end of the meeting it was clear to this author that these students were not only willing to actively participate in the research, but were also very vocal about the absolute necessity for them to play a part in the future dissemination of the research findings.

Stage 1 was carried out over a period of 11 weeks during the second semester of 2011. The aim of these sessions was to provide training to the students in a number of important areas of research (see Table 4).

Table 4. Timetable for Stage 1 of the research

|            |                                                                                                                          |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Week one   | <b>Establishing a baseline:</b> Exploring co-researchers' understanding of research and the role of the researcher       |
| Week two   | <b>Stages of the research:</b> Introducing the stages involved in a social research project and the meaning of key words |
| Week three | <b>The research question:</b> Addressing the question: 'What and why are we researching?                                 |
| Week four  | <b>Inclusive research:</b> Understanding the theory and application of inclusive research                                |
| Week five  | <b>Consent form:</b> Designing the consent form and exploring ways to share information of the project to                |

|                           |                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                           | people with intellectual disabilities<br><br><b>Signing up:</b> Getting consent: ensuring that participants know what they are signing up for |
| Week six                  | <b>Interview techniques:</b> Exploring facilitation and questioning                                                                           |
| Week seven                | <b>Role play:</b> practicing interviewing skills                                                                                              |
| Week eight                | <b>Presentation:</b> Presenting the research project and gaining consent accessibly                                                           |
| Week nine, ten and eleven | <b>Data collection:</b> Interviewing the research sample.                                                                                     |

This above outline of training sessions informed the compiling of the handbook entitled "Co-researchers Handbook". While this handbook was produced with a focus on the research's question on the topic of 'learning', it also has the potential to be used for future inclusive research projects with CCL students in the NIID, particularly where the aim of the research is to examine and explore a particular phenomenon.

### 6.3.1 Presenting Stage 1 using a thematic analysis

Stage 1 is presented using a thematic analysis (Holloway & Todres, 2003; Ryan & Bernard, 2000), a method used for "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and

describes ...data set in (rich) detail" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79).

Themes or patterns within data can be identified in one of two primary ways in thematic analysis: in an inductive or 'bottom up' way (e.g. Firth & Gleeson, 2004), or in a theoretical or deductive or 'top down' way (e.g. Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997). This part of the research project takes an inductive approach which means that the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves (Patton, 1990). In this case the data has been collected specifically for the research via interviews and training sessions. Consequently, the themes identified may bear little relation to the specific questions that were asked, nor were the data driven by this author's theoretical interest in the topic. Inductive analysis is therefore a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or this researcher's analytic preconceptions; in this sense, this form of thematic analysis is data-driven.

However, for Taylor and Ussher, (2001) the idea of themes *emerging* from the data is problematic: an account of themes emerging or being *discovered* is a "passive" account of the process of analysis, and it denies "the active role the researchers always plays in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers" (cited in Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 80). For Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul (1997, pp.205-6), the language of themes *emerging* can be misinterpreted to mean

that themes 'reside' in the data, and if we look hard enough they will 'emerge' like Venus on the half shell. If themes 'reside' anywhere, they

reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them.

Consequently, it was important for me to acknowledge my own values in relation to this research. I did not subscribe to a naïve realist view of qualitative research where the researcher 'gives voice' (see Fine, 2002) to participants. Rather I recognised that people with intellectual disabilities are experts by their experience regarding their knowledge and awareness of their impairment; consequently they *already* possess a voice, but may just need a symbolic microphone placed in front of their mouths. In this way it can be argued that being a co-researcher is a socially valued role (Wolfensberger & Tullman, 1982) and can be used as a strategy to increase the capital and position (Bourdieu 1984, 1991) of intellectually disabled people within the field of disability studies.

### 6.3.2 Presenting Stage 2: using a second-order perspective

For Stage 2, six co-researchers were supported by this author to undertake a data collection that captured the variety of ways in which learning was experienced by CCL students. Marton (1981) refers to this as a "second-order perspective" (p. 178), in which the researcher orients him/herself towards "people's *ideas* about their world (or their experience of it) and ...make statements about people's *ideas* about the world (or about their experience of it)" (p.178). This second-order perspective has implications for the data collection techniques used: as it is the phenomenographic researcher's aim to describe how reality is experienced

by the people who experience it, a prerequisite for techniques of data collection is that it should allow the participants to “express their own way of structuring the aspects of reality they are relating to” (Johansson, Marton & Svensson, 1985, p. 252).

For Kvale (1996, p. 1), the qualitative research interview “attempts to understand the world from the subject’s point of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences (and) to uncover their lived world view.” For Marton (1994a, p. 4427), the phenomenographic interview has to be carried out as a dialogue: “It should facilitate the thematisation of aspects of the subject’s experience not previously thematised. The experiences, understandings are jointly constituted by interviewer and interviewee.”

In attempting to allow participants of this research to express their experiences of learning, semi-structured one-to-one interviews were used in this research as a means of gathering data. As is customary in phenomenographic research, these interviews were the core data collection method (Marton & Booth, 1997; Cope, 2000; Berglund, 2005) which, according to Marton (1997) is connected to the structure of awareness: the more it is possible to make things that are unthematized and implicit into objects of reflection and hence thematised and explicit, the more fully can awareness be explored.

The exploration of awareness, or engaging with “meta-awareness” (Marton et al. 1997), is facilitated by the interviewer tapping into the interviewee’s knowledge of the phenomenon and encouraging them to reflect on their experiences of it (McKenzy, 2003). These experiences and



understandings are “aspects of the subject’s awareness that change from being unreflected to being reflected” (Marton, 1994a, p. 4427).

#### **6.4 Addressing the shortcomings of the interview method**

It has been argued (Sjöström & Dahlgren 2002) that the interview method has two main shortcomings: firstly, participants may not be always motivated to talk about their experiences, and secondly, the interviewer may not always fully understand the utterances of the interviewee.

This author and co-researchers were concerned that these shortcomings were addressed as fully as possible. One of the first steps to address this was to inform CCL students about the project as fully as possible well before any interviews took place. Consequently, our first step was to present a PowerPoint of the research project to all CCL students (see Appendix 2) thus offering them an opportunity and to ask questions and express any concerns. After the presentation, any students who wanted to seek further advice on the research had the choice to bring the information sheets home and discuss it with their parents or guardians. Co-researchers thought that if students had the opportunity to discuss the research in class *and* with their parents or guardians, they concluded that whoever signed up to participate were motivated to talk about their experiences of learning for the research.

The second concern of the interview method according to Sjöström and Dahlgren (2002) relates to the interviewer’s understanding of the interviewee’s utterances: “any misunderstandings in this respect may

jeopardise the quality of the interview data" (p. 341). Säljö (1997) also raised concerns over the expectations of the interaction of talking: how can a researcher be sure that participants tell their *real* experiences, or, are they just fulfilling their communicative obligations when being asked a question by the researcher so they don't lose face? For Säljö (p. 178) "we have access to nothing but what people communicate"; the researcher therefore should be extremely cautious of considering this interaction as "indicating a way of experiencing rather than ...a way of talking." In a similar vein, Kroksmark (2006) also pays attention to the role of the interviewee and sees the shortcoming of the interview being embedded in the moments: "the interviewee has to weight his (*sic*) words on the golden scales, find the right tracks. Not too little; not too much". (pp. 16-17).

Heeding the shortcomings of the commentators above, this author still maintained that the process of interviewing had several benefits to offer the participants of this study. This interview has a proven track record in the field of inclusive research (Williams 1999), and has been shown to be an efficient instrument in giving 'voice' to people with intellectual disabilities who have historically been denied an opportunity to participate in a research project (Williams 2011). With some creativity, (i.e. interviewers used a visual stimulus [Loxley & Prosser, 2008] to help elicit information from CCL students), co-researchers encouraged a free-flowing conversation, guided by the interviewee's own vocabulary. This process intimately resulted in the production of focused, in-depth data that informed the ultimate aim of any phenomenography – the "outcome space" (Åkerlind, 2005, p.323).

Ashworth and Lucas (2000, p. 299) recommend that “the research and the researched must begin with some kind of superficially shared topic, verbalised in terms which they both recognise as meaningful”. In the context of this research, both the participating students and co-researchers shared a meaningful subject as each group possessed considerable knowledge and experience of their learning on the CCL programme.

Ashworth and Lucas (2000) further assert that a researcher’s interviewing skills should be subject to ongoing review. For this author an overriding question was: did co-researchers have the competence to conduct the interviews? Competence is defined as being “an expert in the topic of the interview as well as in human interaction” (Kvale, 1996, p. 147), and possessing “great self assurance, knowledge about others, a certain maturity as a person and a tangible presence” (Kroksmark, 2006, pp. 16-17).

Mindful of this definition of competencies, I considered how I could make co-researchers more self-assured and aware of how they could be supported in developing their skills of interviewing. I drew on my own resources and my considerable experience and understanding of the theory and skills of facilitation and action learning (as outlined in Chapter 2). Over the 11 weeks of training co-researchers I endeavoured to communicate this knowledge of facilitation to co-researchers in an accessible format, and provide them with a greater knowledge and understanding of the qualities of being able to interact successfully with people. How this journey unfolded is outlined in Chapter 7.

## **6.5 Undertaking the interviews**

Co-researchers undertook one-to-one interviews with their peers between May and July 2011 and were guided and supported by this author. We a small staffroom in the NIID building and interviews took place during college course hours - between 10am and 5pm. An accessible "Do Not Disturb" sign was placed on the outside of the door during the interviews to avoid disturbances and any interruptions.

At the start of the interview, the interviewer recapitulated the purpose of the research to each interviewee, explaining what the objective of the interview was (i.e. to explore the participant's ways of experiencing learning while on the CCL programme). Before the interview took place ethical issues were discussed and each participant was assured of confidentiality and were assured that their names would not be mentioned in the research or any future publications resulting from the research. Each participant was also informed that the interview would be recorded and if needed that they could take a break or stop the recording anytime during the interview.

Booth (1992) advised that a phenomenographic interview works best if a small number of predetermined questions which deliberately approach the phenomenon from a variety of directions are prepared - this increases the "chances of full exploration" (p. 60). The interviews carried out by the co-researchers did not have any questions prepared beforehand; participants were asked instead to produce a drawing of "How I learn on the CCL programme" and were informed that this would be the focus of the interview.

This visual stimulus was used as a catalyst for initiating and encouraging a conversation on the research topic. A flexible semi-structured interview followed where no written notes were made by the interviewee during this process. Before the conversation became centred onto the topic of learning however, some chat took place between interviewer and interviewee to create a relaxed and calming atmosphere. Because of this a more conversational style of interview was advanced which encouraged participants to talk more freely about their experience of the phenomenon of learning.

When starting an interview, according to Berglund (2005) and Sjöström and Dahlgen (2002), a few open questions should be used about what the researcher wants to learn from the interview and to encourage the participant to begin talking about their experiences. For these interviews the interviewee invariably began with the question: "Where in the drawing or what part of the drawing would you like to start with?" This strategy got all interviews off to a good start, and giving the interviewee the choice of what they were most comfortable to talk about.

After the initial response was fully explored by the interviewee, an opening question was posed by the interviewee to the participant: "What part of the drawing would you like to go onto now?" The pace of questions at this stage of the interview were slow and measured; this was based on Marton's (1994a) observation that one should not ask too many questions at the start of the interview and that most questions should follow from what the interviewee actually says. Consequently this meant that the researcher had an important task of catching the phenomenon as

experienced by the interviewee and to explore it jointly and as exhaustively as possible (Marton, 1994a). For this reason follow-up questions were presented when it was thought necessary for the participant to reflect further on a topic or to ensure that the interviewees' expressions were properly understood. However, during follow-up questions it was also necessary for the co-researchers to be aware that the responses of the interviewee were not manipulated in any way by the interviewer placing words in the mouth of the participant (Francis, 1996). Consequently, guided by this author, leading questions were avoided (Francis, 1993) and every effort was made to use terms that were uttered by the participants (Cope, 2004).

Occasionally however, for some co-researchers, the skill of following up on participants' utterances proved to be a difficult task (see Chapter 7). For all co-researchers asking the opening questions was straightforward and frequently, this author prompted co-researchers to use follow-up questions. This sequence of co-researchers asking introductory open questions and getting support from this author when a topic needed to be elaborated or explored was repeated for all co-researchers throughout the initial interviews. Gradually however, after a number of efforts, co-researchers started to gain more confidence in asking follow-up questions using the words or expressions uttered by participants, thus requiring gradual less support from this author. If support was needed by the interviewer, it usually took the form of a non-verbal nod by this author to which the co-researcher quickly picked up on as an indication to continue probing the participant with more direct questions.

### 6.5.0 The process of epoché

The process of epoché (Moustakas, 1994, p.86) or “bracketing” (Einklammerung) (pp. 108-109, 155) is described as a method which encourages an open perception, a reflective-meditation, and “letting the preconceptions and prejudgments enter consciousness and leave freely” (p. 89). By practicing the epoché process, the researcher’s competency in achieving a presuppositionless state is increased, and the ability to receive whatever appears in consciousness is opened. The aim of the epoché is to ensure that the researcher ‘parks’ his/her prejudices (Sandberg, 2005), so that they do not influence his/her interpretations of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

However, the reality of bracketing all previous experiences and knowledge and achieving this ‘presuppositionless’ state (Moustakas, 1994, p.89) is a demanding task. In fact for Sandberg (2005) complete bracketing is impossible; he sees us as prisoners of our own past and we interpret things within the framework of our lived experiences. In the context of this research, the current author recognised that whereas the participant has authority over his/her experiences of learning, the researcher has authority over what the research is about and what is relevant to it, therefore questions needed to be clearly based on the purpose of the research focusing on the matter of interest, i.e. students’ experiences of their own learning.

Co-researchers were introduced to the idea of the epoché process during the training weeks of Stage 1. Entering this *presuppositionless* state during interview training sessions and role-play exercises proved difficult

for co-researchers, and demanded frequent prompting and interventions from this author. A detailed account of this phase is elaborated on in Chapter 7 where the sub-section entitled '*The practice session*' offers an account of the difficulties interviewers experienced.

Marton and Booth (1997) recommend that the researcher should vary the focus of the interviewees' awareness and reflection around the aspects of interest. When it was felt by the interviewer (as well as this author) that the interviewee had fully explored the topic of conversation as depicted in their drawing, the focus of attention was broadened and turned in a slightly different direction. At this stage this author took the lead in the interview and asked a conceptual question: "What does the word learning mean to you?" The information gained by asking this question contributed to gaining an understanding of how CCL students fitted into the categorisation of students' conceptions of learning (Marton et al. (1993); Säljö 1979)

The interviews were brought to a close when both parties felt that all aspect of the participant's experiences of learning on the CCL was explored. Co-researchers usually finished the interview with the closing question: "Is there anything else you want to talk about in relation to your learning?" If there was nothing else to be explored the interview was formally finished and participants were thanked for their time and commitment to the research.



Taped interviews ran from approximately one half hour to one hour; the shortest interview was 25.41 minutes in duration and the longest interview took 56.05 minutes.

## **6.6 Problematising the process of transcription**

According to Bird (2005), most qualitative researchers agree that transcription is the act of (re)presenting original oral language in written form. However, the act can be seen as political (Roberts, 1997), with transcribers evoking “the social roles and relations constituted in language” (p. 168). Consequently, for Bird (2005), a transcriber is a social and political being, and “any act of transcription produced by such a being must of consequence be subjective” (p. 228).

With political concerns also come ethical concerns; by viewing transcripts as non-objective constructs the researcher should ask how the voices of the research participants can be heard in the way they wish them to be heard. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) emphasised the need for all stories to be recognised and acknowledged and all voices to be heard, where ‘voice’ is more than verbal sound and authentic dialect – it includes social context and embedded and intended meaning.

As this author sought to present the ‘voices’ of CCL participants in the research, I wrestled with the concerns of Bird (2005) and Clandinin and Connelly (1994) as I presented this thesis as my own product. When representing CCL students’ oral voices in written form, I become the channel for their voices, but because the author/transcriber is *not* those

voices, any act of transcription becomes an interpretive act. For Lapadat and Lindsay (1999, introduction section, para.1)

The choices that researchers make about transcription enact the theories that they hold and constrain the interpretations they can draw from the data.

Because transcriptions cannot represent all details of a recording, they are “always and necessarily selective” (tenHave (1997, Interest section, para. 7). This act of choice implies decisions about significance, which in turn imply interpretation from some point of view (Bird, 2005).

Green et al. (1997) go further and explain that transcription is not only an interpretative act, but is also a situated act. For this author/ transcriber, it is vital that I locate myself within the context of my own assumptions about language and culture and discourse practices so I will be more able to recognise that “writing down what (I) hear is the result of a range of interpretive acts” (p. 173). Green et al., (1997, p. 173) elaborates with the example:

To see silence as meaningful, and not merely the absence of talk, or to see someone as taking the role of questioner involves understanding of the discourse practices of a social group.

Lapadat and Lindsay (1999), while maintaining that the act of transcription is interpretative, also maintain that analysis begins during transcription, thus making transcription an integral process in qualitative analysis. Agreeing with Poland (1995), Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) also call for a “greater reflectivity” (Contextualised section, final para.) on the

part of researchers regarding the transcription process. In reflecting on transcribing, Bird (2005) speaks of her experiences and the importance that greater reflexivity made in transcribing: for example, by paying close attention to tone and analysing the affective nature of the communication, she maintains that more rigour was added to her qualitative research. Also, by examining her own “largely unexamined presupposition(s)” (Bird, 2005, p. 241) regarding transcription, Bird realised that the “reality of a multidimensional communicative event does not easily lend itself to reproduction in the two-dimensional realm of the printed page” (p. 242).

For the current author, understanding transcriptions as an interpretative act was not considered before undertaking this research; the importance of reflecting on this point brought this researcher to the realisation that it was necessary to label the transcription process as interpretive, and to acknowledge the flexibility of the transcription act within the taped events.

## **6.7 Interjudge reliability**

Co-researchers who collaborated in this research made a valuable contribution in a number of meaningful ways: for example, they reflected on their journey of becoming researchers and offered feedback and suggestions to shape the “Co-researcher’s Handbook” (Appendix 1). They also proved invaluable as advisors in making materials accessible and recommended innovative suggestions for the process of gaining consent from people with intellectual disabilities (see Appendix 2).

These examples of co-operacy are in keeping with the recommendations of Bowden and Green (2005) who stated that phenomenographic analysis should be carried out as a team. This process, called 'interjudge reliability' (Johansson, Marton & Svensson, 1985; Marton, 1986; Säljö, 1988; Booth, 1992; Sandberg, 1997) involves the formulation of categories of description arising from transcripts of interviews, and for Marton (1986) it "must be possible to reach a high degree of intersubjective agreement concerning their presence or absence" (p. 35).

In aiming to contribute to the trustworthiness of the research regarding the categories of description, this author presented his formulation of the findings in an accessible PowerPoint to co-researchers (see Appendix 2). They were asked to position the categories in their preferred order - what they viewed as the simplest way of experiencing learning to the most sophisticated. When this exercise was concluded similarities as well as differences to this author's interpretation of the categories emerged and became a focus of dialogue, the details of which is presented in Chapter 8, "The Second stage of analysis – the marriage of inclusive research and phenomenography."

## **6.8 Ethical issues**

Formal philosophical systems have a place in the discussion about ethics because they can help increase ethical acuity, or our ability to identify and clarify ethical issues and ground and justify ethical positions.

Understanding moral foundations is necessary to reach high standards of conduct and making good ethical decisions (Tjeltveit, 1999).

Pring (2000) offers ways to resolve ethical conflicts; one way is to take up a moral theoretical position. In reviewing four orientations in ethical thought, (utilitarian, ecological, deontological and virtue ethics) this author made a choice to take a position and embraced virtue ethics as an orientation to my research.

According to virtue ethics, an ethical professional has the right mixture of motives, knowledge and character (Knapp & Van de Creek, 2006). Meara, Schmidt & Day (1996) have included a list of virtues: a) prudence (demonstrating planned, appropriate forethought and good judgment), b) integrity (adhering to an internally consistent code of conduct, c) respectfulness (considering others worthy of high regard or special attention, and d) benevolence (acting to help others). As a researcher working with people with intellectual disabilities, this author remained aware of these virtues: for example respectfulness requires listening to the perspective of other persons, especially those who come from populations that have traditionally been underrepresented or oppressed.

#### 6.8.0 Applying prudence, integrity, respectfulness and benevolence in this research

One of the great challenges in doing research with people with intellectual disabilities is communicating the purpose of the research and what participation will involve. For consent to be truly informed, the information must be communicated in an effective way and in an understandable and accessible manner.

In this project all participants were given accessible information at the outset about the nature of the research; this applied to both the co-researchers (Appendix 1) and the participants of the one-to-one interviews (Appendix 2). Thus author provided advice and guidance regarding what was involved by signing up to become a co-researcher. The nature of the commitment in terms of time and resources was made clear to potential participants at the outset to clarify the remit of the co-researcher's role.

Co-researchers and participants were informed that audio recordings and transcripts would be made and stored on the author's password protected computer. Participants were also informed that all identifying information would be removed from the interview transcripts and would not be shared outside of the research team of author and co-researchers. For the purposes of anonymity, co-researchers were given the abbreviation 'CR' for their direct quotes in the findings, and were numbered 1-6 (CR1 - CR6).

This author, who is well experienced in working with people with intellectual disabilities, facilitated the stages of CCL students' journey in becoming co-researchers. Prior to the commencement of the project I provided information sheets (written in plain English), describing the research project and what the co-researcher's role entailed (Appendix 3). The information sheet also indicated that students who volunteered to take part would in no way be jeopardised in their studies at the CCL if they did not participate. In addition I explained the purpose of each part of Stage 1 of the research at the beginning of the training sessions.

Participants were encouraged to ask questions and write reflections on each session. Furthermore, they were informed that if they have any concerns, these could be raised with me, and if they were uncomfortable with this arrangement, they could contact a third party for appropriate follow up (i.e. the Director of the NIID or another tutor on the CCL programme).

In conclusion, this author sought and obtained ethical permission for this research from the School of Education (T.C.D.) upon completion of the upgrade component of this Professional Doctorate in Education in October 2010 (see Appendix 4).

The following chapter presents the findings from Stage 1 of this research: the process of becoming co-researchers, and compiling a "Co-researchers' Handbook".

# **Chapter 7**

## **Findings**

### **Stage 1: Becoming a co-researcher**

#### **7.0 Introduction**

The primary focus of Stage 1 was to explore the experiences of CCL students during their period of training as co-researchers. This is presented using three themes: the first aims to establish a baseline by examining co-researchers' preconceptions of research and researchers. Theme 2 addresses the importance co-researchers placed on designing and providing accessible information and the necessity to be rigorous regarding gaining informed consent from participants with intellectual disabilities. Theme 3 examines the co-researcher's role as interviewer, while also exploring the sequence of questioning that unfolded in the inclusive interview process. Finally, it is argued that the experience of participating in this project can enable co-researchers to develop more social capital (Bourdieu 2000) which has the potential to transform the place of people with intellectual disabilities within the field of disability studies.

#### **7.1 Establishing the training sessions**

This stage of the research process took place over a period of 11 weeks during the second college semester of 2011. The aim of these sessions was to build on co-researchers' understandings of research, and to



provide training for them in the skills needed to undertake a research project.

#### 7.1.0 Presenting the sessions: using thematic analysis

It is not the author's aim to describe each training session undertaken by CCL participants in Stage 1 in detail – this would provide an uncritical and ultimately dull account of this data set. Rather, the objective is to provide a thematic analysis (Holloway & Todres, 2003; Ryan & Bernard, 2000) of the data set of this particular stage. Thematic analysis is a method for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes ...data set in (rich) detail” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). A theme is therefore defined as something important about the data in relation to this research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within and across the data set. The ‘keyness’ (p. 82) of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures, but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question.

Themes or patterns within data can be identified in one of two primary ways in thematic analysis: in an inductive or ‘bottom up’ way (e.g. Firth & Gleeson, 2004), or in a theoretical or deductive or ‘top down’ way (e.g. Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997). This part of the research project takes an inductive approach which means that the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves (Patton, 1990). In this case the data has been collected specifically for the research via interviews and training

sessions. Consequently, the themes identified may bear little relation to the specific questions that were asked, nor were the data driven by this author's theoretical interest in the topic. Inductive analysis is therefore a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or this researcher's analytic preconceptions; in this sense, this form of thematic analysis is data-driven.

It is also important to acknowledge that this author does not subscribe to a naïve realist view of qualitative research where the researcher "gives voice" (see Fine, 2002) to participants. As these individuals already possess a voice, all they needed was a symbolic microphone put to their mouths and for my skills to be put at their disposal. In this way it can be argued that for CCL students, becoming co-researchers is a route to a more valued social role (i.e. social role valorisation (SRV) (Wolfensberger & Tullman, 1982). Alternatively, according to Bourdieu (2000), gaining a working knowledge of research methods is a way to increase the cultural capital and position of intellectually disabled people within the field of disability studies.

## **7.2 Summary of findings**

Before the main findings of Stage 1 are discussed in detail, a summary of the three main themes and their sub-themes are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. *Stage 1: themes and sub-themes*

| Themes                                                        | Sub-themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Co-researchers' preconceptions of research and researchers |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 2. Presenting the project accessibly                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Making decisions as a team</li> <li>○ Providing accessible information on the research project</li> <li>○ Designing information on the project accessibly using PowerPoint and handouts</li> <li>○ Learning together in a supportive environment</li> <li>○ Presenting the project to the CCL students</li> </ul> |
| 3. Interviewers and interviewing                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The interviewer's abilities</li> <li>○ Acquiring competence in facilitation</li> <li>○ Peer interviewing and role play</li> <li>○ Interviewing practice</li> <li>○ Using a visual stimulus</li> <li>○ The sequence of questioning – a phased approach</li> <li>○ Reflection</li> </ul>                            |

### 7.3 Addressing the research question

As discussed in Chapter 1, one of the central questions in this research is to answer the following: How are people with intellectual disabilities meaningfully included in a phenomenographic research project? Over a

period of one semester, I organised a number of step-by-step training sessions , the objective being to build on co-researchers' knowledge base of research, and to train them to become co-researchers. The training sessions were taped sessions and mainly consisted of group discussions that captured the thoughts and ideas of the group. I devised a timetable that covered the various stages of the research project, starting with the research question, and finishing with the data collection (see Table 6). The topic of dissemination was later discussed after the analysis stage (see Chapter 9).

Table 6. Timetable for co-researchers' training

|            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Week one   | <b>Establishing a baseline:</b> Exploring co-researchers' understanding of research and the role of the researcher                                                                                                             |
| Week two   | <b>Stages of the research:</b> Introducing the stages involved in a research project and the meaning of key words                                                                                                              |
| Week three | <b>The research question:</b> Addressing the question: 'What are we researching and why are we carrying out this research'?                                                                                                    |
| Week four  | <b>Inclusive research:</b> Understanding the theory and application of inclusive research                                                                                                                                      |
| Week five  | <p><b>Consent form:</b> Designing the consent form and exploring ways to share information of the project with CCL students</p> <p><b>Signing up:</b> Getting consent: ensuring that students know they are signing up for</p> |

|                           |                                                                                           |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Week six                  | <b>Interview techniques:</b> Exploring facilitation; looking at ways of asking questions; |
| Week seven                | <b>Role play:</b> practicing interview skills                                             |
| Week eight                | <b>Presentation:</b> Presenting the research project to CCL students, gaining consent     |
| Week nine, ten and eleven | <b>Data collection:</b> Interviewing the research sample.                                 |

This following section presents the first of the three main themes: Co-researchers' preconceptions of research and researchers

## **7.4 Theme 1: Co-researchers' preconceptions of research and researchers**

### **7.4.0 Introduction**

In carrying out their work, researchers undertake a process of inquiry, a systematic search for information. In particular qualitative researchers aim to understand the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants (Bryman, 2004).

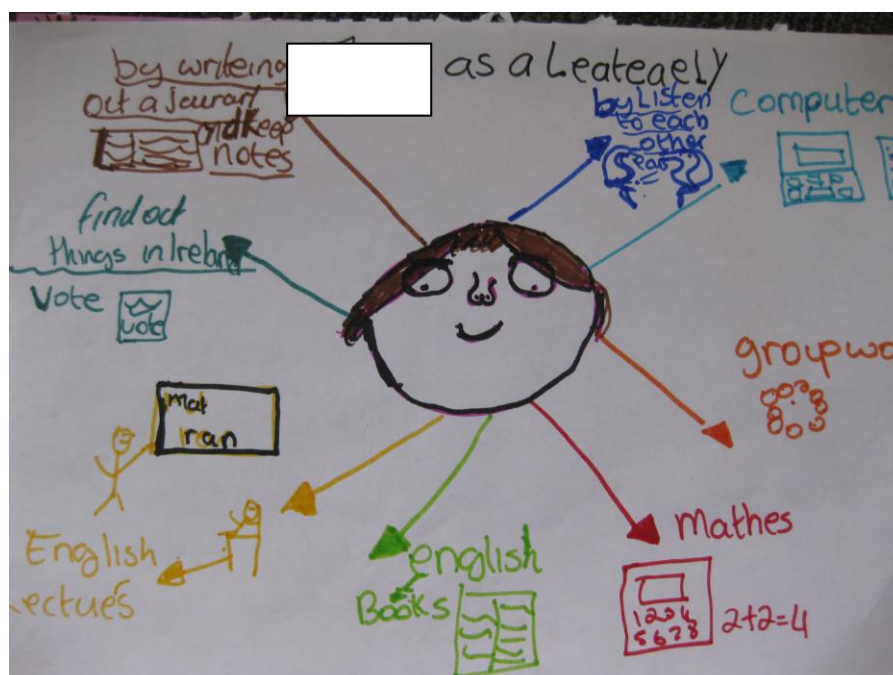
Qualitative research also assumes that the researcher is an integral part of the research process and when beginning a study, a researcher should provide an overview of his or her personal (and professional) perspectives (Byrne, 2001). As I outlined a background of *my* professional position and research interests in Chapter 2, the purpose of this section is to capture how this group of CCL students viewed themselves in their (new) role as co-researchers. It is argued, that capturing their point of view can enable

them to articulate their informed voice, set their own agenda and control what happens in their name. As Zarb (1992, p.128) noted:

"Empowerment is not something that can be given, but something that people must take for themselves.

To stimulate a discussion on the topic of research, I encouraged co-researchers to undertake a drawing or a spidergram (see example Picture 1). A spidergram is a concept-mapping technique and a visual way of demonstrating knowledge of a subject through line, graphic symbols and/or colour. By using this method, (as opposed to a more conventional written format for example), I aimed to place value upon the variety of co-researchers' intelligences and their individual ways of presenting knowledge of a subject. For Gardner (1983), this is seen as being 'intelligence fair' and, according to him practices of this nature can cast a wide net that captures the full range of human cognitive abilities.

Picture 1. Co-researcher's spidergram on learning



#### 7.4.1 Explicating co-researchers' life worlds

In the area of disability studies, a key concern is the nature of research production, in particular, how research can be developed in truly participatory ways to meaningfully include people with intellectual disabilities as co-researchers. This project aimed to produce evidence of good practice in inclusive research, and to provide a narrative of involvement from the viewpoint of co-researchers themselves. In this way it is argued that the experiences and life worlds of people with intellectual disabilities are explicated, going some way to address preconceived notions that come with the label of "intellectual disabilities".

#### 7.4.2 Co-researchers preconceptions of researchers

In speaking about the role of researchers, CR1 outlined that they are informed individuals who also seek out information from printed sources as well as other people. She said:

*Researchers use computers and look up books so that they can get students to talk out ideas...they take notes or use a (Dictaphone) to record what people are saying. They also give advice on research.*

CR2 also saw the role of researcher as someone who "looks up books" to find out information. He also stated that researchers carry out interviews and can also work as a team. He said:

*By working as a team you help each other out... then you type up the research on the computer and do a PowerPoint presentation... this can be written out and you need to add pictures because a picture tells a thousand words. (CR2)*

One of the key skills for a researcher to have, according to CR4, was the ability to listen. For him a researcher should possess good listening skills because “you can retain what people say to you. (A researcher) should also be able to interact well with people”.

However, this co-researcher spoke about his memory of being researched *on* and the feeling of being uncomfortable when these researchers were observing him. For him, what was unusual about this research project as that it was done by students themselves and not by “people in suits and coats” (CR2). Another co-researcher agreed that she felt “O.K.” about carrying out this research because

*it is very interesting that we are doing it. It makes us feel like teachers – nervous as well. I don’t like standing up in front of a crowd. (CR5)*

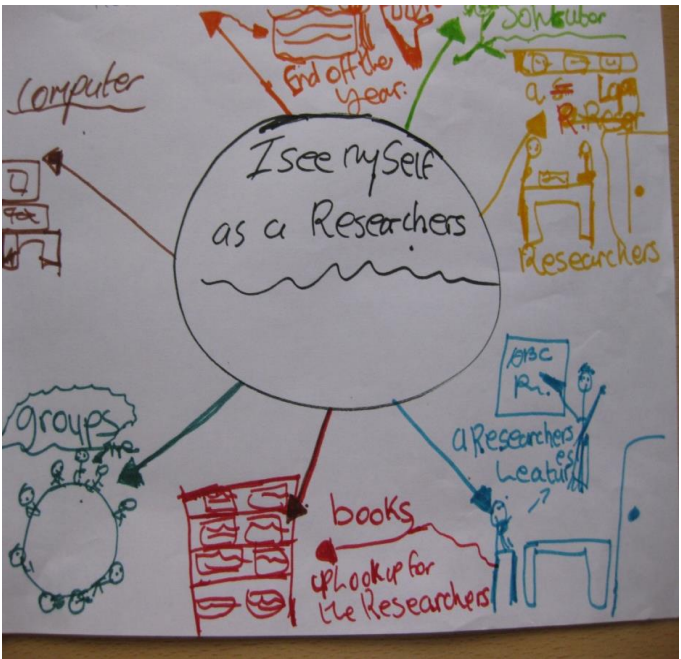
Figure 5 presents co-researchers pictorial and verbal responses to the question: ‘What is research? What is a researcher?’



Figure 5. Co-researchers pictorial and verbal responses to the question: 'What is research? What is a researcher'?

### Verbal responses

### Pictorial responses

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>CR6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Using the internet/Computer</i></li> <li>• <i>Typing up research</i></li> <li>• <i>Interview skills</i></li> <li>• <i>Presentation skills</i></li> <li>• <i>Brainstorming</i></li> <li>• <i>Not asking personal questions</i></li> <li>• <i>Research done for coursework</i></li> </ul>                           |   |
| <p>CR1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Using the internet/Computer</i></li> <li>• <i>Looking up books in the library</i></li> <li>• <i>Working in groups</i></li> <li>• <i>Presentations</i></li> <li>• <i>Inform others and getting feedback</i></li> <li>• <i>Helping people</i></li> <li>• <i>Speaking up for people with disabilities</i></li> </ul> |  |

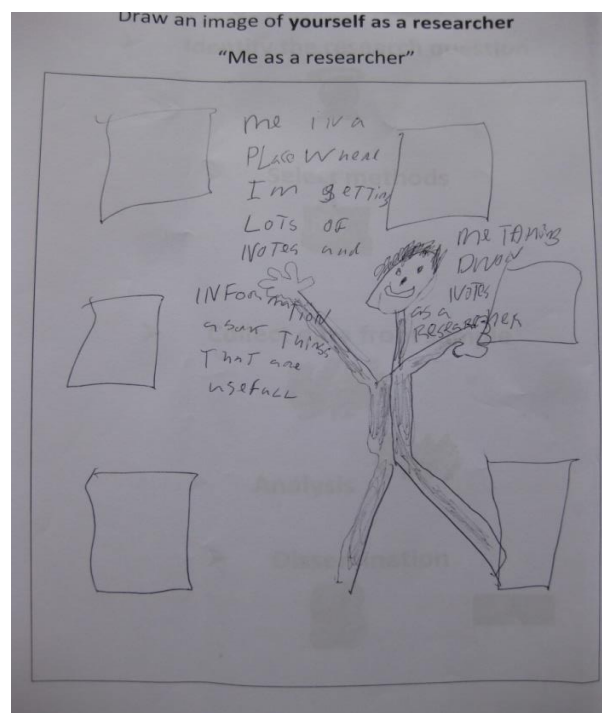
CR5

- Looking up information on the internet/  
computers
- Working in groups
- Looking up books
- PowerPoint presentations
- Research is something done by lecturers to gather information



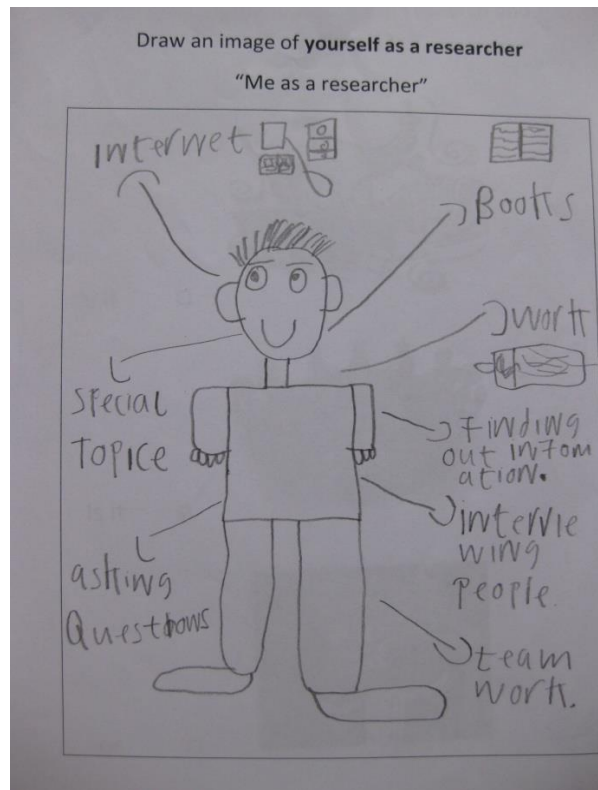
CR4

- PowerPoint Presentation
- Taking notes
- Finding out information that's useful
- Research done for coursework
- Listening and having good listening skills
- Interacting with people
- Brainstorming



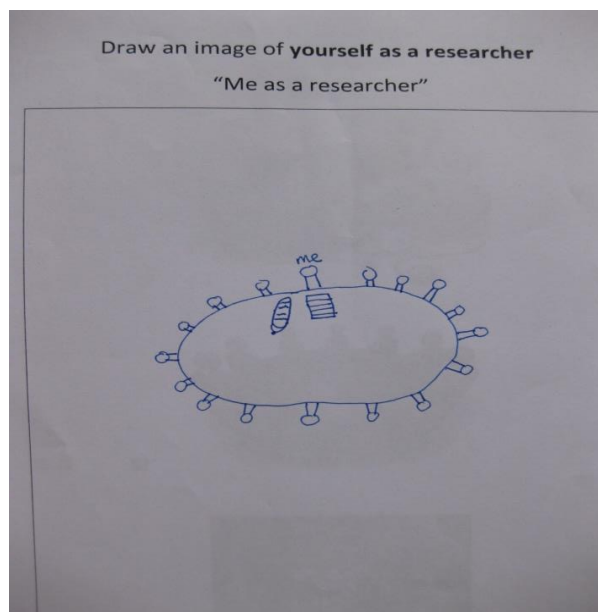
CR2

- *Using the internet/  
Computer*
- *Asking questions*
- *Looking up books*
- *Team work*
- *interviewing people*
- *Finding out  
information*
- *Helping people*



CR3

- *Team work*
- *Taking notes*
- *Helping other  
students*
- *Passing on  
information and  
learning*



In the following section, the second theme entitled “Presenting the project accessibly” is outlined and discussed.

## **7.5 Theme 2: Presenting the project accessibly**

### **7.5.0 Making decisions as a team**

Central to the process of seeking consent is effective communication so individuals can be informed and empowered to make decisions and then act on that decision (Sowney & Barr 2006). Therefore, in any research project, the researcher(s) should be satisfied that the participants are adequately informed about the research, and that they understand 1), the purpose of the research and what is required of them; 2), their right to refuse to consent to participate and 3), their right to withdraw from the research at any time. Participants should be reminded of these rights as the research progresses, and should be reassured that if they refuse to participate in or decide to withdraw from the research this will not be held against them in any way.

During week five of the training, co-researchers and I discussed the principle of informed consent in social research; I informed them that prospective research participants (i.e. CCL students) should be given “as much information as might be needed to make an informed decision about whether or not they wish to participate in this study” (Bryman 2004, p. 540). Co-researchers felt strongly that considerable thought should be put into the process of informing CCL students about this research. We were also keen to come up with supplementary methods of supporting

CCL students who were shy or just unsure of what the project was all about. The following section outlines this journey; it addresses the decisions of the group on how best to present information of the project to CCL students, and the process of designing an accessible consent form.

#### 7.5.1 Providing accessible information on the research project

The group's decision on how to present information of the research to the CCL students centred on two choices: 1), whether co-researchers should talk to the group and give out information sheets, or 2), present the information accompanied by handouts using PowerPoint. Co-researchers agreed that CCL students would benefit better if all of the research information was supported with a PowerPoint presentation; this would include a number of slides that highlighted the consent form. Co-researchers were adamant that clarity was needed relaying to CCL students the nature of what the research. For example, CR1 thought that *"we should have a meeting with the group and start with an information session"* and CR2 stated that *"a PowerPoint presentation is better than just telling them... it should have the words written out and add pictures as well."* CR1 added that there should be *"spare (hard) copies for the group."* It was unanimous that a PowerPoint presentation was the preferred way of presenting information on the project; however, because of time restraints, co-researchers agreed that this task would be finished quicker by this author.

### 7.5.2 Feedback on the PowerPoint

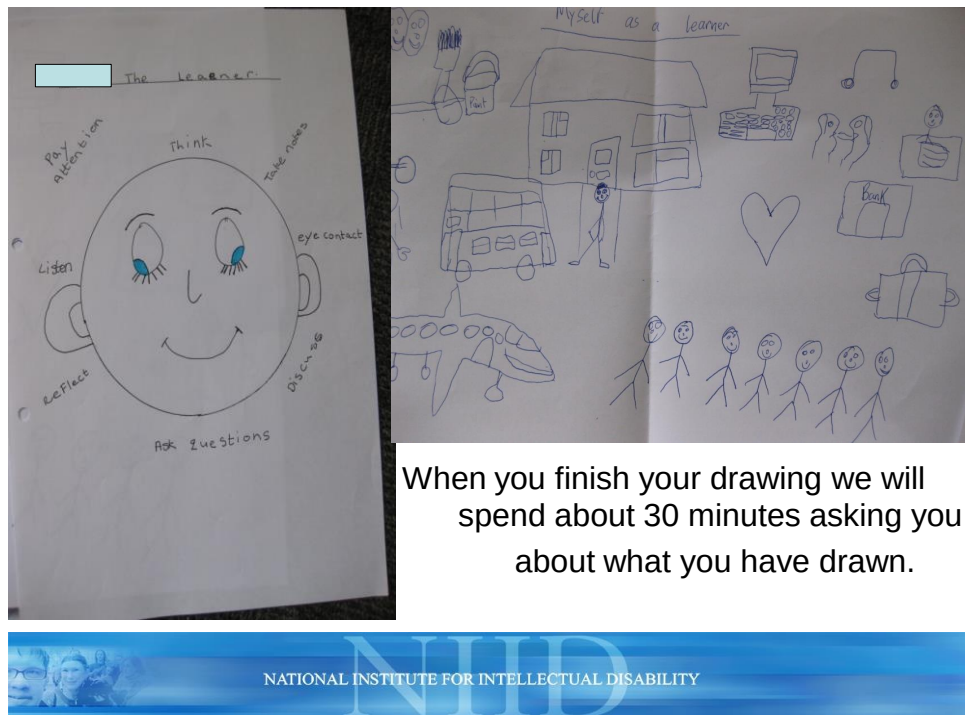
I presented the group with a draft of the PowerPoint for feedback resulting in a number of suggestions for improvement. The first change consisted of a change of a clip art image on slide 1 to a photograph of the co-researchers (Figure 6).

Figure 6 PowerPoint slide 1: Our Research Project



The second change centred on the group's desire to provide examples of their own drawings on the PowerPoint. For example, on slide 12 – "How I learn", the group felt that including examples of their own images in this slide would give CCL students a more concrete understanding of what was expected of them as they prepared for the interview (see Figure 7 for revised slide).

Figure 7. PowerPoint slide 12: Co-researchers' samples of drawings on "How I learn"



Thirdly, the group were keen to ensure that the consent form was made accessible to CCL students so they understood what they were signing up for. Co-researchers had a concern with 1), the volume of words on the page of the draft consent form, and 2), the close proximity of some images and words. They felt that this could cause confusion for someone with literacy difficulties. Changes were recommended which resulted in the font being enlarged to

**Calibri, size 22**

and the images changed to ones that have a direct and unambiguous reference to the written words. For example, the visual for the topic of the



research ("This project is about learning"), was changed from image number 1 to image number 2 (see below Figure 8).

Figure 8 *Change of visual for PowerPoint slide 14*

| Image 1                                                                                                                                | Image 2                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <div>This project is about learning</div> <div></div> | <div>This project is about learning</div> <div></div> |

The completed consent from agreed upon by the group is presented in Figure 9.



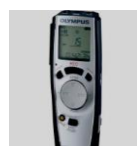
Figure 9. Completed consent form slide



## Consent form

Name of project: "How do CCL students learn?"

Researchers: John Kubiak, & names of co-researchers

|                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>I have had this research explained to me.</b></p>                   | <p><b>I would be happy to talk to another person if I have any concerns.</b></p>  |
| <p><b>I have been able to ask questions and have them answered.</b></p>  | <p><b>I am happy to have the interview tape recorded</b></p>                     |
| <p><b>I understand what is expected of me.</b></p>                      | <p><b>This project is about learning</b></p>                                    |
| <p><b>I can stop being involved at any stage of this project</b></p>    | <p><b>I agree to take part in this project.</b></p>                             |
| <p><b>Signed:</b> _____</p> <p><b>Print name:</b> _____</p> <p><b>Date:</b> _____</p>                                                                      | <p><b>Witness:</b> _____</p> <p><b>Print name:</b> _____</p> <p><b>Date:</b> _____</p>                                                                               |





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Some members of the group raised another concern: how could they ensure that CCL students fully understood what they were signing up for? Their fear was that students may sign the consent form without reflecting

on and understanding the consequences of what they were putting their names to. Co-researchers offered suggestions which ranged from providing more information by *"doing more classes on the research"* (CR2), or *"getting students to do a poster or a word-search of the research project for a home assignment"* (CR3), or *"draw(ing) the project out on the white board using graphic images and/or a spidergram (and) ask(ing) students to do a picture about the research project"* (CR6). A final decision was reached by a suggestion from CR1 who thought a quiz on the research topic would offer a simple yet effective solution. He said: *"give them a quiz on the project in class after the presentation"*.

The group designed the quiz which offered a choice of three questions supported by visuals covering three themes: relationships, jobs and learning (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Quiz: Checking if CCL students understand the research project

What is this project about?

 Is it about **relationships**?

Yes ☐ No ☐

 Is this project about **jobs**?

Yes ☐ No ☐

 Is this project about **learning**?

Yes ☐ No ☐

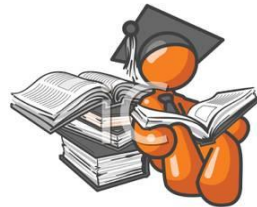
The final part of this stage centred on how best to advertise and inform the CCL students about the research. The group discussed the possibility of announcing it during a class; however, this option was rejected as it was considered too disruptive. The idea of designing a poster that could be placed on the notice board inside the NIID lobby was agreed on. The details of this poster were discussed and it was recommended that it should contain the following details:

- Good visuals
- Minimum words and large font size
- What's happening
- Where it's happening
- Who's involved
- Contact details

Over the course of the following week two co-researchers consulted with the group and me, and together we designed and completed the poster (Figure 11). The finished product was placed on the notice board in the foyer of the NIID, a public space where plenty of staff and students passed through daily.

Figure 11. Information poster of research project

# ***Research project on LEARNING***



*What's happening?*



*CCL students are invited to a meeting in the NIID at*

***10am on 14th March 2010***

*(Names of six co-researchers)* and John Kubiak would like you to take part in a research project on:

***“How CCL students experience learning”***

Contact: John Kubiak email: [kubiakj@tcd.ie](mailto:kubiakj@tcd.ie) tel: 8963442 or

*(names of co-researchers)*

if you have any questions.

### 7.5.3 Presenting information on the project accessibly using PowerPoint and handouts

The time for informing the CCL student body about the project was fast approaching and co-researchers were gradually becoming nervous about the looming presentation. Initial concerns centred on who would be the first to speak in front of the students; CR4 felt that he was “not skilful enough”. However, he was aware of the fact that research on learning was an important topic and that the presentation need to be engaging for students:

*The message is how learning is important for all people, disabled or not. People all learn in different ways... (when presenting) you need to speak clear and make it interesting. Tell it to them by charming them, lift them off their feet! Make it exciting!*

With this challenge in mind, the group allowed two weeks to practice the delivery of the presentation; this would give them an opportunity to feedback to each other and offer suggestions for improvement. A decision firstly had to be made regarding the order of speakers: CR1 volunteered to take slide 10, stating that she would be happy to present on her example of the spidergram exercise. This author also suggested that she could take slides 8 and 9 as these slides were all connected. Co-researcher CR4 stated that he would like to open the presentation with slides 1 and 2 (“Our research project”, and “What are we researching?”). CR2 volunteered to take slides 3, 4 and 5 (“Why are we carrying out this project?” and “Inclusive research” information slides). CR6 decided to cover slides 6 and 7 (“Inclusive research on learning” and “What question

will we ask”), and CR5 offered to deliver the slides covering consent (slides 13 and 14). Finally, CR3 volunteered to speak about the examples of drawings done by co-researchers in their mock interviews (slide 12). Each co-researcher was given a hardcopy of the presentation and wrote their names beside their chosen slides before the practice run started.

#### 7.5.4 The venue

People with intellectual disabilities, like many people, do not always adapt well to unusual situations, and can find it difficult to cope with an unfamiliar environment (Bull 1995). Poor adaptation has a deleterious effect on memory and communication, and according to Milne and Bull (2001) can increase stress levels.

The group agreed that the NIID was the most suitable location for interview to take place as it was a space that all students would be familiar with and would also make students “feel safe” (CR2). There was also some discussion on the most appropriate room to use for interviews – the choices being 1) the staff room; 2) the main classroom; 3) the seminar room, or this author’s office. The group agreed that the staff room would be the most suitable venue for interviewing students: it was a room that had an intimate atmosphere, yet it was large enough to accommodate a number of people comfortably without them feeling crowded or contained. One co-researcher raised a concern about the background noise of the air-conditioning; it was noted that it needed to be switched off during interviews as it could interfere with the clarity of the

recording. Finally, it was agreed that a “Do not disturb” sign should be placed outside the door of the room, informing people that an interview was taking place.

#### 7.5.5 Learning together in a supportive environment

Educational settings that are “safe, supportive, and that offer helpful relationships” can be hugely encouraging to students’ learning (Dart, Burnett, Purdie, Boulton-Lewis, Campbell, and Smith, 2000, p. 269). Indeed, the encouraging environment created by this group allowed them to take risks during the practice of their PowerPoint presentation; they were also confident that any mistakes they made were viewed as opportunities for individual and collective learning rather than an occasion for criticism. This climate of encouragement is summarised by CR10 who commented on CR4’s first attempt at presenting: “You did well - we’re not out to ‘get’ you – rather we’re here to support you” (CR10). This attitude prevailed through the practice sessions and allowed other group members to take risks as they proceeded through their individual presentations. For example, while stumbling on the word “professional” in slide 4, CR2 was comfortable enough to repeat it in front of the group until he had it perfected. CR2’s confidence increased enough for him to recommend that the structure of the wording in slide 4 should be changed from making a statement (“Research is usually carried out by professional researchers”), to asking a question (“Should research be carried out by professional researchers?”) (see Figure 12). CR2 felt that this minor alteration of words



was a subtle way of prompting the audience to engage more actively with the message of the presentation.

Figure 12. Change of wording for Slide 4

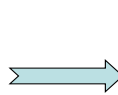
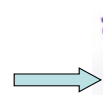


## ‘Inclusive’ research



Should research be carried out only by professional researchers?  
or

Should research be carried out by students like us **as well as** the professionals?



Why this is important?

- ✓ To make sure that our voices are heard and
- ✓ To let others know about the **things that are important to us.**



Other examples include CR1’s wish to improve Slide 10 of the PowerPoint (Figure 13) which she felt was problematic for her as it did not possess any written text to refer to. The group offered support by suggesting that she could say: *"This is an example of how to use a spidergram to show how you learn – you could do a poster or a drawing instead"*. CR1 also recommended that the slide could include pictures of the ways people learn that supported the computer drawing. To complement delivery, I

recommended animating the slide: each arm of the spidergram could be introduced visually as CR1 spoke about the different sections (Figure 14).

Figure 13. Spidergram of "How I learn at the NIID" before animation

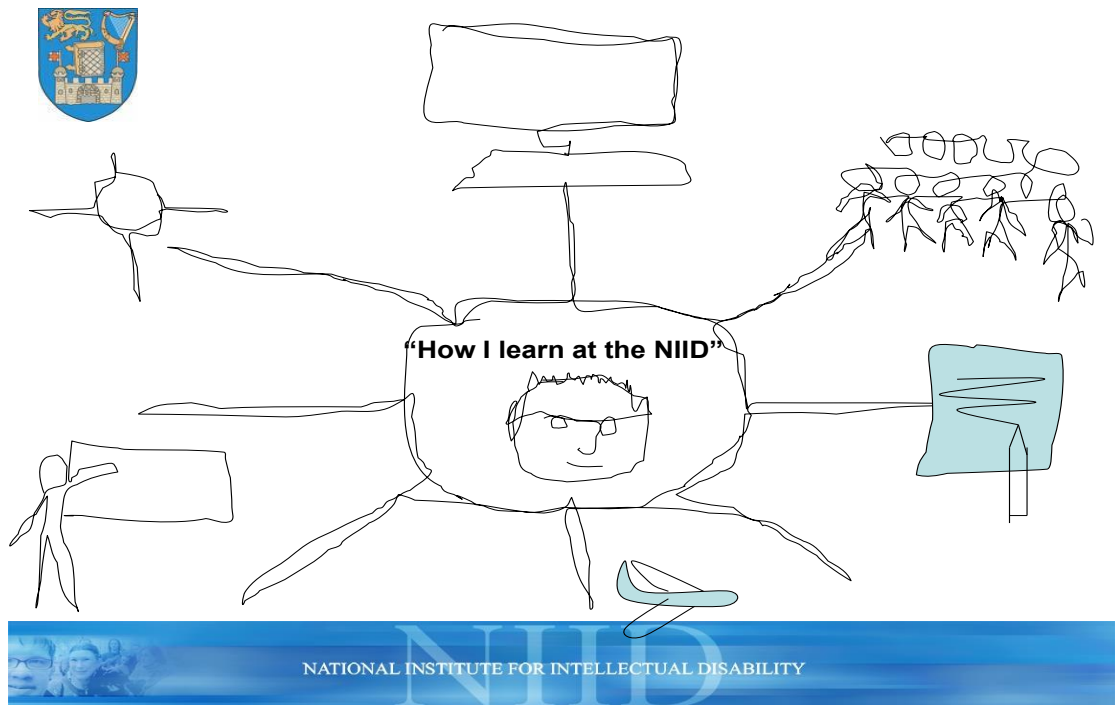
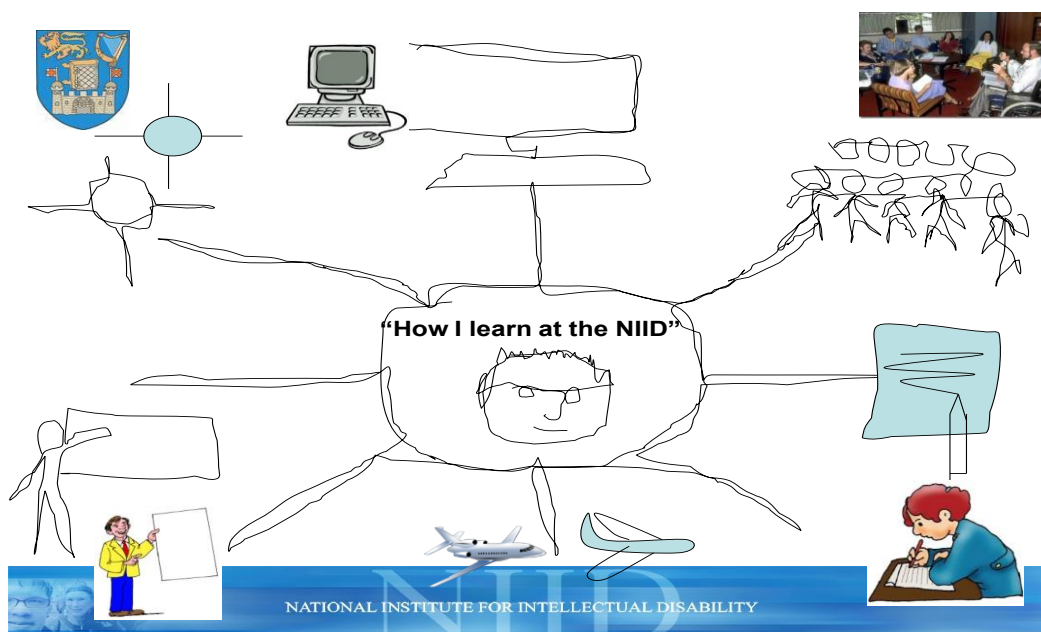


Figure 14. Spidergram of "How I learn at the NIID" after animation



Finally, co-researchers offered further suggestions to improve the flow of presentation. These covered 1), being polite: *"Start and end by thanking the CCL students for attending the information session"* (CR6); 2) possessing common sense: *"Introduce the team of co-researchers by their first names only as all CCL students were familiar with them already"* (CR3); 3) playing it safe: *"Speak about the information that's on the slide without elaborating too much at this point"* (CR2), and 4), practical advice: *"Practice at home in front of a mirror attempting to look away from the handout at intervals"* (CR5).

Through the process of these training sessions, a wave of apprehension emerged within the group as it neared time to undertake the interviews. CR4's concerns were centred on the unpredictability of what she was getting involved in. She said: *"What if the person was a real yapper, and goes on and on? And what do you do if you don't know the answer to all the questions?"* She was also concerned about the possibility of the interviewee being *"a bit grumpy... and back-answer you?"*

This encouraged other group members to articulate their apprehensions. CR5 was concerned over some of her fellow 1<sup>st</sup> year students being discourteous. She said: *"I find some of the 1<sup>st</sup> years a bit rude. I'm just worried about it. I'm nervous how it's going to go"*. Other fears concerned the physical uneasiness that's associated with undertaking something new: CR1 stated: *"I've never actually done an interview. I'll be a bit nervous about doing it... when I do interviews for jobs I get nervous and I fidget and I find it hard to look at the person sometimes"*. CR2 also felt

apprehensive: *"I'm a little nervous and concerned as well. How am I going to ask the questions? What'll people's responses be? It's nerve-racking."*

This final comment from CR6 centred on her uncertainty of asking the correct set of questions: *"I'm worried that I won't know what to say. I won't know what to ask and what not to ask. I know I won't be asking about hobbies or what you had for dinner. I'd like to have a list of questions."*

In an effort to allay these fears, I recommended that an interviewer aims to gain people's trust; she endeavours to bring around a problematic situation by getting the interviewee on her side, saying something like: *"You've agreed to take part in this interview. Unless there was something bothering you today I'd really appreciate that you try to answer these questions in a respectful and polite manner. There is no point in continuing otherwise"*. This author also reiterated that it was very unusual to encounter rude people in a context like this, and especially unlikely that a fellow CCL student would be rude during these conversations.

However, if people being interviewed were, *"not themselves"* as CR2 stated, I elucidated that a good interviewer will show the interviewee a certain amount of compassion. It was explained that as human beings, some days we find ourselves 'up', and other days we are 'down', and that in an interview you might come across a person who just wasn't themselves on that particular day. I suggested that it is better to say: *"Are you alright today?"* rather than letting the situation continue and deteriorate.

The process of foregrounding these real concerns around the upcoming interviews proved to be very cathartic for the group; individuals were relieved that they had an opportunity to voice their apprehensions in a safe and supportive environment. A final appeal from a number of individuals requested that I would be present during the interviews. I agreed that I would be with them in the room, but would attempt to remain quiet and in the background during the interview.

#### 7.5.6 Presenting the project to the CCL students

The PowerPoint was presented to the CCL students on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2011 from 10am – 12pm in the main teaching area of the NIID, a space that easily accommodated the two groups of students (35 first and second years). This author set up a lap-top and connected it to the visual display unit consisting of a large screen at the top of the room. Six chairs for the co-researchers were placed in front of the screen; this author was positioned to the right of the group, a location that allowed him to operate the lap-top and be slightly removed from the group of co-researchers.

The presentation unfolded as rehearsed: CR4 opened the presentation by introducing the research project. The rest of the group followed according to the agreed sequence, each reading from their handout. When the final slide was completed by CR5, the group thanked everyone for listening and the round of applause from the students that followed concluded this part of the presentation.

Questions were invited from the group and the responses covered a number of concerns (for a detailed outline see Appendix 5):

1. What was a consent form?
2. What did research involve?
3. An explanation on the use of colour in the drawings undertaken by co-researchers
4. The length of time it would take to complete a drawing or a spidergram
5. Lacking artistic ability to complete a drawing
6. Wanting inspiration to undertake a drawing
7. Storing collected data
8. Challenges co-researchers experienced over the last few weeks

After students queries were fully answered and questioning came to a natural conclusion, I placed a visual representation of the consent form on the PowerPoint and the contents of this image were read out by me. The forms were then distributed by co-researchers to the group of students who were told that help (in the form of four CCL student support officers) was available to anyone who needed it.

A total of 20 forms were signed on the day by CCL students and witnessed by CCL student support officers. When these forms were examined later, it emerged that three students failed to answer the quiz correctly. Consequently, as these students were deemed to be unsure or unaware of

the nature of the research and what they were signing up for, it was decided that they would not be included in the upcoming interview process. A summary of the outcome of this session is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. A summary of the number of CCL students who consented to participate in this research

|                                     |    |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Total number of CCL students        | 35 |
| Declined to sign consent form       | 15 |
| Signed consent form on the day      | 20 |
| Failed to answer the quiz correctly | 2  |
| Total number who participated       | 18 |

## **7.6 Theme 3: Interviewers and interviewing**

### **7.6.0 The importance of the interviewer's abilities**

Among people with intellectual disabilities, there is evidence that they are prone to response bias and have low levels of responsiveness during interviews which might vary as a consequence of the characteristics of the interviewer (e.g. Perry & Felce, 2002). However, it is also stated that conducting interviews is one aspect of the research process which is readily amenable to the active involvement of people with an intellectual disability, at least for those people with adequate cognitive and language ability (Perry & Felce 2004).

This author aimed to minimise the possibility of achieving a low level of responsiveness from CCL students by actively involving their peers (i.e. co-researchers) in the interview process. It is argued that training co-researchers minimised the perceived imbalance in the status of the interviewer and the interviewee, and increased the level of responsiveness of the interviewees. Placing the focus in the importance of the interviewer resonates with Milne & Bull (2001), who state that in order to retrieve information that is accurate and reliable, the focus should be on “the abilities of the interviewer rather than the capabilities of the interviewee” (p. 96).

#### 7.6.1 Acquiring facilitation competence

It can be argued that successful interviewers should possess knowledge and awareness of the skills of facilitation. In her book *The Art of Facilitation*, Dale Hunter describes a facilitator as a “process guide, someone who makes a process easier or more convenient” (Hunter, 2007, p. 19); facilitation is described as a process that “enables a group of people to achieve their own purpose in their own agreed way” (p. 19). Facilitators are therefore people who have the knowledge or intuitive ability to lead groups towards “self-generated knowledge, participative decision making and consensus” (p. 19).

Possessing an awareness of the skills of facilitation is an essential tool for any person interacting with groups and/or individuals. Possessing considerable knowledge on the art and skills of facilitation (I regularly deliver a course entitled “Person Centred Facilitation Skills”) I was keen to



share this knowledge of facilitation tools and their uses to co-researchers. These sessions included topics such as listening and the nature of listening process (for a detailed account of this session see Appendix 6).

#### 7.6.2 Peer interviewing and role play

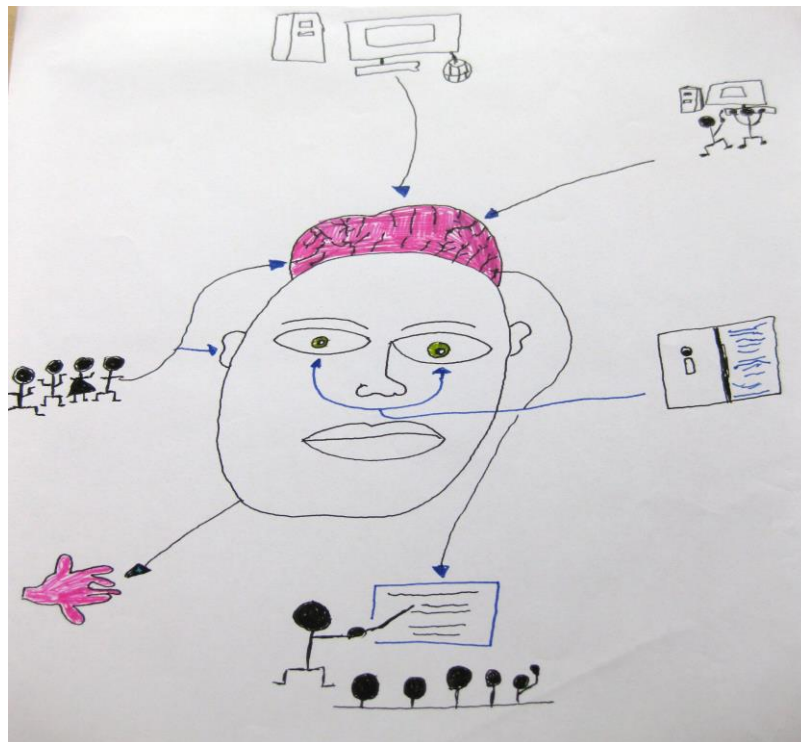
Using role play, co-researchers practiced their skills at interviewing during weeks 7 and 8 of the college's second semester. Undertaking these sessions enabled them to learn in a safe space where they could take risks and seek advice and guidance from their peers.

For illustrative purposes, one practice session is presented in detail here. The purpose of outlining this interaction is to highlight two areas of interest regarding peer interviewing for CCL students: the sequence of turn taking, and how boundaries between researcher and researched became "blurred" (Williams 2011, p. 166). If the empirical data of social research "are predominantly products of specific discursive practices" (van den Berg, Wetherell, Huutkoop-Steenstra (2003a), then the idiosyncrasies of these inclusive interviews may seem at odds with the more 'accepted' interview practice of phenomenographic researchers (i.e. remaining unbiased, and "bracketing" preconceptions Åkerlind et al., 2005, p. 98). However, it is argued that the 'irregularities' of the interview process described below are not evidence of bad interview practice; rather, they are examples of the realities of inclusive research practice which can occasionally consist of sharing of experiences and identities between the interviewee and interviewer.

### 7.6.3 Interviewing practice

CR4 and CR2 participated in this mock interview. At the start of the session I reminded the interviewer of the purpose of this role: to elicit information on the interviewee's experiences of learning on the CCL. This process was aided through the use of a visual stimulus – a pre-prepared drawing done by the interviewee (Picture 2).

*Picture 2. Visual stimulus by CR2*



Transcriptions conventions used in the following passage are based on the standard "conversation analysis" (CA) conventions (see Wooffitt 2005, pp. 211-12; also Appendix 7). However, it should be noted that this project is not a discourse analysis and CA conventions are used to illustrate the above argument regarding the process of turn taking.

An extract of the conversation between interviewer (CR4) and interviewee (CR2) is presented below, with the author (A) interjecting as the interview unfolds.

CR4: Hello (CR2). Can you tell me about what this picture is about?  
I see that you have a few things (.) what you actually have in the picture (.) lets see what you have done here, right, right I see a picture of a book, a computer, and what's this here? (*Continues to describe what's in the picture*)

A: (*Gestures for CR4 to stop talking*).

CR2: That's me working around a table in a group (.) I learn in lectures (.) on computers (.) writing (.) [I keep a journal

CR4: [And will that help you to think, once you've finished college, will it help you to do other things by looking back at the diary. Right, okay, and tell me, has this helped you, has this helped you to improve in any way, say towards learning or anything like that?

A: Let him talk. Just say "tell me a bit more" (.) draw him out.

CR4: You said working with others helps you learn. Could you tell me more about that?

CR2: I get feedback from other people [I

CR4: [And how do you feel in class, how do you feel say, say working with others in class?

A: (Interrupts) You could ask: "Do you prefer to learn in a group or on your own?" It will give you an indication if he likes to learn alone or with others.

CR4: (Repeats) "Do you prefer to learn in a group or on your own?"

CR2: In a group because I like to learn from and get feedback from other people. I like [

CR4: [Why?

CR2: Because I like to hear other people's ideas [

CR4: [What sort of ideas?

A: Try not to break the flow of conversation – just let it flow. Try not to chop the responses down.

The interview continued with the interviewer proceeding to use probing questions regarding how CR2 learns in groups. As CR4 was repeating the same information and was struggling to bring something new in to the conversation, I interrupted by stating that it was a good time for CR4 to move onto another topic by referring back to the visual stimulus. The interviewer took this suggestion on board by asking: "What are these things here?" The conversation continued:

CR2: That's a pen... when I write down words I'm learning from writing.

CR4: (15)

A: How can you follow through with this response?

CR4: (0.5) HOW do you actually learn by writing?

A: Good question!

CR2: When you write down words they go into your head and then you reflect on them afterwards.

CR4: Do you mean that you're using your short-term memory?

CR2: Yeh.

I interrupted at this point telling CR4 that he was leading the interviewee, rather than letting him talk further about "writing". I also emphasised that this was where deep listening skills were needed and suggested that as the topic of *reflection* was introduced in the last remark, it would be good to elicit more information on this theme from CR2. The interviewer responded and probed further on the topic of reflection:

CR4: Could you tell me why reflection is important?

CR2: Reflection is what happens in the day on how you are feeling (0.4) it's important to me 'cause you get to write down what you did in the day and how you feel [

CR4: [You used the word 'feel' twice – why are feelings important (.) about learning?

CR2: Feelings are important because you get to look over (0.3) to jog the memory

After the topic of feelings was explored the conversation continued with the interviewer asking: "Is there anything else you want to talk about in your drawing?" (CR4). The interviewee responding by saying that he wanted to talk about computers. After this topic was explored to CR2's satisfaction, he was thanked by CR4. The interview ended with the interviewer stating with some satisfaction: "I feel like Ryan Tubridy!"

When CR4 was asked about his performance during the interview, he said he felt it went well, but he thought that: "I should have come to the point sooner, but I don't do that and that's something I need to work on". The interviewee was then asked for feedback on how he felt the interviewer performed. CR2 responded by saying: "I felt that he did very good... He needs to watch the long sentences and don't cut people off with a 'how' or 'why'; let them explain 'till they're finished... he could have waited me to finish".

Although it could be argued that this interviewer demonstrates a lack of awareness of bracketing preconceptions (Åkerlind et al., 2005) on the part of the interviewer, this dialogue can also be used to highlight two key features of inclusive research interviewing: turn taking sequence and blurring the boundaries between interviewer and interviewee (Williams 2011, p. 167).

When looking at turn taking, in the above extract, one can see how CR4 took immediate control of the interview:

CR4: Hello (CR2). Can you tell me about what this picture is about?

I see that you have a few things (.) what you actually have in the picture?

As this interview unfolded, CR4 became gradually became more confident controlling the flow of conversation, encouraging the interviewee to speak by using a lot of short remarks, such as 'okay, okay' and 'right, right'. The following extract illustrates the use of these comments as CR4 drives the conversation, offering the interviewee the option of talking about one topic or branching of with another:

CR4: Right so, do you want to continue talking about that or do you want to go off and talk about something else CR2, it's up to you.

CR2: Yeah I just like to make a point on this one here.

CR4: Okay, what is it?

CR2: It's interpersonal between these two here, because that would be help to work in a group so that you can share (.) share with like other people in the class.

CR4: And when you're ready CR2 could you explain what this is about, please.

CR2: Oh like (.) you share different experiences with other students on the CCL course.

B: So you're saying group work, group work is important is it?

S: Yeah.

CR4: Do you learn well through groups, is that what you're saying?

CR2: Yeah you like, you work with groups like you learn more.

CR4: Right! Right!

However, even though CR4's aim was to elicit information, on occasions he 'answered' the question he put to the interviewee. For example:

CR4: Hello (CR2). Can you tell me about what this picture is about?

I see that you have a few things (.) what you actually have in the picture (.) lets see what you have done here, right, right I see a picture of a book, a computer, and what's this here? (*Continues to describe what's in the picture*)

Rather than discount this response as bad practice, it is argued by Williams (2011) that this can be something unique to the inclusive research interview. In a project entitled 'Finding Out' (Williams 1999), Williams noticed that interviewers with intellectual disabilities engaged with a more conversational style of interview, and that the strict division between 'researcher' and 'researched' was not always maintained. Consequently, for Williams, what made this research interesting are the "shared experiences" and the participants' "open reflections about their views and perceptions" (p. 166).

It is further argued by Williams that this "blurring of boundaries" (p. 167) can be seen as an example of "membership" (p. 167). In the context of this research project, it is argued that "membership" consists of two CCL students sharing the same experience and identity. For Williams, applying 'standards' of social research to inclusive contexts is not always useful: when people with intellectual disabilities do research they are "creating a new form of social activity based on peer identity (which) is a rich form of research and has its own hallmarks" (p. 170).



#### 7.6.4 The sequence of questioning – a phased approach

It was mentioned above that in order to retrieve information that is accurate and reliable, the focus should be on “the abilities of the interviewer rather than the capabilities of the interviewee” (Milne & Bull, 2001, p. 96). For this research project, I encouraged co-researchers to use techniques, outlined in the Co-researcher’s Handbook, that had the potential to develop their interviewing abilities. This process of enhancement was informed by Bull (1996) who recommended a phased approach to interviewing people with intellectual disabilities, namely: 1) building rapport, 2) free narrative, 3) questioning, and 4) closure. The following section addresses how co-researchers used an adapted version of these four stages in carrying out interviews with CCL students. These phases consisted of:

- (i) Building rapport
- (ii) Using a visual stimulus
- (iii) Questioning (introducing, follow-up and probing questions).

##### *(i) Building rapport*

Even though co-researchers were familiar with the students they were interviewing, they started each meeting by thanking and welcoming the student, before asking them if they were happy to proceed with the interview. For example CR6 opened his conversation in this manner:

CR6: Right. I'd like to thank you for coming along today for this interview, and your Spidergram is brilliant, can you explain what you have in your Spidergram?

According to Milne & Bull (2001), rapport is essential for a successful interview and people with intellectual disabilities need extra time to feel comfortable with the interviewer. As co-researchers were also students attending the same programme as the interviewee, the perceived power difference between interviewee and interviewer was minimised; it has been argued that this can help to create a psychologically comfortable environment where the interviewee can gain some control in the interviewee (Perlman, Ericsson, & Isaacs, 1997).

*(ii) Using a visual stimulus to elicit information*

For all practice sessions co-researchers used a visual stimulus as a catalyst for eliciting information from the interviewee (see example Pictures 3 and 4).

Picture 3. CR5's Visual stimulus



Picture 4. CR6's Visual stimulus



These participant generated images (Loxley & Prosser 2008) proved to be a useful and effective research tool that provided a versatile elicitation media that evoked ideas and memories in respondents. These drawings enabled interviewees to select a starting point for the conversation to

unfold, allowing the interviewer space to think about further questions to form during this process. One such example of how a visual stimulus was used successfully is presented below.

This role play session consisted of co-researcher (CR1) interviewing CR5. During the early part of the conversation CR1 was unable to follow up on CR5's answer, resulting in an awkward period of silence. This author intervened by advising CR1 that it would be a good idea if she referred back to the visual stimulus and to ask another open question.

CR1: (*Pointing to the music notes in the drawing*) Do (0.5) do you like listening to music? How does music help you to learn?

CR5: I find music helps me to learn because I listen to foreign music from other countries. I pick up a few words. I know French and German. I just listen to the words of the song and that's how I find things out.

Once again however, CR1 found it difficult to follow through with another question. This author (A) suggested that she refer back to the visual stimulus for inspiration and ask another open question. The conversation continued:

CR1: Who is that (.) in the picture?

CR5: That's me.

A: That's a closed question - "Who is that" How can you turn it into an open question?

CR1: (0.5) Are they people in your life? You wouldn't be able to tell me about those people in your life?

A: Try saying: 'Tell me about these people' and she'll have to come back with some more information.

CR5: They are not actually people, they are smiley faces 'cause I like them and they make me very happy.

CR1: Why did you put those smiley faces in and how do they help you learn?

A: Excellent!

CR5: I use these because I find that they help me come out of my shell more and they make me not upset, and any time I write I use them and I find I learn more and that I make my writing look more happy.

As the topic of emotions arose in the last part of the verbal interchange, I suggested to CR1 that this was an area that she could encourage CR5 to elaborate on:

CR1: I'm really interested in why happy feelings are important to you in your learning.

CR5: I find that I'm not always my happy smiling self.

CR1: When you're not happy do you learn the same as when you are happy?

CR5: No, I get distracted.

A: Now you've really hit something important with her (.) Where can you take this?

*(Long pause with this author prompting the interviewer to ask an open question that explores feelings in learning).*

CR1: Do you keep a journal (.) when you go home in the evening do you draw a picture or put your feelings into a journal?

CR5: I draw a picture (.) sometimes I keep a journal.

CR1: Do you put the happy stuff into your journal?

CR5: Yes. I don't express why I'm feeling sad; only happy feelings into the journal.

CR1: Why do you not put unhappy feelings into your journal? Does it make you feel upset?

CR5: Yes.

Another long pause followed. The author once again suggested to CR1 that she could refer to the visual stimulus for inspiration.

CR1: "How do you learn when you come in to college?

CR5: I learn well if there is no noise and nobody annoying me... in my own space.

In this manner CR1 gradually got into the stride of the interview. He frequently referred to the visual stimulus to initiate questions; he listened to the answers, and kept the conversation moving along.

Ultimately, the questions CR1 asked focused on a number of key areas of learning for CR5 which provided a rich array of data. These areas were: the role of the tutor, the importance of groupwork and the difficulty of overcoming the fear of assessment using PowerPoint presentations.

*(iii) Questioning (introducing, follow-up and probing questions)*

With regard to questioning people with intellectual disabilities, there is some evidence that the use of non-leading questions can result in accurate information (Cardone & Dent 1996). Heeding this, I encouraged co-researchers to give some thought to the nature of questions that they were asking, and to become conscious of *not* leading students during the course of the interview,

Kvale (1996) has suggested that in qualitative interviews nine possible types of questions can be asked; these are: "introducing questions... follow-up questions... probing questions... specifying questions... direct questions... indirect questions... structuring questions... silence...interpreting questions" (Bryman 2004, p. 326). Coincidentally, co-researchers used a similar version of this format, (more a detailed account see Appendix 8) asking introducing questions. The questions consisted of open questions:

CR2: I'm here with (H) today and I'm going to be interviewing her about her drawing. Can you explain about your spidergram here?

closed questions:

CR4: Do you want to talk about... how you go about your learning?

CR6: Yes.

probing questions:

CR3: Can you tell me what's in the picture please? Talk a little more about that.

CR2: Do you want to explain anything else you have here on the spidergram?

and follow-up questions:

CR1: What's this?

P1: It's supposed to be a computer.

CR1: And what did you find interesting about using a computer?

In summary, with this author's support, co-researchers worked out their own ways of engaging with the process of interviewing and questioning. By adapting recognised techniques of the qualitative interview (i.e. Kvale 1996) co-researchers demonstrated that there is no one right way to approach questioning in inclusive research. The message from this project and indeed other inclusive research projects (i.e. Walmsley 2004; Williams 2009) reinforce the view that adjustments need to be made according to the topic, the methodology and the skills of those involved.



### 7.6.5 Reflection

It has been argued that reflection offers the potential to develop deeper understandings through becoming more metacognitive (Flavell, 1976).

Metacognition is a form of cognition, a second or higher order thinking process which involves active control over cognitive processes (Flavell, 1979). Metacognition is defined as "knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena" (p.906), or "a "person's cognition about cognition" (Wellman, 1985a, p. 1).

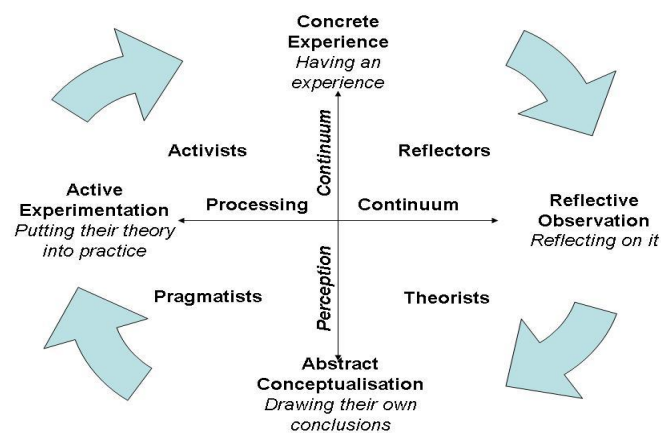
Brown (1987) divided metacognition into two broad categories: (1) knowledge of cognition, and (2) regulation of cognition. Knowledge of cognition, are activities that involve *conscious* reflection on ones cognitive abilities and activities; these activities refer to the stable, state-able, often fallible, and often late developing information that human thinkers have about their own cognitive processes as it requires that learners step back and consider their own cognitive processes as object of thought and reflection (Brown, 1987).

Regulation of cognition is activities regarding self-regulatory mechanisms during an ongoing attempt to learn or solve problems. This category consists of the activities used to regulate and oversee learning. These processes include planning activities (predicting outcomes, scheduling strategies, and various forms of vicarious trial and error, etc) prior to undertaking a problem; monitoring activities (monitoring, testing, revising, and re-scheduling one's strategies for learning) during learning; and checking outcomes (Brown, 1987).

The method of reflection used in this context was informed generally by the above descriptions, but more specifically by the learning cycle made popular by Honey and Mumford, (2000). This model shown in Figure 14 takes the cyclical form of:

1. Describing the experience
2. Reflecting on the experience
3. Abstract conceptualisation (engaging with the theory presented), and
4. Actions to be taken to inform future learning – putting theory into practice.

*Figure 15. Honey & Mumford's Learning Cycle*



Co-researchers were encouraged by this author to use an adapted version of this model to reflect on the training sessions they were undertaking during Stage 1 - Figure 15.

An account of co-researchers' use of Honey and Mumford's (2000) reflective cycle is presented in Appendix 9 which outlines in detail the

group’s engagement with the process of reflection. This practice offers a number of insights into the thought processes of co-researchers, highlighting some of the difficulties they had with the Honey and Mumford model. It concludes with co-researchers’ recommendations on how to make this reflective cycle more accessible to learners with intellectual disabilities. While Figure 15 presents this author’s adaptation of the Honey and Mumford model as presented to co-researchers for a reflective tool. Alternatively, Figure 16 illustrates co-researchers preferred adaptation of the same model.

Figure 16. Adapted learning cycle – this author’s version

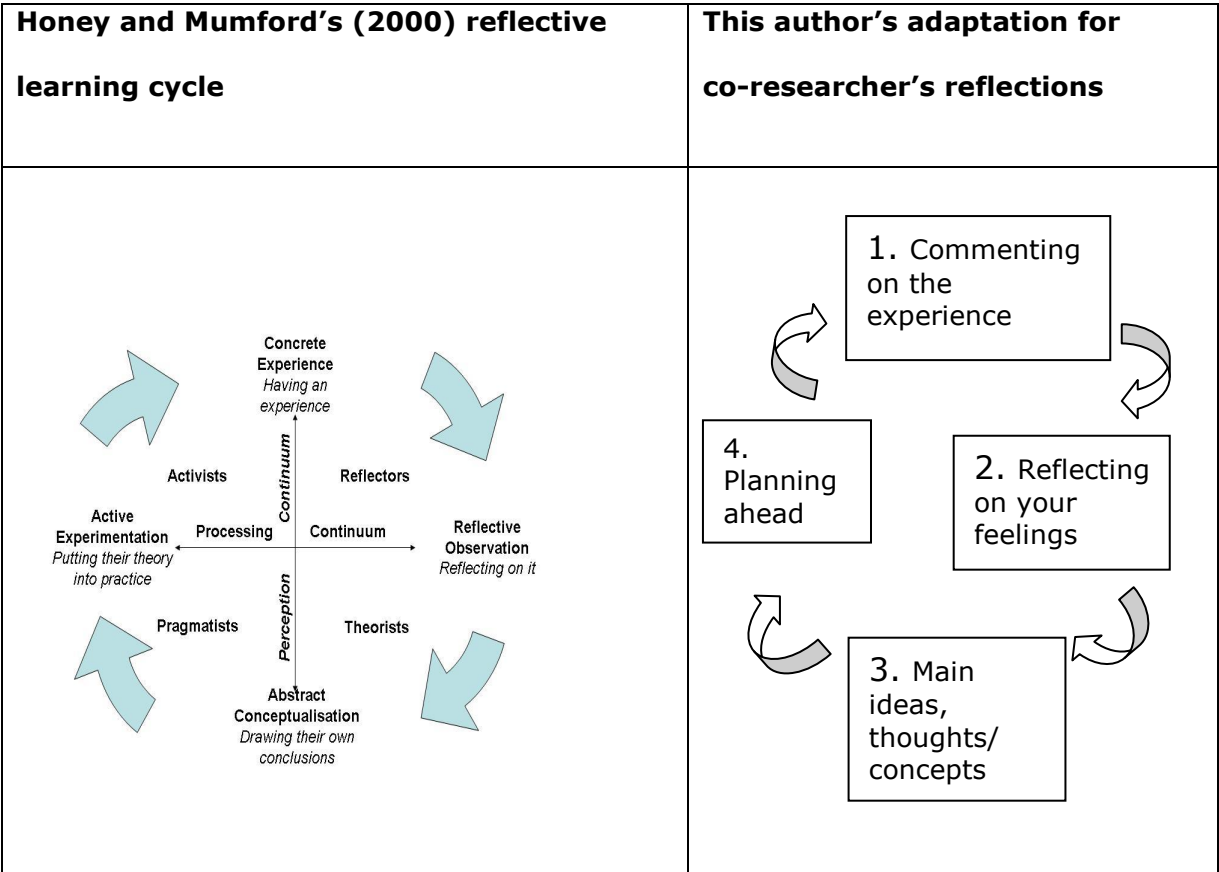
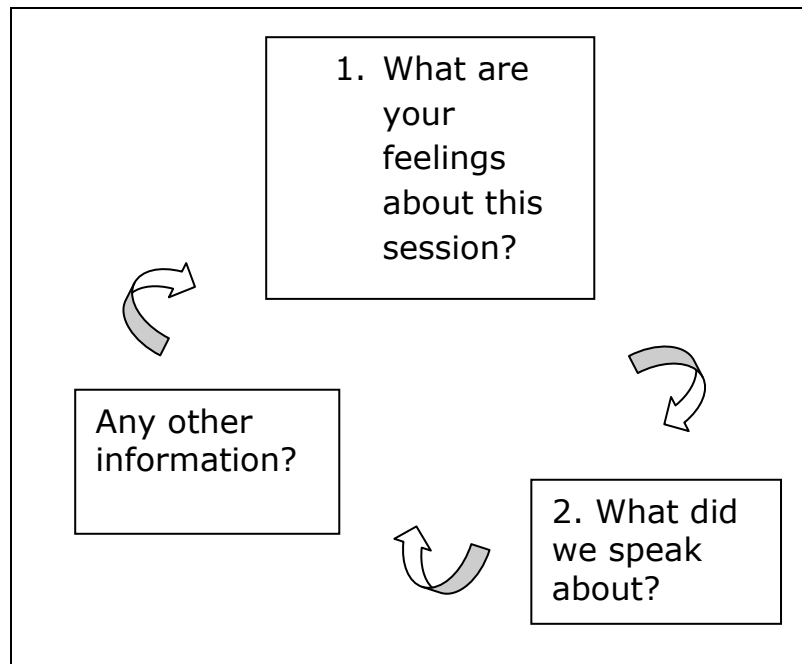


*Figure 17. Adapted learning cycle – co-researchers' version*



The group's recommendation was that the reflective cycle should just consist of three stages and thought that this adaptation offered them more flexibility to engage with the reflection process. The revised reflective cycle took the following form:

1. Engaging with feelings (What are your feelings about this session?)
2. Thinking about content (What did we speak about?)
3. Any other information?

Co-researchers main difficulties centred on engaging with stage 3 of the Honey and Mumford's model. Consequently, stage 4 of this model, which involves translating reflection and analysis of theory into an action plan

regarding what has to happen next, proved to be difficult and problematic for co-researchers to employ.

In conclusion, it is argued that most co-researchers demonstrated metacognitive ability and engaged with a higher order thought process (five showed evidence of reflection for stage 3, and three demonstrated their ability to engage with stage 4). For Brown (1987) this metacognitive process ultimately leads to an awareness of knowledge of cognition which involves the ability to consciously reflect on one's cognitive abilities and activities. Co-researchers also demonstrated that they can step back and consider their own cognitive processes as object of thought and reflection; this is evidenced in the revised reflective cycle presented above. Furthermore, there is evidence (outlined in Appendix 9) that co-researchers used reflective activities in attempting to solve a problem, (for example, their awareness of the difficulty in engaging with Honey and Mumford's learning cycle), and their willingness to plan an alternative strategy to resolve the problem. As CR2 stated:

*I was writing the same things (in the reflection). I found it hard to write new things down... there's a need to make them easier... it would be better to just have 'what are your feelings', 'what did we do', and 'any other information?'*

## **7.7 Conclusion**

The aim of Stage 1 was to build on co-researchers' understandings of research, and to provide training for them in the skills needed to undertake a research project on learning.

This author undertook a thematic analysis of the data set using an inductive or 'bottom up' approach. The three themes identified were:

1. Co-researchers' perceptions of research and researchers
2. Presenting the project accessibly
3. Interviewers and interviewing

To summarise, co-researchers saw themselves as individuals who sought out information from printed sources, the internet, and from other people; co-researchers also offered advice and support to those they were researching with.

In their role as co-researchers they perform a number of important functions: they design accessible material and inform people about the research they are undertaking. They ensure that those who are interested in participating in inclusive research projects understand the purpose of the research and what is required of them, and that they have the right to refuse to participate, and to withdraw from the research at any time.

Using an appropriate venue is also important as access to a familiar space enables the interviewee with an intellectual disability to feel safe and protected; it is in this type of recognisable environment that a successful interview can unfold.

Possessing facilitation skills are important for the interviewer: the ownership of good listening skills and being able to question (using introducing, follow-up and probing questions) appropriately are essential requirements of the inclusive interviewer.

Co-researchers reflect; they possess metacognitive ability and engage with a higher order thought process. In attempting to solve a particular problem (i.e. engaging with Honey and Mumford's learning cycle), co-researchers planned an alternative strategy to resolve the problem, and demonstrated the ability to consciously reflect on their cognitive activities.

Finally, co-researchers also see themselves as advocates who can speak up for people with intellectual disabilities; this is achieved through curriculum design and conference presentations.

Chapter 8 is now presented and focuses on Stage 2 of this research – the phenomenography of CCL students' experiences of learning.

## **Chapter 8**

# **Findings: Stage 2: CCL students' experiences of learning**

### **8.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of a phenomenographic study on CCL students' experiences of learning. The focus of Stage 2 of this project was to explore the variety of ways college students with an intellectual disability experienced their learning. From an ontological perspective, this study took a non-dualist ontological stance whereby the object (learning), and the subject (the individuals engaged in learning), are not separate. Epistemologically, knowledge of that variation of experiences might then have an impact on subsequent engagement with learning for intellectually disabled students.

A second-order perspective was maintained throughout – the emphasis was on attempting to see the phenomenon through the students' eyes. However, this is not straightforward (Prosser, 2000) with some claiming that it is impossible to set aside one's preconceptions in order to remain unbiased (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). It is recognised that the author and co-researchers have their own thoughts on the phenomenon, and a conscious decision was collectively made to focus on eliciting CCL students' experiences of their learning without bringing in to the process the author's or co-researchers' own perceptions.



## **8.1 First stage of analysis**

In data analysis, there is a debate among phenomenographers (Dunkin, 2000) regarding whether the whole transcript is considered (Trigwell, Prosser, & Taylor, 1994) or large extracts related to particular issues (Prosser, 2000), or even smaller excerpts that represents particular meanings (Marton, 1986). In this study the whole transcript was used to form categories, and "bracketing" (Åkerlind, Bowden & Green, 2005, p. 98) was adhered to as much as possible, whereby "neither categories of description nor structural relationships (were) anticipated in advance of the data" (p.98). This author's choice was not to focus on structure too early in the analysis in order to avoid imposing my own ideas (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000).

Categories were constructed from the pool of data (as opposed to being fitted into categories) and, as they were constructed by this author, it is inevitable that the process is therefore open to "researcher bias" (Walsh, 2000, p. 29). To minimise this bias, and in an effort to be as objective as possible, every attempt was made by this author to use the evidence from the data to form the categories of description. According to Walsh (2000) "the categories don't exist independently of the person who's doing the analysis" (p. 22); any analysis is therefore dependent on the researcher's background, knowledge and ideas.

It needs to be pointed out that in phenomenographic research, participants' experiences of learning typically identify with more than one category, and this is also the case in this present research. There are categories with which several students identify, as well as categories with which only few of them identify.

Wording for the student quotes are presented as exact quotes (rather than the “spirit of the quotes”, Trigwell, 2006, p. 78), so as to let the words and voices of the CCL students speak for themselves (Barnacle, 2005), and hopefully give the reader a sense of authenticity with regard to the experiences of the learners. In presenting student’s quotes, some irrelevant repetitions and digressions have been removed, and occasionally, words are added by this author in order to complete partial sentences. Three successive dots indicate that several words or a sentence have been removed as irrelevant in relation to the meaning that the quote is intended to illustrate. For ethical reasons, there are no names offered of participants in connection with the quotes; numbers of interviews are offered instead to locate the source of evidence (i.e. P1, P2 – P17) with different interview numbers indicating different participants.

## **8.2 Second stage of analysis – the marriage of inclusive research and phenomenography**

To seek an informed response to my plan to make this phenomenography inclusive, I emailed the founder of phenomenography, Ference Marton, informing him of this project and invited him to comment on the marriage of phenomenography and inclusive research.

In his reply, one of Marton’s concerns was that he had “difficulties with imaging how the combination of phenomenography and inclusive research would make a happy marriage”. His reason was that

*arriving at a phenomenographic description amounts to being - or becoming - aware of the differences between the different ways in which a*

*certain phenomenon is seen by the participants. This means that the observer's way of seeing the phenomenon is almost always more complex than the participants' ways of seeing it, regardless of the participants' intellectual abilities (Marton, 2011).*

Despite Marton's concerns, I was insistent on making this an inclusive research project, as failing to do so would have compromised what I stood for as an inclusive researcher and educator of intellectually disabled people. I was keen to make my role and co-researchers' roles transparent in order to avoid "using people with intellectual disabilities in tokenistic ways" (Williams 2011, p. 172). I turned to other researchers who worked inclusively for guidance; I found that the views of people with intellectual disabilities were key factors in studies such as: living arrangements (McConkey, Sowney, Milligan, & Barr (2005), accommodation and support (Barr, McConkey, & McConaghie, 2003), and the barriers to social inclusion (Abbott & McConkey, 2006).

Chapman and McNulty (2004) also found that it was possible to work as part of a team with different people having their own roles in the team. I also heeded the warnings of Walmsley (2004) who stated that the lessons from research practice suggest that people with intellectual disabilities should not be asked to carry out tasks relating to research for which that have no training or preparation. In the context of this project, it was an unreasonable expectation within the time-frame of the academic year to expect co-researchers to carry out training in research (i.e. learning facilitation skills, questioning techniques and undertake interviews), *and* gain an understanding of phenomenographic analysis and write up. I wanted to find ways of enabling co-researchers I was working with to appreciate the significance of what they are doing as researchers. Chapman and McNulty (2004) found that it was possible for people to have their own roles in a research team. For me, it made eminently good sense that CCL students could make a valuable

contribution to this research: firstly, by reflecting on their role as researchers, and secondly, as advisors on how to make information relating to this project accessible for people with intellectual disabilities. Co-researchers' roles therefore centred on the data collection phase of this research, and consisted of presenting information on the project and interviewing participants. Although my role was varied (i.e. designing the research, supporting and training the co-researchers), in this stage of the project, it centred mainly on analysing and interpreting the data. Although Åkerlind (2005b) points out that the phenomenographic researcher often analysis and carries out the entire research project by themselves, I was keen to find a way to meaningfully including co-researchers in this phase of the research.

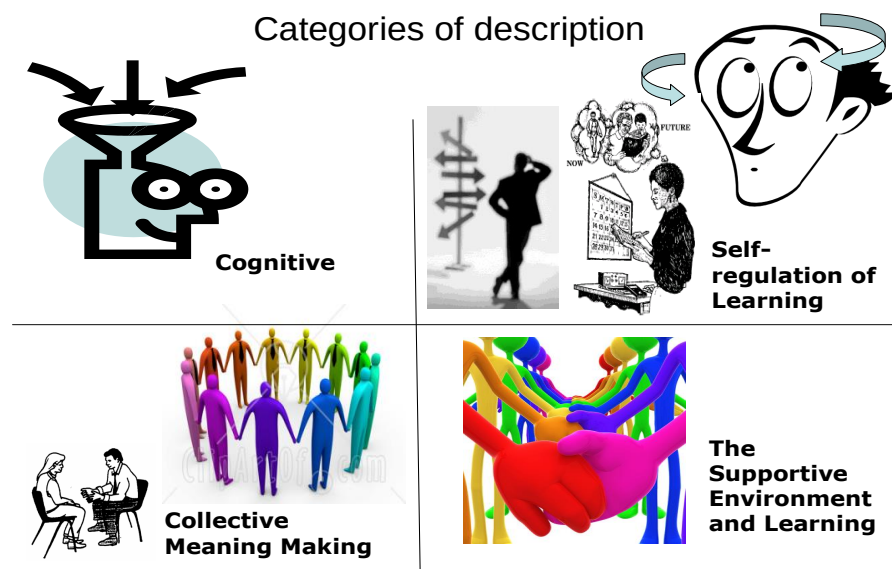
This need for co-operacy and discussion is in keeping with the recommendations of Bowden and Green (2005) who stated that phenomenographic analysis should be carried out as a team. This process, called 'interjudge reliability' (Johansson, Marton & Svensson, 1985; Marton, 1986; Säljö, 1988; Booth, 1992; Sandberg, 1997) involves the formulation of categories of description arising from transcripts of interviews, and for Marton (1986) it "must be possible to reach a high degree of intersubjective agreement concerning their presence or absence" (p. 35).

After I had completed an analysis of this stage of the research, I presented the categories of description in an accessible format to the co-researchers (see Appendix 10) in a 1.5 hour session in June 2012. I hoped that group members would serve as 'devil's advocates' who would raise questions, provide critical insights, and possibly bring up different ways of

seeing the data, bearing in mind that all data must be critically considered and debated (Green 2005b).

In this session I presented to co-researchers an accessible PowerPoint consisting of the four categories of description of CCL students' experiences of learning (Figure 17, see also Appendix 11) as well as the outcome space. I spoke about the set of descriptive categories, how the categories 'emerged' from the data and highlighted some of the difficulties I experienced as I undertook this time consuming method. I went into considerable detail describing each category using supporting visual imagery, and afterwards quizzed each member of the group to confirm that they understood what each category represented.

Figure 18. Categories of description for CCL students' experiences of learning – accessible version



At this stage I did not present my version of the outcome space as I wanted to find out what their opinions were in relation to the hierarchy of

the categories. When I reached slide 9 (Figure 18) I invited their comments in relation to the hierarchy of categories: in other words, which categories did they think as the most important, the second most important, third most important and forth most important.

Figure 18. Slide 9 – inviting co-researchers to comment on the outcome space

**The outcome space:**  
Write down which categories you think are:  
1=least important  
2 = important  
3 = very important  
4 = most important

|                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p><b>Cognitive</b></p>                  |   <p><b>Self-regulation of learning</b></p> |
|  <p><b>Collective Meaning Making</b></p> |  <p><b>The Supportive Environment and Learning</b></p>                                                                        |

On a print-out of slide 9 of the PowerPoint, co-researchers were asked in what order they would position the categories. Upon completion of this exercise a group discussion followed in which individuals spoke about their choices - what they viewed as the simplest way of experiencing learning to what they viewed as the most sophisticated.

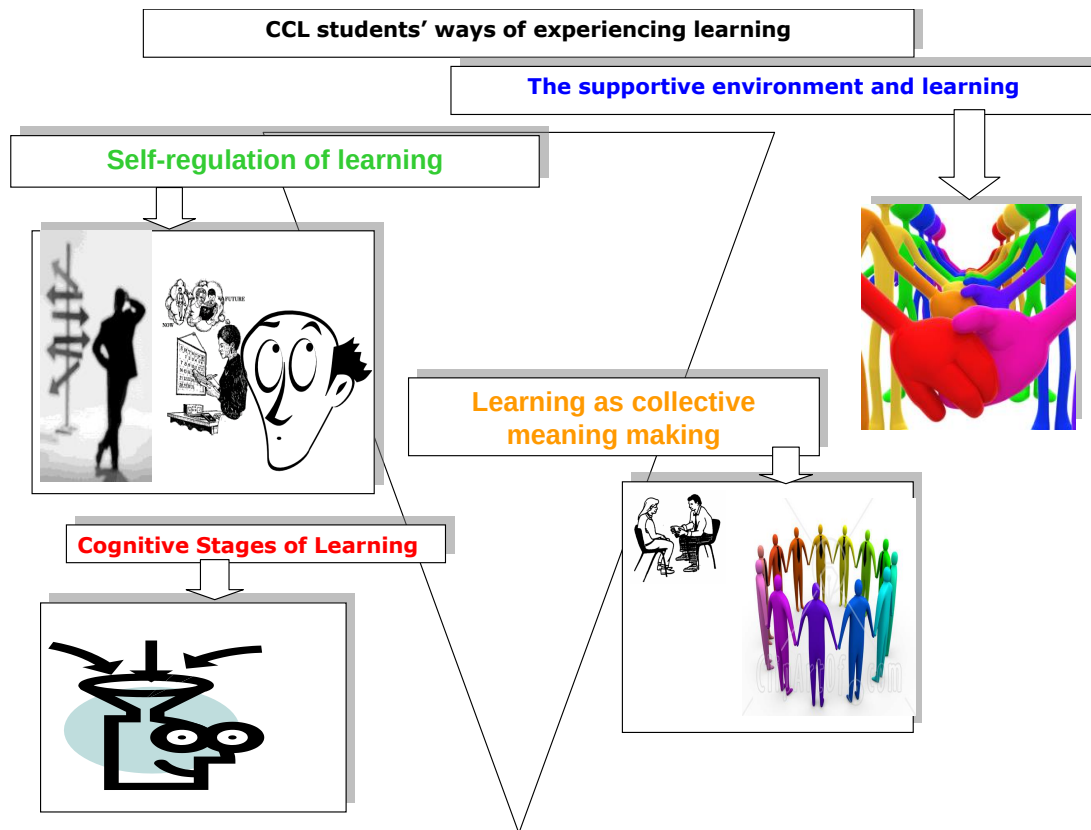
Co-researchers thought that the most important category was the category entitled "The Supportive Environment and Learning". For example, CR1 felt that *"feeling safe in the pace you learn in is highly important"*. The second most important category (very important) was "Self-regulation of Learning", (i.e. planning, monitoring and reflecting on the work that you're undertaking); for CR2 this meant a gain in self-knowledge: *"it's good to plan... and it's o.k. if I want to work in silence"* (CR2).

The category that was considered as important by co-researchers was "Collective Meaning Making". For example, the process of learning collectively, either in groups or in pairs, was considered by CR3 to be *"good, as you can help others out... and be there for each other"*.

Finally, the category considered to be least important was the "Cognitive Stages of Learning". Although this category was seen by CR6 as most important - *"getting stuff into the head... and using this information"*, other members of the group thought that taking in formation was best placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, as CR4 said: *"your head can get filled with too much information"*.

Figure 19 offers an accessible visual representation, designed by co-researchers, illustrating their views of the outcome space.

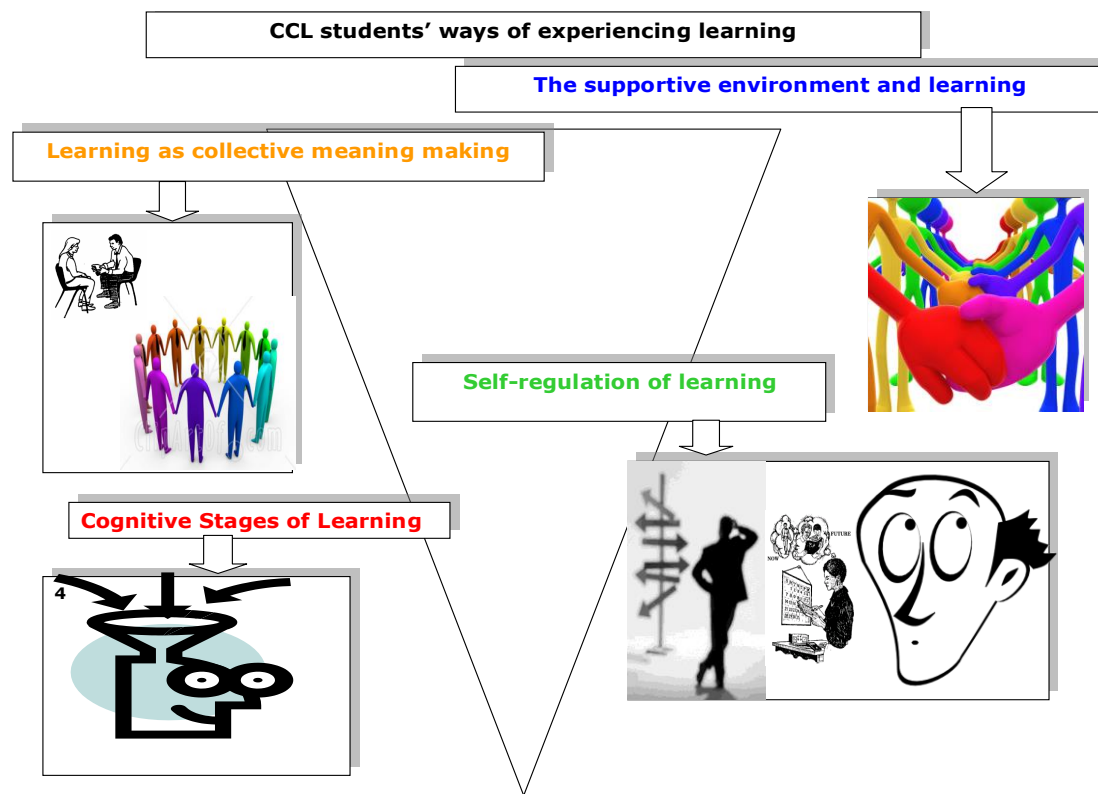
Figure 20. Co-researchers' outcome space



This author's formulation of the categories of description and the outcome space are now presented in detail in the following section. Figure 20 jumps forward with this study's findings by illustrating this author's outcome space which highlights similarities as well as some differences between this space and the outcome space of the co-researchers. These resemblances and dissimilarities will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.



Figure 21. This author's outcome space



The following section presents the justification for the decisions made in formulating this outcome space by presenting the four categories selected by this current author.

### 8.3 CCL students' experiences of learning: the Cognitive Stages of Learning

In this section CCL students' experiences of learning are presented. These are grouped into four categories which are:

1. The cognitive stages of Learning
2. Self-regulation of learning
3. Learning as collective meaning making

#### 4. The supportive environment and learning.

The 'Cognitive Stages of Learning' category pays attention to what is happening in the minds of the learners; their acts of learning are seen as a cognitive process. This stage is divided into three sub-categories:

1. Learning as increasing one's knowledge
2. Learning as memorising and reproducing
3. Learning and applying knowledge

These sub-categories are hierarchically linked and this hierarchy is informed by their inclusiveness and relative completeness: the experiences in later categories include elements similar to the earlier ones, but not vice versa. For Åkerlind (2008) each way of experiencing a phenomenon may be understood as part of a larger whole, the "collective sum" (p. 635) of experiencing. These different ways of experiencing are commonly ordered in terms of inclusivity of awareness, where more inclusive ways also represent more complex ways of experiencing the phenomenon, indicated by an "increasing breadth of awareness" (p. 636) of different aspects of the phenomenon. The above three hierarchically linked sub-categories can be seen as a gradual expansion of CCL student learners' cognitive awareness (see Table 8).

Table 8. *Cognitive phases of CCL student learning applied to Åkerlind's (2008) concept of the 'increasing breadth of awareness'*

| <b>Category 1 Cognitive phases of learning</b>   |                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Learning as increasing one's knowledge</b> | <i>(learning about facts from books/music /computers/lectures)</i>                                                                                                          |
| <b>2. Learning as memorising and reproducing</b> | <i>(in class memorisation/ short and long-term memory / learning little bits at a time/ home assignments)</i>                                                               |
| <b>3. Learning and applying knowledge</b>        | <i>(researching in class and for home assignments /socialisation through networking sites/learning to pass the CCL course / selective use and application of knowledge)</i> |

In attempting to answer the question: "what is a way of experiencing something?" Pang (2003) posited that it is related to how a person's awareness is structured. It contains both a 'what' aspect (which corresponds to the object) and a 'how' aspect (which refers to the act). These two aspects can be thought of in terms of the dynamic relationship between the two aspects of human awareness, the "structural and the referential / meaning aspects" (Pang, 2003. p.148). Table 9 offers an view of the interrelatedness of a referential aspect and a structural aspect for CCL students' learning.

Table 9. Pang's (2003) *referential and structural aspects applied to CCL students' learning*

### Category 1

#### Cognitive phases of learning

| <b>Referential aspect</b><br><b>('what' aspect)</b>                                                                                                                                        | <b>Structural aspect</b><br><b>('how' aspect')</b>                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learning as increasing one's knowledge</li> <li>2. Learning as memorising and reproducing</li> <li>3. Learning and applying knowledge</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adding quantifiable knowledge</li> <li>2. Holding knowledge in mind</li> <li>3. Using knowledge in different contexts</li> </ol> |

#### 8.3.0 Learning as increasing one's knowledge

In this first sub-category, learning is viewed as adding to one's current knowledge base. Biggs (1994) identifies such a view as quantitative; a perspective which proposes that learning is concerned with acquisition and accumulation of content. When this view is applied to the hierarchy of conceptions of learning framework of Marton et al. (1993), it connects to the first level, i.e. learning as increasing one's knowledge.

In this sub-category CCL learners see learning as an accumulation of new knowledge which can take place either in class or at home. For example,

the following student spoke about looking up information from the internet for classroom assignments. She said:

*I can look up information on projects that I'm doing at the moment at college...stuff on the Titanic and stuff that I'm doing in the ISR project on the Classical studies...I can look up information on those. (P6)*

Another student used books as a resource for acquiring information. Her quote clearly shows how learning is seen as an acquisition of facts learned from the written word. She explained:

*I... learn(ed) things from books...when I was doing the Yeats thing in (J's) class...and I found out about his children, his son and his daughter, and I found out what year they were born and what year they got married in and it was kind of interesting (P9)*

Books read by students are not solely curriculum related; in reading for leisure, the following student spoke about reading every morning in college just before class starts:

*...it helps my brain and I kinda learn new things from a book...Trying to read new stories interests me. And that I also learn new big words that I've never heard before. (P15)*

Coupled with books, computers also feature highly among the means used by CCL students to acquire knowledge. This can take the form of learning the more practical components of the computer, as well as acquiring new information from the internet. This student remarked:

*(The tutor) taught us was about different parts of the computer and also... how to put photographs onto them...Onto the ...memory stick how to save onto the USB. (P2)*

Another noted the internet was faster (than books)

*because I can find out more information than I can find in a book because of my reading disability...I know everything about the internet like, I can click on almost all of the icons and everything, so if I want information and pictures, I just click on it and in a few minutes it's up...if I'm on the computer... I...just underline the words that I need to know. (P6)*

The following student remarked on the seemingly endless possibilities of acquiring information from the internet

*... was looking up Google, and the Internet, and doing the email and all of that...(I) liked putting information on the USB. (And) word search and all that stuff, you know, I liked doing that... (P4)*

And, if a student wants more knowledge, s/he can get it if needed:

*I can look up information on projects that I'm doing at the moment at college...stuff on the Titanic and stuff that I'm doing in the ISR project on the Classical studies...I can look up information on those. (P13)*

As well as gaining more knowledge from using computers and searching on the Web, CCL students also gained in their learning when auditing undergraduate lectures which is part of their ISR module. In this context, rather than it being a book or a computer, another person (i.e. a lecturer)

delivers information and offers facts on a particular subject. One student observed that

*(The lecturer) was talking all about social housing...Children's allowance... social welfare...old age pension(s). (P2)*

In this context learning can be seen as a passive undertaking, a process where the learner does not necessarily see him/herself as an agent of learning - rather learning takes place as a result of the delivery of knowledge by a person who remains outside the learner. The following observation highlights an observation by a student who saw the lecturer as someone who equipped learners with the relevant information about a particular subject.

*It's more interesting... to learn about poetry and to learn about the authors...I pick up on a good few things. I don't write them down but I just listen and pick them up, things that I like - but it's good. (P16)*

The previous two experiences of learning quoted above support the notion of knowledge being seen as something ready-made, something 'out there', with learning seen as the act of tapping into a place or a reservoir where knowledge is stored, whether it is a book or a computer.

Information in this context seems to be collected effortlessly by students when needed for either a home assignment or a research project as the following quote by a student illustrates:

*I can look up anything on (the computer). The news, or the internet, or get information like, you can look up the electronic mail and all of the mail, you know like the Google and the Yahoo and all of that. (P4)*

However, in the following quote, this student recognises that learning is not only about acquiring facts (in this case about English poetry), rather it also about the pleasure of learning and the need to remember:

*I wrote (down) the lines I learned and that I felt strong about that I found interesting...some poems I never knew even existed, I found them good... the 'Tomb' one, was good and then I did one about the 'Wild Oats' and I thought that poem was very good about the rose and the girl working in it...since I went to the lectures I'm actually going to enjoy poets. (P14)*

The following sub-category 'Learning as memorisation and reproducing' addresses the students' need to remember, i.e. learning as memorisation, and the need to retain and hold knowledge in the mind for a variety of purposes.

### 8.3.1 Learning as memorisation and reproducing

Memorisation has been described by Entwistle and Entwistle (2003, p. 36) as "a largely mechanical, unreflective process of forcing knowledge into memory by conscious effort". In this sub-category the knowledge that is handled by CCL students during classes is 'non-problematic', a term used by Paakkari, Tynjälä, and Kannas (2011, p. 708) that involves merely storing and remembering facts.



A CCL student described learning as follows, illustrating the point made by Paakari et al (2011). She said that she learns by storing information

*into my head, long term and short term memory so...that's how I learn...*

(P8)

Another student also made reference to learning how to store and remember facts using long and short-term memory:

*I actually learned about... long and short-term memory... in college last year in first year... if you're going out to the shop to get a loaf of bread, that would be in your short term memory so... I just remember that for a few minutes. But like stuff for college, I remember in my head for a long time... I write it down. (P13)*

Handling knowledge in a non-problematic way refers to the students' tendency to "take knowledge for granted, without reflecting further on the nature of the knowledge or the ways of acquiring or constructing knowledge" (p. 708). Students in this sub-category see memorisation as something consciously done by "*looking... and reading*" (P4), something which the following student described as the process of information entering and remaining in her mind. She said:

*that's how I remember it...it stays in my mind (and) once it's there...I just think of it. (P13)*

Another student agreed that looking and reading are important for memorisation but adds a further element – answering questions for reinforcement. This process of combining self-assessment and

memorisation allows these students to see if they remember in this way.

These students explain:

*We have to read a book for (the) Communications (module) and we had to answer questions about it and that was good because you learnt how to answer questions after reading the book to see if you could remember the information. (P5)*

*Then I would go over it and I would cover the page and see if I can remember it... it works for me doing it that way because you see it first, and then you can remember it and then if you've made any mistake, if you got anything wrong you could have a look back then and correct it the next time. (P13)*

For this following student, learning continues at home as memorisation is reinforced by catching up on work done in class; he elaborates:

*You need to study more... (at home)... to get more brains... you have to do the study here and then at home a little bit. You just catch up on homework (to) see what you did, what you missed like... in the evening... until homework (is) done, you watch no telly... you need to pass second year... (P12)*

For other CCL students the ability to remember information is enhanced by their engagement with visual images from the tutor's use of PowerPoint during delivery of the curriculum. According to Dunn (2003), perceptual strengths such as a visual, auditory, kinaesthetic or tactile (VAKT) form part of five major strands called *stimuli*. These stimulus strands are: a) environmental; b) emotional; c) sociological; d)

psychological, and e) physiological - elements that significantly influence how many individuals learn. The *physiological* strand examines perceptual strengths (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic or tactile), time-of-day energy levels, the need for intake (food and drink) and mobility while learning.

For the following student the importance of the tutor's use of a PowerPoint in an expressive arts module is that it enabled him to memorise information on Michelangelo:

*We talked about him (on) a Power Point...you can write it down and you can remember them (and) look back on it...if there was no Power Point that would make it difficult...because then I wouldn't be able to remember it and I wouldn't be able to learn it. (P4)*

To illustrate the effectiveness of visual stimulus, this student proceeded to describe a Renaissance painting ('The Peasant Dance' by Breugel) by visualising the content of the picture in his head. He described it thus:

*... it was in southern Germany...The Peasant Dance, they're all dancing right, and there's doors and there's houses and they're made of wood, and the clothes they are wearing, they didn't buy them, they weren't like what we have today...I think they were made for them...there's two, I think there's two men dancing, then there's a man pouring a glass of wine on the other side, then there's a cat, then there's a kid lying down on the ground... and there's a man playing a big huge bagpipes. (P7)*

For another student the ability to remember through visualisation was a strategy he learned from childhood:

*I play(ed) a game age four. I can't speak properly and I speak language. Say (I) have a picture... of (a) shopping list, and have a list - bread, milk and water, and lots of things, 7Up, and cake, brack and they'd say 'what's on the shopping list'... and I'd say bread, milk, 7up, bread, and everything I'd remember on the list... I've a very good memory. I close my eyes and do it... (I)... see those things in my head. (P19)*

And for the following student this strategy of visualisation can also be applied in a college environment - information delivered by the tutor in class was memorised by the student:

*I close my eyes and see... it... on PowerPoint. (P1)*

For another learner remembering an item of information from a poetry class was achieved by associating this new information with familiar concepts already in memory. This mnemonic link system is also known as a chain method (Hock, Romanski, Galie, & Williams 1978). The student in question memorised information on W.B. Yeats by linking an element of that information with a personal event; she explained that this was a process which she learned in college that helped to established an interaction between the two words she needed to remember.

*In college it's easier because they help you to remember... (I remember) by listening and taking in the information, and some of it I link it to different things... WB Yeats - link it to France... that's where I went with my sister, so I link them in. I just associate it with thing that I know already. (P5)*

This technique of 'chunking' (Miller, 1956) was also a learned technique used by some CCL students as it breaks the information to be learnt into

smaller and more manageable parts. In a seminal paper, *The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on our Capacity for Processing Information*, Miller (1956) noted that according to this theory it should be possible to effectively increase short-term memory for low-information-content items by mentally recoding them into a smaller number of high-information-content items.

Much later when Gobet, Lane, Croker, Cheng, Jones, Oliver, & Pine, (2001) connected chunking with long-term memory (as opposed to Miller's preoccupation with the effects of chunking on short-term memory), a chunk was defined as "a collection of elements having strong associations with one another, but weak associations with elements within other chunks" (Gobet et al. 2001. p. 236).

The following CCL student's concern was on retaining information from classes, and he commented positively on the benefits of chunking information into manageable 'bits' that builds upon what he had learned previously. He said:

*When I'm learning I'm learning one thing at a time because if I'm learning too much together I won't retain what's going on so if I find if I learn bit by bit I'll actually ...take it at my own pace I'll actually retain what I'm learning... I concentrate on just one part for maybe a week or two maybe studying it and going back over it and remembering it all and maybe then learn a little bit more and then go back and forward over that again and ...add to it each time then I retain better. (P14)*

### 8.3.2 Learning as the application of the CCL curriculum

In this sub-category, students emphasised the importance of being able to apply aspects of the acquired CCL curriculum in practice. This was related to various practicalities in both classroom and home-assignment activities. However, in order to apply knowledge, an understanding of that knowledge is fundamental. For Nickerson (1985, p. 234), understanding is an active process. It requires

the connection of facts, the relating of newly acquired information to what is already known... in short, it requires not only having knowledge but also doing something with it.

For the following learner, understanding how to use computers successfully was necessary for researching home-assignments. She said:

*We're doing (computers) in class... you follow the instructions then you just click the mouse and it will say that's right... you can read all of ... sort(s) of poetry... you can look up William Shakespeare and all of the poets. (P4)*

In their research Entwistle and Entwistle (1991) found that the nature of understanding is associated with a sense of satisfaction; this feeling of gratification is evident in the following students' comments:

*You get to type up the information and the spelling comes up easy. I find spelling hard so... (I can)... correct my spelling. (Computers) are good for me 'cause I can look up information on projects that I'm doing at the moment at college... stuff on the Titanic (and) the ISR project on the Classical studies...I can look up information on those. (P6)*

*(I) want(ed) to find out... (about) different people who took over... America and I was looking at it yesterday on the internet and I just typed in. Do you know the way you get the Google thing, you can look up different ones, you type in whatever you find out about and it's kind of handy, that's how it's kind of good. (P9)*

The process of understanding how to apply the skills learned in the computer class in order to keep in touch with one's peers became evident in the following students' comments about using social network sites.

*(We are doing) Microsoft, typing in and PowerPoints, doing presentations, we are doing bloggers at the moment. There's many things I find interesting... getting pictures on the internet... I'm on Facebook. (P15)*

*I do... the Web, social networking site... Facebook and Bebo and all that. (P15)*

For another student however, learning was a selection of what information was useful and could be applied later, with a disregard of knowledge that what was not of foreseeable use. He explained:

*Some of the stuff you're learning in college is useful for the future, and you say yes I'm interested in that 'cause I can use it again. But some other stuff you learn in college is not interesting for you and you may feel that I'll never use that again, what's the point in using it. (P14)*

For this learner the knowledge that was useful covered information gained from Communication (Speech and Language) classes where correct grammar usage and proper pronunciation was taught. This was seen as something beneficial for this student to possess; correct punctuation and

grammar was something that *"you might need to have for everyday talk"* (P14). He continued:

*I find the (Communication) class interesting. (The tutor) speaks about the proper pronunciation of words or say having the right grammar or also say taking your time when you're speaking or slow down and don't talk too fast... I find this stuff interesting, it opens up new horizons for me. It broadens my mind a bit better and makes me more knowledgeable about things. (P14)*

However, this potential for conceptual change, the "mechanisms by which individuals achieve change in their prior knowledge" (Luque, 2003, p. 135) is reduced for this individual when information presented to this student is too complicated to understand:

*If there is something that is really difficult, and if it's not that interesting and not that important, I wouldn't be inclined to be worried about it, or bother about it. If I forgotten it by the time the class is finished it wouldn't really bother me because it might have been something I wasn't really interested in, but you see most of the things you talk about I am really interested in. (P11)*

#### **8.4 Self-regulation of learning**

Unlike category 1 (Learning as cognitive), which manifested the *outcomes* of learning, this third main category entitled 'Self-regulation' deals with the learning *process*.



There are several theories of self-regulation (Schunk, 2005). For example, Pintrich (2000, p. 453) sees it as

an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behaviour, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features of the environment”.

Zimmerman and Schunk (2001) see self-regulation as a process that “encompasses the degree that students are meta-cognitively, motivationally and behaviourally active participants in their own learning process” (p. 5). Zimmerman (2002) also points out that the characteristics of a self regulated learner are not only the ability to prepare and take the essential steps in order to learn in a “pro-active way” (p. 65), but also have the capability to take care of their own monitoring, motivation and feedback processes, both during and after learning. Self-regulation of learning is not a single personal trait that individual students either possess or lack; instead it involves the “selective use of specific processes that must be personally adapted to each learning task” (p. 66). The component skills (p. 66, *italics original*) include:

- Setting specific proximal *goals* for oneself
- Adopting powerful *strategies* for attaining these goals
- *Monitoring* one’s performance selectively for signs of progress
- *Restructuring* one’s physical and social; context to make it compatible with one’s goals
- Managing one’s *time use* efficiently
- *Self-evaluating* one’s methods

- *Attributing* causation to results, and
- *Adapting* future methods.

For Schunk & Zimmerman, students' level of learning has been found to vary based on the presence or absence of these key self-regulatory processes (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994; 1998).

#### 8.4.0 The Forethought Phase - Goal setting

It has been argued above that self-regulated learning is an active process. Learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their behaviour (which consists of motivations, self-beliefs, cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies, and self-management) in order to guide their goals to their performance in the environment (Wolters, Pintrich & Karabenick, 2003). Motivation helps people focus on the task, select and apply appropriate strategies, and monitor goal progress (Paraskeva, Mysirlaki & Choustoulakis, 2008).

Social learning psychologists such as Zimmerman (2002) view the structure of the self-regulatory processes in terms of three cyclical phases:

1. The forethought phase
2. The performance phase and
3. The self-reflection phase

The forethought phase refers to "processes and beliefs that occur *before* efforts to learn; the performance phase refers to processes that occur

*during* behavioural implementation, and self-reflection refers to processes that occur *after* each learning effort” (p. 67).

The following section presents the ‘forethought phase’ of self-regulation for CCL students, which includes the two main classes of “task analysis and self-motivation” (p. 67). As task-analysis involves planning for goals, and self-motivation stems from students’ self-efficacy beliefs, the following section presents student comments on their views of setting specific goals and their views of being self-efficacious.

*(i) Goal setting*

The importance of being interested in what is being taught is a key factor for the following student’s motivation to engage with the CCL curriculum. For him, it was essential that the information to be learned was relevant for his needs; if it wasn’t relevant, or if something was not very interesting he might start daydreaming. However, if something is interesting

*then it makes it a lot more interesting for me. (The subjects that)... I’m not interested in as much as others... I just try to take in as much as I can, but what’s not important to me I just leave it and what is important to me I try my best to take it in. (P14)*

If conscious ‘tuning-out’ due to lack of interest was the decision of the above student, then a determined effort to ‘tune in’ was the choice of this following learner.

*(If) I get tired but I just say to myself that I’m here in Trinity and I have to do the work and it’s benefiting to me so I have to just tune and listen.*

*Then when you go home you can tune out. You can watch the telly and relax. That's the way I look at it. (P15)*

For another student however, having clear goals are an essential part of controlling behaviour, in this case it was avoiding becoming bored and lethargic.

*I hate not doing anything, I get bored easily... (I like) a busy life ... I [like] keeping occupied (P1)*

Planning ahead also keeps this student going, because she "wants to go on (to) the second year of the course" and, at the end of it she anticipates that the rewards will be

*a good job in the end... even if it takes me five years, six years, or ten years (P1) .*

Similarly for this following student, the goal of undertaking the CCL was getting the certificate and the prospects of a dream job.

*I'd do anything to pass the course... So I can put it on my C.V. and get a good job. If you don't (pass the course)... it's just a waste of your own time. (P15)*

For Schunk (2005), goals enhance self-regulation through their effects on motivation, and self-evaluation of progress. For the learner below determination and self-belief is the key to success:

*I just decided that it's part of what I have to do. I just said to myself if I don't do it no one else will so I just plucked up the courage and said I'm going to do it and I'm going to pass it. I was determined. .. I think the way I learn I just listen and I just help people out and I just tune in and*

*know that I'm going to pass... to pass (the CCL) means that I'll have a life and have a job and I'll have loads of new friends. (P13)*

For another student having a challenge was the motivating factor. He said:

*Challenges makes me learn better, you know, you challenge me and I work a lot harder, and I become a better person all round... because if I want something, I actually fight for it. I would work day and night... to get it, if I want something... I am very determined to get what I want. (P8)*

The ultimate goal for this same individual was to return and fulfil an ambition – to become a Special Needs Assistant (SNA), a job which would be a labour of love for her. She explained:

*I want to be an SNA again. I actually was a special needs assistant beforehand, and I loved it, but my back kept me from doing it, because I wasn't able to lift them out of chairs or anything, so after this I'm actually going to go back and do an SNA course, and I need all of the spelling, and all of the computers and everything, so if I say, here's my certificate, I would like to try it, they can't turn me down, so basically to do what I love. (P8)*

#### 8.4.1 The Performance Phase (1): Self-control

It has been outlined above that social learning psychologists view the structure of self-regulatory processes in terms of three cyclical phases: "the forethought phase... the performance phase... and the self-reflection phase" (Zimmerman, 2002, p. 67). The following section presents the

'performance phase' of self-regulation, which falls into two main classes: self-control and self-observation (p. 68). (The class of self-observation is presented later below). The class of 'self-control' refers to the deployment of specific methods or strategies that were selected during the forethought phase.

Self-regulation of learning is not a single personal trait that individual students either possess or lack; instead, it involves the selective use of specific "powerful strategies" (Zimmerman, 2002, p. 66) that must be personally adapted to each learning task in order to attain particular goals. A number of adapted strategies that were used by CCL students are presented below. They are:

- i. Brainstorming;
- ii. Spidergrams;
- iii. Visual and auditory learning from PowerPoint presentations, and
- iv. Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic and Tactile (VAKT) learning.

Each of these strategies is now outlined in turn.

#### *(i) Brainstorming*

The technique of brainstorming was popularized by Alex Faickney Osborn through the book *Applied Imagination* (1953). In this work, Osborn systematized his creative problem-solving method which works by the method of association. In the context of the CCL programme, brainstorming is usually used a strategy to generate words and ideas from

students in relation to a topic, and is designed so that all learners are encouraged to participate in an active and animated way.

The process begins with a topic to be explored. Each participant is encouraged by the tutor to brainstorm by calling out a word relevant to the topic, and all the ideas are graphed onto one large exploding head (see Picture 5). For the following student, the process begins when the tutor draws a picture of an exploding head

*and then there's a brainstorm... we'd be shouting all of these ideas... about a certain topic, so say if your topic is 'college', then someone would (shout) travelling, students, freebies, whatever, all that kind of thing.. and you can discuss them... if they're on the board you don't have to try and think in your head. (P5)*

*Picture 5. Visual of exploding head: brainstorming*



This strategy can also be used individually, and has the potential to benefit students long-term. For this other student, brainstorming is beneficial because:

*when you think of loads of different words in your head, and just get them out of your head and write them down on a piece of paper. It's good because when I leave college next year I probably remember loads of things* (P9)

## (ii) Spidergrams

In the context of the CCL, brainstorming is a strategy used by a tutor or student(s), the function being to transfer information from the brain into a visual format with words. However, as these words are thematically disconnected, there may be a need by a student to organise the words into groupings. One way that CCL learners achieve this is through the use of a 'Spidergram'. This visual strategy is described as "a diagram with lines and circles for organising information so that it is easier to use or remember" (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus, 2011). A spidergram typically has

- A central image;
- A hierarchical structure;
- Nodes coming off each hierarchical line, and
- Lots of phrases and sentences.

The following student used a brainstorming exercise for generating her thoughts and then moved to using a Spidergram for shaping these thoughts. For her, there was a progression from initially learning about something through brainstorming: *"if I was learning about it for the first*



*time, (I'd use) the brainstorm"* (P5), to using a Spidergram for the organisation of thought or ideas: *"but then when you've learnt about it I'd do the Spidergram"* (P5). This learner clearly knew that there was a correct way of doing a Spidergram:

*(The topic) is put in the middle of the circle... and then you draw legs with ideas to do with that particular topic, kind of like the brain storm. It's shouting out to the tutor (and) in the Spidergram you put them on the legs... the proper Spidergram leg might be with say William Butler's (Yeats) marriage... his love life, and another leg coming out of it might be to do with his education, and another one would be whatever like, but with a brainstorm you just shout them out... a spidergram is more organised.*  
(P5)

Another student was keen to highlight her knowledge of using Spidergrams as an effective strategy for writing essays. Starting with a central circle containing the topic of the essay to be written about, she would plan it out using nodes coming off the central circle. Each node would contain an element of the essay to be written; it would have an

*introduction, paragraph one, paragraph two, paragraph three. I'd think really hard at home, go away and think what should I do for paragraph one, paragraph two, paragraph three, paragraph four, and the same paragraph of paragraph eight and the conclusion.* (P11)

This following student considered Spidergrams to be a useful strategy for gaining knowledge on how to make learning easier and more manageable. She found that

*it's a lot easier if I (use) a spidergram. It explains what you have to do and it explains a lot because it gives you an insight into what you are doing, what you are writing and what you needed to write. You're learning more. You're learning how to do it because otherwise if you didn't have a spidergram you wouldn't know how to do it. (P16)*

This strategy can be made more effective through colouring each node differently and understanding that the information contained in a colour-coded Spidergram can be more easily remembered. The same learner added that she used colour for aesthetic reasons also, using orange and red

*just to put a bit of colour in it and to make it look nice as well. It's no point doing a (Spidergram) if it's not going to look nice.*

This student also had a clear understanding of the effect colour had on her ability to learn and remember information. It didn't matter what sequence of colours were used; the information in the nodes could be any colour. To prove this point this student closed her eyes and remembered the Spidergram she had drawn for the research interview by remembering the colours used. She related correctly that in her drawing "*computers were blue, lectures yellow, maths red, journal brown and listening was blue*" (P16).

Her advice to other students was to

*think of a (Spidergram) and which way you're going to do it, then get markers and just do different colours and try to remember through the colours. When I highlight things like this, I can actually, without looking pick up stuff that I'm trying to get across, so it jumps out at me more and*

*I can remember things. Maybe the other students might find that interesting to do that. (P16)*

This following second-year student thought that Spidergrams were an important teaching and learning strategy and ought to be taught to first-year students. He recommended that an outline of the Mathematics module should be presented using a Spidergram, and this could be done by putting the word 'Maths' in the middle of the Spidergram, with arms (nodes) about

*adding... minus, (subtraction), on another arm there would be a time table, another arm a clock, then going (to the) cinema and timetables, and then another arm for train station timetables. (P12)*

### (iii) Visual and auditory learning from PowerPoint presentations

PowerPoint presentations in the context of the CCL consist of a number of individual "slides" that typically contain accessible text and graphics (for an example see Appendix 12). PowerPoint is frequently used by this author in the introduction of a new topic or theory, or to encourage debate and discussion in class. CCL students have also experienced a wide variety of PowerPoint presentations by lecturing staff throughout different schools within Trinity as they audit their chosen undergraduate lectures as part of the Inclusive Studies and Research (ISR) module. In the following section these lectures are described as ISR PowerPoints (as opposed to CCL PowerPoints) and most of these were not originally designed to be delivered to an audience of people with intellectual disabilities.

The benefit of PowerPoint has been debated: for Tufte (2003) school-children who are taught PowerPoint are being taught how to formulate client pitches and infomercials, rather than learning to write a report or an essay using sentences. For others there are no compelling results to prove or disprove that PowerPoint is more effective for learner retention than traditional presentation methods (Savoy, 2009).

It is argued below that PowerPoint presentations enabled CCL students to engage with their visual and auditory sensory receivers. In the context of this research, this author has found that the benefits of PowerPoint to aid learning for students are compelling. Learners appreciated the use of good pictures accompanied by a minimum of relevant words in presentations, and spoke about the benefits this strategy had over a more 'traditional' lecture where the lecturer speaks at length from a podium.

For these two CCL students what was good about an ISR PowerPoint was that

*you can see the words visually and can see pictures... if you don't see the words and the pictures... you're kind of lost, and you're wondering what (the lecturer) is going on about. So if you see the words on the screen it makes it easier for you to take down notes and re-write it in your (journal) afterwards as well. (P13)*

*I found it interesting because (the lecturer) was using the pictures in the (ISR) PowerPoint to tell a story of how the history came about, and then she was using times and dates and how the war and all affected it, how their history affected future events that came along. The PowerPoint was*

*very visual... she made everything really clear. It was very precise like she had all of the times and dates and everything correct. (P11)*

For these students, the lecturers' use of clear visuals coupled with the relevant language or key-words were strategies that enabled learners to remember the main elements of the lecture. For another CCL student however, the pace of the delivery of a PowerPoint was something that needed to be considered by the tutor. According to her, a PowerPoint needs to be stopped at intervals to allow a discussion to take place to ensure that everyone has understood what's been covered. The tutor should not wait until he or she finishes the PowerPoint; it is better

*to do a couple of slides, (then) discuss, another couple of slides, discuss, maybe half way, then discuss it, taking little chunks of it... so the tutor could double check that everyone in the class knows what he or she just did in the PowerPoint. (P5)*

For another student, pace and duration was important: the PowerPoint should continue for *"twenty minutes... it should not be too quick... (but) nice and slow"* (P11), and learners should have an opportunity to *"ask questions at the end on what we (have) learned"* (P11). The process of asking questions could take twenty minutes, so that the first part of a typical CCL two-hour class would consist of *"a round, a PowerPoint, a discussion, and then a break, that's an hour"* (P11).

A number of students commented on the importance of word-colour and font-size in the PowerPoint slides. In relation to font, a larger size was important –students felt that this was because a large font enabled all students to access the information on a slide as *"bigger print is better for*

*everyone to see"* (P10). A small size font has the effect of making some students squint, whereas a larger font was preferable for the following learner because *"I can't read anything below 14 – anything above 14 I can read"* (P11).

Coupled with font-size, the number of words per slide was also an important consideration for CCL learners. One student recommended *"probably three or two words, not too many words (in) black and white... and a colour picture to sum up all those words"* (P10). Another student however, recommended *"maybe five or six (words)... and easy language, and some easy words - not really hard fancy words because that's hard to remember"* (P5).

The choice of colour in slides was also something that impacted on the ability of students to learn from PowerPoint. This was because *"colour would be good because it makes it more eye catching, once it's not all black or something, some colour is needed"* (P5). For another student colour was *"important so people will be able to read more clearly, and understand. (With) dark colours it is harder to see the words"* (P7).

In general students spoke about the impact that carefully chosen pictures or photographs in CCL PowerPoints had on their ability to remember information. According to one student, what was good about a CCL PowerPoint on Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory (Gardner, 1983) was the tutor's ability to select accessible and memorable photographs of famous personalities that supported the theoretical side of

the presentation (Appendix 12). This choice of photographs had the effect of enabling the student to talk about the nature of intelligence with reference to an image remembered: *"I remember the guy on a wheelchair Stephen Hawking, and the other person Mother Theresa... (I can) see those people's faces"* (P12).

In a similar vein, the ability to remember through both listening to the lecturer, and looking at a picture (rather than the written text) on an ISR PowerPoint slide enabled the following student with literacy difficulties to remember the main points from a Classics lecture. He captured this information through graphing his notes while at lectures; he described this strategy thus:

*I was taking notes in this way - I was drawing pictures because I find writing and spelling difficult. I was drawing pictures on stuff that I thought was relevant to (the lecture)... my writing is pretty atrocious so I just drew the pictures instead. The lecturer was discussing the Greek bath houses and how it's built on top of the golden house... So... I drew an outline of the Greek bath house from the design point, I didn't draw any of the baths in I just left it blank and drew in Greek on it so I'd remember what it was from, like I drew the outline. So when I look over those notes again I know exactly what it was. (P3)*

Finally, students appreciated a printout of the PowerPoint that was easy to follow. This allowed learners to *"go home and read over"* (P1) what was covered on the day, and be able to talk about it with their peers.

#### (iv) Visual Auditory Kinaesthetic and Tactile (VAKT) Learning strategies

It can be argued that learning strategies such as Brainstorming, Spidergrams and PowerPoint presentations engage with the visual, auditory and kinaesthetic sensory receivers of CCL students. Dunn and Dunn's (1993) VAKT (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, & Tactile) style model recognises that there is a dominant style that defines the best way for a person to learn new information by filtering what is to be learned. This style may not always be the same for some tasks. The learner may prefer one style of learning for one task, and a combination of others for a different task.

An important principle in Dunn and Dunn's model is the idea that students' achievements are heavily influenced by relatively fixed characteristics (Dunn, 2003; Dunn & Griggs, 2003). However, a relatively recent overview of the model (Coffield, Moseley, Hall & Ecclestone, 2004) contains the claim that the learning styles of students changed substantially as they matured from adolescence into adulthood.

It is beyond the scope of this research to determine if learning styles of CCL students are a fixed characteristic. However, what follows are comments from a number of students that illustrate how they learn through the use of either one, or a variety of VAKT learning styles.

With reference to a visit to the Pergamon Museum on an international field trip to Berlin, the following student talks about a tactile style of learning



he used for finding out about ancient sculpture. He learned about the nature of the medium of the figures of the Pergamon Altar by

*actually walking up to touch the side to see what the textures like. It's like flat granite and it feels kind of like marble, but with kind of a rough tint on it because of the way it was scratched, cut out, you could see all of the little cuts where the designs were inside of it. (P3)*

For this learner the tactile act was far superior to the alternative method of looking up the Pergamon Altar in a book because by touching it

*you also get to feel where certain people made mistakes... one of the carvings in the marble that actually has a mistake in it, you can feel where it is when you go down on it. You can feel a slight indentation where the people who had cut into it had made a mistake, they obviously shaped it out on the stone, but when they cut it out you can feel the cracks in the indentations on the statues on the sides of them. (P3)*

Two other students also preferred one style of learning for a task. When learning how to read the time for a maths lesson, or count money, both students would find it easier to learn if a kinaesthetic approach was used, in other words if the coins were put in front of them and they were *shown* how to do the exercise, as opposed to reading the same exercise from a book. For one student

*everything really has to be (tactile), you know, or else I just wouldn't be able to do it. If we were doing maths or something, I actually have to be shown, I have to do it at the same time (as the tutor) - I just get confused*

*otherwise. For learning about time, I'd have to be shown on a clock if we're doing the time. (P8)*

Another learner learned by counting and moving around fake coins because it was

*easier to count and learn how to do the minus with the coins than on the page, because you're adding with the 50p and 20p coins, I got 70, so it's better than on the page. (P16)*

The following learner preferred using a combination of learning styles for putting information from his short-term memory into his long-term memory. If an assessment was coming up and he needed to remember something important, he would test himself by

*writing it down first. Then I would go over it and I would cover the page and see if I can remember it. This works for me doing it that way because you see it first, and then you can remember it and then if you've made any mistake, if you got anything wrong you could have a look back then and correct it the next time. (P13)*

The combination of kinaesthetic and visual learning style (i.e. writing it down and visually remembering the information), enabled the above student to improve his chances of remembering how to spell long words and put information into his long-term memory. Another student however, had a different strategy for dealing with difficult words: if this student got stuck on a big word she would use a combination of learning strategies for a difficult task. Firstly, she would

*try and break down the big word into small words. I'd break the sound down also. I'd chunk it. I'd also draw pictures around it or over the chunks. Like the word 'dictionary' – I draw a book and I'd draw pictures over the (parts of) the word I broke down. I remember breaking down the word – dic – tion – ary. I wrote it down but I said it a few times in my head. I'd try and remember the (whole) word for the next time. I'd keep repeating the word...or I'd write it on a bit of paper. (P16)*

In learning how to spell difficult words, the above student engaged with all the sensory receivers of Dunn and Dunn's (1993) learning style model.

This process started firstly with a visual dissection of the large word (dictionary) into smaller chunks (dic-tion-ary), followed by the use of an aural strategy, i.e. sounding out the word. This is then proceeded by the combination of a kinaesthetic and visual strategy where learning the small words (dic – tion – ary) is aided by the tutor drawing visual representation of the 'chunks'; for example: Dic = Dick Tracy; T = a cup of tea; I = an eye; on = something on (a table); ary = 'arry Potter (Figure 20).

*Figure 20. A visual representation of the word 'Dictionary'*



dic – t – i – on – ary

This is followed by either an internal sounding out of the complete word, or kinaesthetically writing the word out on paper.

In a similar vein, the following student remembered something difficult by associating what needed to be learned with something visual that is of personal significance to her. When attempting to remember the unusual surname of the Flemish artist 'Breugel', she associated this word with an image drawn out by the tutor on a flip-chart of a bagel, a horse bridle or a bridal gown. She said:

*the images of bagel, bridle and bridal helped me remember a very difficult artists name. It sounds like the most daftest thing I'd ever come across but it's better than telling me the name... it can be very frustrating when there's nothing (visual) in front of you. (P13)*

#### 8.4.2 Performance Phase (2): Self-Observation

It has been described above that the Performance Phase falls into two major classes: self-control and self-observation or monitoring (Zimmerman, 2002). The following section presents the class of 'self-observation or monitoring' which refers to "self-recording personal events... (and) cognitive tracking of personal functioning" (p. 68). In this study this includes students' awareness of the importance of time-management, being organised, taking the responsibilities of being a third-level student seriously, and an awareness of cognitive tracking, i.e. maintaining concentration in class.

CCL students were found to 'self-monitor' in a variety of different ways: these included a personal commitment to using time effectively outside college, and being pro-active in planning ahead and preparing for college.

In speaking about the time committed to studying at home, the following student spoke about how he plans in advance. At the weekend he

*sits down and (does) the homework for each day. I spread out the homework throughout through the weekend, so I can learn a bit more. I'm working towards getting a certificate so it's very important for me to do that... I like to have things organised, have the books ready in the bag for the next day. (P13)*

Being organised means being aware that success will not come without some level of effort. Like the student mentioned above, the following learner knows that one way to achieve success in passing assignments is to be organised, and this means writing down what needs to be done in a diary. She explained:

*I write down the assignments I have to do for each class in my diary, so that I remember to keep them. It's very important to put down my assignments and my homework in my diary... I look back on that and see what we did that day in the class, and that's how I remember. (P9)*

Keeping track of cognitive functioning was something that the following learner was keen to keep abreast of; for her it was important to constantly be attentive to the tutor and to be aware of how to cope with bouts of tiredness in class. In her opinion

*there's no point tuning out and not listening 'cause it's a waste of time coming into Trinity. Listening to the tutor is good 'cause the tutors are there to help you and if you tune out you're not getting the benefits whereas if you tune in you're getting all the benefits. (Sometimes) I get tired - I kinda tune out for one minute but then I say I wanta pass, I*

*wanta get through so I tune back in. If I get tired I just say to myself that I'm here in Trinity and I have to do the work and it's benefiting to me so I have to just tune and listen. Then when you go home you can tune out. You can watch the telly and relax. (P14)*

The following learner expressed a keen awareness of the consequences of becoming bored in class and how to address it. He describes that if he is not interested in something he loses focus, but he also has a strategy to counteract this. He elaborates on this point:

*I find it hard if I'm not interested in something to keep eye contact, it tends to break down my concentration. I lose interest and I get bored with it and I quit, I go and I leave it. (If this happens) I normally take a break and I try to listen to music or play a game on my phone so I can keep going. I take a few minutes to myself. (P3)*

This learner negotiated an arrangement with the tutor: if he feels under pressure in class he can take a short break to gather himself. Having time-out in the form of short regular breaks was something another student spoke about. He stressed the importance of working in stages and having breaks, because for him there was a need *"to be relaxed and get nice open fresh air and then come back again"* (P12). The break should be *"ten minutes or so, a short break, just to clear your head, just to get out"*, otherwise this student could get agitated and nervous (P12). Alternatively, for another student time-out could take the form of

*Having a little walk or going to the bathroom and splash a little water on your face to wake yourself up. And maybe sit in a different place in the classroom where you're not in the sun. (P15)*

The following student learned from experience that it was prudent to keep a "*regular check of his intake of fluids*" (P3) while attending college. This particularly applied to the time he spent attending undergraduate lectures. He continues:

*When it came to Roman and Greek architecture classes, the lectures were so long I used to bring an extra drink in with me during the day when I was doing it just to keep my brain going, keep it active. I learned it from television. It was a healthy eating (programme), and they were saying that... sugar levels would go down and it starts to make you tired and sleepy and stuff. So I've overcome that by taking a small drink of water or fruit juice into the class with me. (P3)*

This section outlined the two major classes of the performance phase: 1) the self-control phase and, 2) the self-observation phase which are processes that occur *during* behavioural implementation. The following section presents the self-reflection phase which refers to processes that occur *after* each learning effort.

#### 8.4.3 The Self-reflection Phase

There are two main classes of the self-reflection phase processes: self-judgement and self-reaction (Zimmerman, 2002, p. 68). Each of these classes is now presented in turn.

## 1. Self-judgement

One form of self-judgement, self-evaluation, refers to “comparisons of self-observed performances against some standard, such as one’s prior performance, another person’s performance, or an absolute standard of performance” (p, 68). CCL students are encouraged to self-evaluate by keeping a reflection journal of their experiences of learning while on the programme. These learners are given instructions in journal keeping based on Honey and Mumford’s (2000) model, which is a cyclical sequence of

- Having an experience
- Reflecting on it
- Drawing conclusions (theorizing), and
- Putting theory into practice to see what happens

(Coffield et al., 2004).

In the context of the CCL programme, self-evaluation through journal keeping is informed by an adaption of Honey and Mumford’s (2000) learning cycle model outlined above. A CCL student’s ‘typical’ written entry in a journal page would consist of a daily entry that:

- Describes a learning experience (what happened in class);
- Reflects on what was covered, (theory / subject matter), and
- Expresses emotional responses to a learning situation.



All students who were interviewed for this research did not keep a learning journal before commencing the CCL programme. Some students spoke that having a model to work from enhanced their ability to engage with this self-evaluation process. For this student it was easier to have a structure to engage with because

*it makes it less difficult and ... the way you have (a guideline) that's written down - first we do that, then we do that, and then we do that... and at the end, down the bottom of the sheets it says... what did you not enjoy?... So I put (it) down. Sometimes I like all of the stuff I did, and some of the classes I like three-quarters of the things I did. (P1)*

As described above, self-evaluation also refers to “comparisons of self-observed performances against... one’s prior performance” (p, 68). For these following two learners, what was good about self-evaluation was the enjoyment aspect of it as well as its potential for self-improvement. One student explained that he

*likes doing the reflection journals... if we do things a certain way and then you think back, you can think back and (see) if we could have done that better, or have done it differently... It's a way of trying to do things better. Doing things better for the next time, yeah. (P9)*

This following learner valued the power journals have for improving memorisation. She explains that

*if you don't write things down, you come back a couple of hours later and say oh, I don't remember doing this or that. It's best to keep a memory journal so you know that when you come to come back to it a couple of hours later you say oh, I remember doing this. (P3)*

For another student keeping a reflective journal not only helped him remember class content, it also offered the potential to relive cherished memories of the Trinity experience sometime in the future. Recording learning experiences was important for two reasons because

*It helped me to look back and I am able to remember what I did in class during the day... When I'm finished in Trinity College I'll be able to look back and remember what I did in college for the two years. Yeah, I'll be able to remember the classes that I did. (P2)*

If memorisation and nostalgia were the inspirational factors for keeping a journal for the above student, for another learner however, the regulation of motivation was the key element driving learning. The control processes of motivation and emotion has been described as volition, which is the "tendency to maintain focus and effort towards goals despite distractions" (Corno, 1994, p. 229). This student talked about how keeping a journal

*keeps you going. Keeping a journal means I wouldn't forget. If I'd forgotten I wouldn't have known what I'd have done. It helps you, it helps you to think back, because if I didn't (keep a journal), then I probably wouldn't remember. It makes you look back and say well I'm happy I've done that today. (P4)*

In a similar vein, for another learner, reflecting and being motivated meant that

*you could pass the CCL course. So you can get a piece of paper with your name on it and underneath it the class that you passed. (P8)*

Some students however, found the process of keeping a learning journal difficult initially but with persistence maintaining the journal became easier with practice. One student found it got easier because "*once you start you get used to it and then you know after a while how to do it*" (P10). Another learner spoke about the need for students with literacy difficulties to have access to an accessible 'tick box' loose page version of the journal (Appendix 13). If he was to design a sheet for this it would have boxes supported by visuals that states

*what did you do today in the class... what (are) you feeling today, sad, happy, angry, upset and this should be done every day after class. A student (with literacy difficulties) can tick a box about what he feels is good in a class, or if he feels happy. This is the sheet I'd make to make it easier, (because) something it's very hard.* (P5)

For the following learner understanding what to do for keeping a journal was not an issue; the problem evolved around the difficulty of the physical act of writing and the pain it caused her. She elaborates: "*My hand gets sore when I'm writing for ages, about ten minutes writing is all I can do*" (P9). A way to overcome this for her is to "*type it up, because I'm a good typer. I could put it in a little sheet, a word document, and that would make it easier 'cause my hand gets sore*" (P9).

Self-evaluation through journal keeping discussed above, which is the first class of the self-reflection phase, now gives way to the second class of the self-reflection phase which is called by Zimmerman (2003) as "self-reaction" (p. 68).

## 2 Self-reaction

Self-reaction involves engaging with one's emotions during the performance of learning. This can involve being aware of and engaging with feelings of "self-satisfaction and positive affect" which according to Zimmerman can enhance motivation (Zimmerman, 2002, p. 68).

For Järvenoja & Järvelä (2005, citing Corno, 1994), the volitional phase of learning, i.e. the "tendency to maintain focus and effort towards goals despite distractions" (p. 467), includes different integrating parts of the learning process, such as "selected goals, emotions and motivational experiences" (Järvenoja & Järvelä, 2005, p.467). For these authors there are several reasons for students' experienced emotions during learning: students' interpretations of the situation are influenced by "their former experiences as well as by their perceptions of themselves, and their situational, social and motivation for the task factors" (p. 467). To reach their learning goals students must regulate these emotions by using volitional control processes, and the recognition and regulation of emotional experiences is an essential part of this.

Research on emotions has shown that students experience a rich variety of emotions in academic settings (Schutz & DeCuir, 2002). Results show that academic emotions are significantly related to student motivation, learning strategies, cognitive resources, self-regulation and academic achievement (Pekrun, Goetz, Titz & Perry, 2002). Not only do the emotions themselves vary, but so do their sources. Learning situations instigate a variety of task-related and social emotions.

The following section presents CCL students' exploration and awareness of their emotions as they undertake a variety of learning situations on the CCL programme.

For the CCL student quoted below, being in touch with his emotions was very much related to understanding his own academic achievement and motivation for doing the course. He explains that being in touch with feelings are very important

*because it's good to let your feeling come out so people will know how you're feeling, instead of keeping them inside you all the time. I am a reflective person before because I think about myself and I think about others. It's important to let other people know how you're feeling so they can sympathise with you and talk you through it or be there for you if you need somebody, instead of them not knowing what is wrong. (P17)*

This particular student didn't have a problem sharing his feelings as long as the person he shared them with did not "*spread this around and let everyone else know*" (p17). He recognised that his learning journal was the place to record these emotions because it allowed him to

*put down what you did in class and how you felt the class went for you and how you learned in the class as well. It's good to look back on those things so you know yourself... you can look back and see how you felt. It's important to keep the journal for yourself and for the college coursework that you're doing as well... This keeps you going... It's good for yourself in the future to say this is what did back then. (P17)*

For another student however, being in touch with emotions through journal keeping is a strategy used for motivational purposes. The

importance of "*thinking nice thoughts*" (P10) meant that he strives to maintain a perpetual state of positivity. He explains:

*I have to think about my thoughts... if I feel good or bad, or sad today. I have to think nice thoughts (then) I am happy. (P10)*

This same student records this information in a journal so he can "*keep the story up to date, so I don't miss anything*". The way he learned to be in touch with his emotional state, he said, was aided by listening to the tutor's instructions. He felt that it was a tutor's job to teach students to have "*happy thoughts*" and once they've done this, students should be able to do it themselves. For this learner it was important that students were relaxed and calm in class; in his opinion it was only in this way that a safe learning environment could be established. He maintained that this type of learning space

*helps students to relax. It is an important part of being in class, that people are relaxed... Sometimes I find in class, (that) some people are giddy, always laughing, giggling, and I hate it. (P10)*

Being in relaxed state during learning was also important for the following learner. For her, listening to music before class helped her to keep calm; she related that

*music can relax me... when you're all relaxed and calm you're able to take in the information so you're not stressed or anything. It is necessary to be relaxed before you take in information that's going on in the CCL course. (P6)*

For this student, being upset or distressed were emotions that were not conducive to learning. She explained that

*if you're coming in and you're all stressed out and you're under pressure like, you wouldn't be able to take in the information, you'd be all over the place and things wouldn't work... if you're coming in to class and you're stressed out, you wouldn't be able to take in the information that's going on, then you'd be all in a panic... It's better to leave all those feelings at home... you should think about the positive things. (P6)*

Leaving unhappy feelings outside the classroom door was a very important strategy for this next student who saw it as a way to deal with stress and feelings of negativity. In his opinion

*it's very important to express yourself, to draw it out and get it out of your system. If you didn't do it you would be more miserable. (P15)*

The above quotes empathise how important it was for CCL students to engage with their emotions during learning and to record these feeling in a journal. Indeed, keeping a written record of emotions was something that the following second-year student thought was so important, that he wished to teach it to first-year students. For him it was a therapeutic process to be continually aware of his feelings, because

*writing your feelings down is good... it helps when you're upset (and) by writing it down I feel better after. (P12)*

This same student also saw the benefit of sharing this knowledge of emotional awareness and journal keeping by

*helping out and talking to the first year students by showing them how to do the journal... in this way they could understand it because it's coming from me. I would write it down on the board and use a Spidergram. (P12)*

For some students, one of the main methods of exploring and understanding emotions was engaging with the CCL modules that covered the expressive arts. For these learners, undertaking the painting and poetry modules were catalysts for becoming aware of and stirring their emotions. In the Art and Design module, students engaged with and explored the elements of art, and looked at how colour, line and texture can be used to evoke or express feelings. In the Creative Arts Participation and Performance (CAPP) module, students studied the work of famous poets before progressing onto creating their own poetry.

Most students who were interviewed never wrote poetry before, and a few who studied poetry at school found it difficult and tedious. However, while undertaking the CAPP module these learners gradually became to enjoy the process of studying poets and their poetry. Creating poetry allowed students to express their feelings, and it offered them the opportunity to put these emotions onto paper (for examples see Appendix 14).

This student learned to express herself by writing her own poems; she was able to write her

*emotions and feelings down onto paper. Writing down what's in my head, my friendships and my thoughts... I've never in my life done that before. (P1)*



While attending undergraduate lectures as part of the ISR module, one student studied two poems by Philip Larkin (1922-1985) – *Wild Oats* and *An Arundel Tomb*. This experience allowed her to engage with the subject-matter and sentiment of the poems and relate this to her own life. The poem *Wild Oats* was significant for her because

*It was about a girl who tried to get on in life and she tried to get her job and she loved roses and... it reminds me of (myself) sometimes. Like doing work and baby-sitting, it reminds me of that... It sometimes reminds me that when life is difficult I just shy away from it and then on the other hand I just stand up and say I have to get on with it. (Studying poetry) helped me gain an insight into myself... into the person that I am. I learned a bit more about poets and the way they feel and their writing the poems. It reminds me of me. A bit like me when they are writing.*

(P16)

This following student also found that studying the medium of poetry enabled him to become more emotionally aware. He wrote poems and

*Rap songs. Ten weeks ago. I wasn't able to make rhyming. Now I'm expressing how I'm feeling, what feelings do I have inside me, (when I'm feeling happy I write nice poems...some nice ones, other times (I write) some mad ones and some horror ones.* (P12)

The same student also found that the medium of painting enabled him to express

*how I was feeling... You draw the colours of your feelings; if you're angry you're feeling red, if you're feeling down and sad, sad is blue, and black means you're feeling evil, and green would mean you're a bit happy, and*

*yellow would probably mean you're delighted. Yellow's light – that's what delight means. And white, white can be the same as yellow. Light. Black and white and grey means sad days and the rain and snow... I learned that whenever you're feeling like anything, happy, sad, or angry or evil, disappointed you just draw it out (and) sometimes it might put me in a happy mood, and end up drawing happy colours. (P12)*

The above quote highlights the importance of the arts as a vehicle for raising awareness of and controlling a student's emotional state. The final comment of this section on self-reaction comes from a learner who enjoyed making artwork because it relaxed him. The important element for him was the action or 'doing' element of the process. He explains that

*cutting out a collage, or doing a drawing makes me feel more relaxed... I'm always active and I need time to myself to relax me, because I am too busy sometimes, too active all of the time... art helps me relax. (P17)*

This final comment brings the second class of the self-reflection phase, i.e. self-reaction, to a conclusion. The self-reflection phase examined how CCL students engaged with their emotions during the performance of learning, and how feelings of "self-satisfaction and positive affect" (Zimmerman, 2003, p. 68) enhanced their motivation, self-beliefs, self-management and goals.

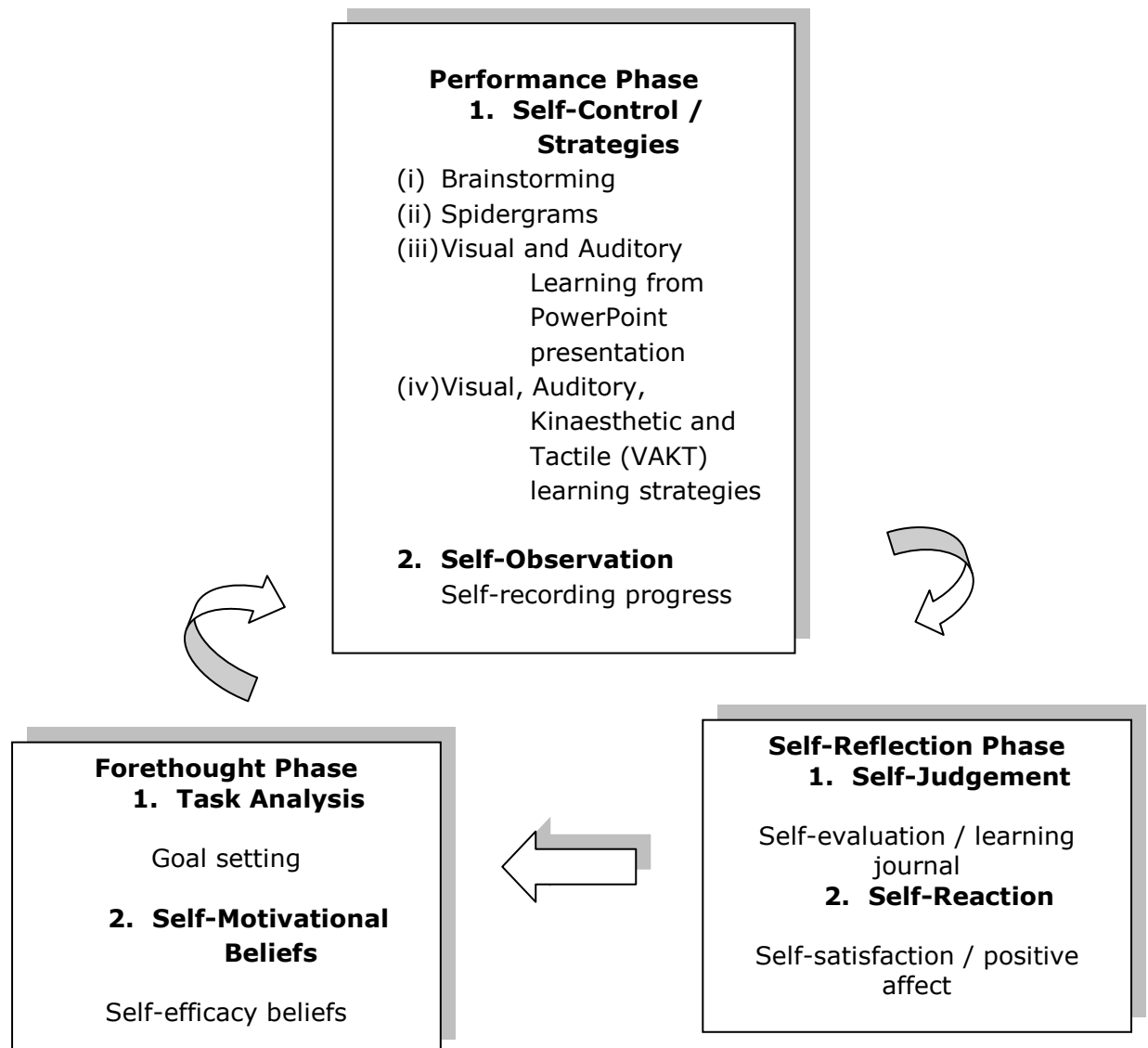
This section was begun by viewing the structure of the self-regulatory processes in terms of three cyclical phases:

1. The forethought phase
2. The performance phase and
3. The self-reflection phase

(Zimmerman, 2002, p. 67).

The phases and sub-processes that have been outlined above in each phase are now presented in Figure 20 below.

*Figure 20. Phases and Sub-phases of Self-Regulation for CCL students. Adapted from Zimmerman, (2002).*



## **8.5 Learning as collective meaning making**

### **8.5.0 Introduction**

The 'learning as collective meaning making' category moves from individual meaning to collective or shared meaning. In this mode of learning CCL students, plus the tutor and/or parents/key-staff form a community in which they learn together through discussion and dialogue. The difference between this category and categories 1 and 2 is that the learners do not only learn on their own, but also participate in a dialogue with others in order to create new understandings. In this way, it is argued that there are many 'teachers' both in the college environment itself and outside the class either at home or in the workplace, who collectively create meaning.

As introduced in Chapter 4, Pang's (2003) structural and the referential aspects (p.148) are presented in Table 10 which offers a view of the interrelatedness of a referential aspect and a structural aspect for this category.

Table 10. Pang's (2003) *referential and structural aspects applied to learning as collective leaning making.*

### Category 3

#### Learning as collective meaning making

| <b>Referential aspect</b><br><b>('what' aspect)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Structural aspect</b><br><b>('how' aspect')</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collectively learning from discussions and debates</li> <br/> <li>2. Peer support and home assignments</li> <br/> <li>3. Collective learning from parents/guardians</li> <br/> <li>4. Collective learning from ISR mentors</li> <br/> <li>5. Collective meaning making through situational and contextual learning</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students sharing / being exposed to alternative viewpoints in the classroom</li> <br/> <li>2. Awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses / using peers' strengths as a resource</li> <br/> <li>3. Practical support with home assignments / imparting values</li> <br/> <li>4. Peer support at lectures and pre/post lecture study group activities</li> <br/> <li>5. Skills learned in the 'real-life' situation of the work environment.</li> </ol> |

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### 8.5.1 Revisiting constructivist theory

In Chapter 4 it was argued that constructivism was not a unified theory, but rather a conglomeration of different positions with varying emphases. In reviewing the literature on constructivism, Tynjälä, (1999, p. 364) summarises the following branches of constructivist thought:

- Radical or cognitive constructivism;
- Social constructivism;
- The sociocultural approach;
- Symbolic interactionism, and
- Social constructionism.

What is common to these diverse views is the metaphorical description of the acquisition of knowledge as “a building process in which knowledge is actively constructed by individuals or social communities” (p. 364).

Constructivism, therefore rejects the idea that knowledge is passively received; rather it is “a learner’s active continuous process of constructing and reconstructing his or her conceptions of phenomena” (p. 364).

These schools of thought differ mainly in the role that they give to the individual and the social aspects of learning. The radical or cognitive constructivist stresses individual’s knowledge construction processes and mental models, whereas the social constructivists or constructionists are more interested in social, dialogical and collaborative processes, placing the emphasis on language and discourse. Attempts to include both the

individual and the social aspects are seen in the sociocultural approach, symbolic interactionism and social constructivism (Gergen 1995; Philips, 1995; Shotter, 1995).

The phenomenographic tradition of research on learning (as outlined in Chapter 4) has also been seen as a version of constructivism (Biggs, 1993). However, phenomenographers make a distinction between their position and constructivism: learning is either 'constructed' (i.e. learners create their own private reality which is separate from the real world), or, 'constituted' (i.e. the learner grows into a world already formed) (Marton & Booth, 1997). This phenomenographic non-dualistic perspective is therefore fundamentally different from individual and social constructivist perspectives of learning: phenomenographic research on learning is based within a constitutionalist framework where learners participate in an ongoing constitution of that reality (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). This perspective differs significantly from a constructivist framework on learning in which learners construct their own private reality and grow into a world already constructed.

#### 8.5.2 Learning as constitution in CCL students

It has been argued above that proponents of phenomenography use the term 'to constitute' rather than 'to construct' when referring to learning. For Marton and Booth (1997) the world is "not constructed by the learner, nor is it imposed upon her; it is constituted as an internal relation between them" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p.13). Consequently,

phenomenographers recognise that reality is constituted through a reciprocal and intertwined emergence of human beings and their world (Bowden & Marton, 2004). Human understanding is a human-world relation (Pong, 1999) where experience is seen as internal relationships between the individuals and their surroundings, described in terms of learners' meanings of phenomena (Anderberg, 2000).

The following section presents examples of how students on the CCL programme learn through a process of understanding which relies on social interaction and collaboration in meaning making. The focus in this category is collective or shared meaning, where both students and tutor from a community of learners.

This learning is underpinned by facilitative teaching (Espiner, Hartnett & Lyons, 1991; Murray, 1993; Heron, 1989) that takes place in the NIID. This is a method of instruction that helps students to actively constitute knowledge by assigning tasks and assessment procedures that enhance this process. For example, in Discovery Learning (Heron, 1989, see Chapter 2), students explore course content through working in small groups which discuss a particular topic. Each group is then asked to present the essence of their discussion in a form such as a debate. Group discussion then follows during which the tutor presents theoretical input and/or feedback.

The following section introduces the first of five sub-categories. These are:

1. Collective learning from discussions and debates
2. Peer support and home assignments



3. Collective learning from parents/guardians
4. Collective learning from ISR mentors
5. Collective meaning making through situational and contextual learning.

#### 8.5.3 Collective learning from discussions and debates

The following CCL student found that “discussions and debates” (P9) were a good way to learn from each other. This way of learning enabled students to exchange views that created new knowledge which was then shared through collective reflection. She explained:

*Just say if a few of us were in class and say if another student has an idea that I thought it was a good idea, but I didn't agree with it. So I say, I'd put my point across and then there's a whole big debate thing about it and everyone starts joining in. (P9)*

Getting involved in this kind of discussion was important for this student as it encouraged her and her fellow students to form opinions and also be open to other viewpoints. She elaborates:

*It gives you different ideas. (For example) the five of us in the group are different, I think about things in a certain way and then you come across someone (else) and you say to them: "How do you think different about something?"... I've met someone else who had different ideas a couple of times and it's changed my opinions. (For example) with one of the Social Work students on placement I was talking to one of them about the*

*Spanish Inquisition in America, and we started talking about different ideas and then (I said) "I never thought about it that way," and it was good. (P9)*

For the following student, listening was one of the most important qualities a student should have to engage in learning through social interaction. She felt that *"if you listen to other people's opinions, you're getting each other - whereas if you're not listening to each other's opinions you're not getting the story, you're drifting off"* (P13). In order to make group work successful, this learner felt that it was important to *"take turns and don't shout over each other... and get feedback"* (P13).

Respectful listening and supportive collaboration also allowed another learner how to *"fit in and get on well with people"* (P15). For this student the realisation that *"other students were nervous as well"* was encouraging. He explained:

*I learned how to get on well with people - very well. When I first came here I didn't think that I'd fit in, I was a bit nervous. (It got easier) by meeting new people and they were nervous as well. We all worked together and just put our heads together and always sit together in classes, at lunch-time at break-time and always go out and chat. What's important is to get out and do something with other people rather than being on your own - it's not a nice feeling at all. Being around these people stops this... It's very important and we support each other by encouraging them. (P15)*

One by-product of CCL students' social interactions and collaborations in learning is the development of friendships and support structures within

the institute that learners can tap into. For some students this bonding *"builds confidence"* (P17) and promotes a sense of *"good community where ... lots of people have lots of ideas"* (P17). This following student explained:

*When I was in my first year I felt nervous coming in... I was a bit shy, I didn't even know anyone. Now I'm happy because I have friends I can work with... if I wasn't in for a week they would help me because when I come in they would tell me what was happening in class and what they were doing and stuff. (P17)*

For another student asking for help from a classmate was something that makes sense because it makes learning easier; it increased his knowledge base as well as his ability to develop certain skills necessary for passing the course, such as *"preparing and presenting an assignment"* (P2). However, this student had particular opinions about the preferred structure of study groups and the best way to learn with them. He elaborates:

*A small group (is better). About four other people to work with, not a large group... (It's important that) other people are not talking - I find this difficult to work with, walking in and out of the room... I kind of just ignore them, and get on with the work. (P2)*

For another student however, five people working together was the preferred size, with the maximum being six. This learner explained:

*When it's over that certain amount it just gets messy, there's so many people arguing to basically to get their point across. I find it hard to work*

*in a group with certain individuals. Because there's so much going on around the room that it distracts me. (P6)*

If things get too difficult for this learner he has the choice of opting out and working on his own. For him it is important to be allowed the opportunity to "escape" from this group. He said:

*When I really need to do something... when I need to focus and get an idea of what I'm doing, (I'll work on my own), just so I can get my head around it. Sometimes I find it hard, especially when I'm in a big group and it's even harder to concentrate. Then I'll come back and do the group work with the group. (P6)*

Another student had similar feelings about distractions in relation to working with groups. For her group work was an excellent way to learn, however it needed to unfold without her being distracted by the antics of her peers. She explained:

*I find it difficult to learn when other students are making noises. I find it hard to concentrate. I don't mean to get angry when people are talking, but I can't do my work. I can get easily distracted by this because I like to be focused on my group. (P1)*

The issue of the protocol while interacting with fellow CCL students was also addressed by another learner who expected that "*people in class should behave themselves*" (P7) in an appropriate manner. He continued:

*Otherwise you wouldn't be able to learn anything at all if they were messing around... you wouldn't be able to do anything. (These people)*

*need to be supervised, they need to behave themselves and pay attention, they can't just be running around the place, you know... (Learning) would be made easier if they come in and they sit down, and that's it, that's the way it goes. It would make me feel annoyed actually because (we) are here to learn. (P7)*

For the following student, group work was good *"for putting things together... like a jig-saw"* (P16). However, a problem of group-work for her was when a group member or members did not carry out the required work for a particular project. She related that this lack of co-operation put pressure on the other members of the group *"who really want to do the stuff"* (P16). She said:

*Sometimes it can be difficult, one person is doing the work and other people didn't bring in stuff and they don't want to do stuff.... It kinda puts pressure on people who really want to do the stuff.... I just take them aside and I wouldn't give out I just bring them to one side and in a polite way I'd say you're in the group and if everyone's chipping in then everyone should chip in and everyone should do the work. (P16)*

The following comment highlights a student's preference for working in a classroom setting where the support of both tutor and students is present to facilitate learning. In this way there are many 'teachers' in the class, all of whom form a community of learning and support. This student explained this was co-operative problem solving, through awareness of each other's strengths:

*Whatever (other students) need help I can help them, but what I need help with, they can help me. Our problems are different. But you get to know what the person's good at... I found all different strengths and*

*weaknesses in the class because I got to know people in the class through groupwork. (P8)*

However, another student preferred to learn in class because of the opportunity to ask questions of either the tutor or a peer for clarification.

He explains:

*In class there are some friends that can show you what you're exactly supposed to do... If I didn't understand something I'd also ask the tutor a few questions. (P7)*

A number of learners felt comfortable asking a tutor for help because their experiences of CCL college tutors were different to their previous encounters with school teachers. For one student CCCL tutors were easier to talk to. He continued:

*The role of a teacher is to teach the class and encourage the class on in their learning... the teacher is there for the students and make them pass; the teacher wants the students to do well. The teacher is not like "I'm out here to get you." It's like I want you to do well and I'm here to help you if you need it. They are more (approachable)... they ask you how do you find the class, is it hard, do you find it easy, and they are there for you... any time. (P13)*

Another student related on the encouraging manner of the maths tutor.

She said:

*(The tutor's) help and support got me through... She just explained the maths problem; she did her own diagrams and expressions on the board so you could see it. She said try doing it that way. I did it that way, it was*

*different. I asked her to check it for me and I still got the same answer (as her).... she gave good feedback. (P11)*

For learners it was important to feel comfortable enough to ask questions in order to learn something new. One student explained that a "good class session" (P5) for her would be having the opportunity to listen to questions from others and to be able to seek clarification through further questioning. If she didn't understand something she would take the following course of action:

*I'd put my hand up and ask my tutor to say it again. Sometimes there are times when I don't understand something (and) I'd put my hand up straight away. It's important to ask (the tutors) questions as well if I'm not sure or something... the tutors here are good at answering questions. It helps me on the answers, and I can write them down. (P5)*

Asking questions in class can be seen as a catalyst for collective learning, and this can take the form of student to student, or tutor to student(s) engagement. For the following learner what made the class attractive was the tutor's ability to engage students through dialogue and opportunities to ask questions. She said:

*I didn't know what history was until I joined (the history tutor's) class on Wednesday. We all talk about James Connolly as a group... then we are able to ask questions... she allows you time to ask questions... and I put my hand straight up before someone else starts talking...I get in straight away... (and) that makes learning easy for me.(P1)*

#### 8.5.4 Peer support and home assignments

CCL students found very creative ways to make the learning process a little bit easier for themselves. One learner commented about the being aware of the variety of different learner's strengths and weaknesses; the strategy she used was to tap into the collective knowledge bank that friends could offer especially for home assignments. She explained:

*My friends help me. Yeah, we all help each other if somebody gets stuck. We'd work in pairs – (I'd say) would you help me with this essay, you can't copy off me, but I'll give you a hand... if I have to get one part of my homework done and I ask (my friend) could you help me with the maths? 'Cause she's good at maths and she would help you. Somebody would ask me (for help with) English, or drama. (P1)*

Another group of students were more strategic in their approach: they formed a homework club where they helped each other out. A member of this group elaborated:

*It's something like this: It goes ... if I knew how to do the maths homework, and (my friend) might know how to do the drama homework, we'd help each other. It's really good... helping another person because it proves that you understand it and plus your helping your friend so that's good. It works both ways, unless they tell you how to do it wrong and then the two of you just do it wrong (laughs). If neither of us understood how to do a particular task, we'd usually just go home and we'd call each other over Skype... I'd be able to do maths, but I wouldn't be able to do the drama, but (my other friend) could do the drama, and the maths, but she might not be able to do the computers like, so then I'd Skype her. (P5)*



### 8.5.5 Collective learning from parents/guardians

An arrangement such as the above emphasises negotiation and sharing of meanings through discussion and collaboration. It can be argued that engaging in such collaborative learning and discussions can lead CCL learners to a greater understanding of their reality. However, this process does not only happen for students in the classroom: learning can also take place outside the college in collaboration with the student's family, and/or with support from dedicated agency key-staff.

Some students commented that if they needed help with home assignments they would have a go at trying to complete the task themselves; alternatively they would ask a more knowledgeable parent/guardian. This student said that if she "*got stuck with words*" (P8) she would take the following steps:

*I try and break down each word, break the sound down. Sometimes I'd just try to figure it out. I'd either look it up or I'd either ask my parents what it means... I ask my Mam or my Dad. But I try and remember the word for the next time. I go over the page again. (P8)*

In a similar vein another student would have not hesitate to ask his family "*if they could they spare a half an hour*" to "*go over (the problem) with them*" (P2). For other students however, the influence of family goes beyond assisting with home assignment problems – for these students the family was the imparter of values that students learned and took beyond the home environment. This following student explained how his introduction to and understanding of values started in the home with his parents:

*My father and mother would have told me different things... how to behave in life and how to present yourself well. He has an old saying: "respect yourself and others will respect you". That's to say when you're nicely dressed and nicely presented and well behaved, and then people will have great respect for you. That's important for me... in everyday independent living life, if you are aggressive or rude to people they will have no time for you, but if you're well spoken and nicely dressed people will listen to you and respect you. (P11)*

For a different student, the family was also the learning community where she gained the confidence to survive life's challenges; when she went to college it was her parents' words of wisdom that motivated her. She explained:

*I was brought up a particular way – I was (shown how) to be safe. I was shown how to be more independent and don't keep things bottled in and (the need to) talk. I was shown how to stand up for myself at home. My Da would explain stuff to me and my Ma would explain things in English and Maths. My Da said to me... you can do it, you have the strength to do it, he knows I can do it 'cause I have the strength to do it. He'd say: you can do it. You have the strength in you. So that's where I got my confidence from. (P8)*

One student who lived independently spoke about the residential staff who supported him and who were helpful with his home assignments. He said:

*I went to the staff and I got them to read (the assignment) for me. I started it on my own and then I got a bit of help from one of the guys who works in my house. He helped me read it... and then I put it all together. If there is something that I didn't understand I got him to explain it to me,*

*so... I listened, I tried to keep as much eye contact as I can, and like if there was something I didn't understand I'd ask him to explain it better. I use my eyes and my brain. (P3)*

#### 8.5.6 Collective learning from ISR mentors

One of the mandatory modules of the CCL programme is the Inclusive Studies and Research (ISR) module. The aim of this module is to allow CCL students to audit undergraduate educational programmes alongside the wider student body at Trinity. Within the ISR module students identify a discipline of interest and attend a series of lectures offered by a variety of schools within Trinity. As students attend lectures they are supported by academic mentors who meet them to discuss and revise lecture notes before or after classes.

Learning in collaboration with these mentors forms a very important part of the collective meaning making for CCL students as one student explained:

*You can learn different stuff from your mentor... what their course is like. They can help you out in aspects of your course like if you're having trouble with something. They can let you know that you can do things in different ways – you can do it that way, you can look it up this way; they can help you out as well. You ask them for advice if you are having any problems with your learning. I find that very helpful. We meet our mentor at lunch in the Buttery (canteen) and we have a chat about how... how their course (is) going. So it's kind of like a friendship as well; someone who can help you out at work or college or both. (P13)*

For learners who are initially nervous about attending lectures, having a mentor can help to alleviate this. This student explained how he and his classmates managed the stress of the first few lectures:

*At the beginning I was nervous but having a mentor helped. They're there to help you... knowing that's there someone else in the lecture with you really helps. It also helps when some of the people in your class are (going to) lectures as well, and having them there as well gives you a feeling of being safe. (P13)*

As well as being a reassuring presence, mentors also supported the learning process for CCL students through collaborating in study group activities. The following student explained how this was an effective way of learning:

*I found it a good way for learning, because (the mentors) can help you; they can help you to understand the Power Point a bit more. We met with them once a week at lunch time 20 minutes before the lecture and anything you don't understand you can tell them and they will help you to understand a bit better. My mentor gave me the notes because I found it a bit hard to take down everything in the lecture. (P2)*

Another mentor helped by sitting near a CCL student during lectures and discretely answering his questions. This enabled this student who struggled with literacy, to take down notes during class and ask questions. The conversation after the lecture also exposed him to another person's viewpoint. He explained:

*I was sitting down the back (of the lecture hall) near (my mentor) because she'd be taking down notes and she'd be asking me questions while the*

*lecture was going on... she also discussed the lecture after we finished our class. We'd discuss what the teacher said and what we thought about it, and then she would basically just talk about it and then she'd say goodbye and she'd go and get her lunch... it was a discussion really, a casual discussion. I just found it very interesting because another person's point of view - her point of view was good. I had my own (point of view) but to get someone else's viewpoint on it was good, because it makes you understand there's more ways than you actually think to learn. It made all of the difference really. (P6)*

#### 8.5.7 Collective meaning making through situational and contextual learning

Situational and contextual learning (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Kirshener & Whitson, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991) focuses on the places in which people learn and the social interaction and collaboration that this involves. Theorists of this learning emphasise that tasks should simulate real-life situations where the knowledge is to be applied in the future.

The workplace is a real-life context where CCL students undertake their job placement or work experience during the Career Development module. This module explores the purpose of work and the purpose of work options, and develops the knowledge and skills for locating, securing and maintaining employment.

This following student spoke about his experience of work, a place where he learned "*new skills and things*" such as "*franking letters*" (P7). He found that being in the workplace (rather than being in a classroom),

helped him learn “slightly different stuff” as well as the “*day to day tasks*” of the job. He explained:

*You’re in the work environment (and) it gets you out there so you know what work is actually like. I was shown how to use a franking machine, and I find I learn best from being shown (what to do)... I also learn about how to scan letters on the computer (and) logging the stuff you finished scanning on your computer on Excel. (P7)*

Another student also valued the opportunity to learn new skills in his placement in an American investment banking and securities firm. This company also allowed him to build on the skills learned in the classroom and to transfer them to the work environment. He explains:

*I was typing the post in the computer... I learned new skills in how other people work in the company, how the company works, and what people are like there... I (also) signed a confidentiality form. That means that you’re not going to mention certain things outside the company. I understand why they have it because it’s personal information and you don’t want other people knowing what they do. That’s something new I learned. (P13)*

This journey toward work placement for this student started by practicing the presentation skills he had learned while undertaking the CCL course “*once or twice a day for three or four days... or at home in front of a mirror.*” Preparing in this way enabled him to deliver a PowerPoint presentation to the employees of the bank the week before he started so they could know a little bit about their future colleague. He elaborated:

*I felt nervous at first because the room was packed full of people that you don't know... I learned that you take your time and go through it slowly. And people are listening to you and they are all really quiet and you're wondering if they are listening ... I learned that when people are quiet they are listening to you...I got a round of applause at the end and I got a few laughs out of them also. (P10)*

The presentation paid off for this student because he found that it helped him connect with the people who worked alongside him; they knew a little bit about him and were open to engaging him in conversations. For this student learning how to socialise in a real-life situation was an important form of learning. He said:

*I found that people were very nice and I was getting on with them. They were all very busy and they were very pleasant. They all chatted to me and we went out for lunch... you get to find out what their lives are like outside work. What they do, their hobbies. Do they have families or they don't? Where they live? What they like about work? It's important to know this so you can chat to that person and ask how's life for you in general? How are things at home? Or are you going away this weekend? (P10)*

Having the opportunity to learn in real-life situations can be transformative for some CCL students. For the following student situational learning in a well known national supermarket chain was a “*big learning thing*” (P11) which led to an increase in a number of skills. He elaborated:

*Coming on this course... and my work have been the biggest things in my life... I've come on so well in everything. Work would be a big learning thing there because I learned all about hygiene, I learned it the hard way but I did learn how to be clean and proper and I learned how to work with others and I also learned how to read the 24 hour clock I'm proud of that. I also learned to be in time for work and to work by myself and I feel that work has made me to be a great people's person because all the customers are all pure mad about me. (P11)*

This student's work experience also led to an increase in self-confidence and self-awareness that may have not been possible anywhere else. As he gained more confidence since he started in employment he developed a "different attitude" (P11) towards himself. He explained:

*I couldn't care less any more what people think of me. I said to myself that I'm just going to be friendly with everybody and I have a 'couldn't care' attitude and I found that if I had this attitude...people responded better. (Now) I'm my own person and... this has brought me out of my shell and I find that when I'm been friendly and been nice to people, people get a sense of who I (am). (P11)*

Situated learning has been criticised for focusing on the use of concrete, episodic information and for ignoring the development of generalisable, abstract knowledge and higher-order thinking (Bereiter, 1997; Ohlsson & Lehtinen, 1997). However, as evident from the remarks of the above student it is clear that the knowledge and skills gained from undertaking the CCL course, as well as from the real-life situation of the work environment, has given him the opportunity to grow and develop on a



very deep emotional level. An acceptance of himself as a person with a "mild disability attending Trinity (who has) come on a lot" gives him the confidence to "casually say to people that even though I may have a learning disability I'm still able to do something like this" (P11). He concluded:

*Usually I get credit and I get praise, like "fair play to you you're doing very well", and people admire me for the fact that I have a disability and I'm going ahead and doing something with my life. (P11)*

## **8.6 The supportive environment and learning**

Learning is a complex task which is dependent on a combination of factors, for example the learner's background, the teaching practices the learner may experience, and the learning environment (Dart, Burnett, Purdie, Boulton-Lewis, Campbell & Smith, 2000). Teachers' and students' perceptions of classroom learning environments have received increasing attention from educators (Pace, 1963; Moos, 1987; Chavez, 1984; Fraser, 1994). It is noteworthy to recognise that classroom environments are human environments, and accordingly, research in this field has focussed historically on the psychosocial dimensions of the environment – those aspects of the environment that focus on humans behaviour in origin or outcome (Boy & Pine, 1988).

The concept of environment, as applied to educational settings, refers to "the atmosphere, ambience, tone, or climate that pervades the particular setting" (Dorman, 2002, p. 1). Dart et al. (2000) showed the benefits of

learning environments that are “safe, supportive, and that offer helpful relationships” (p. 269). Such environments are seen by Paakkari et al. (2011) as spaces that support conditions for the development of students’ own views, i.e. “personal meanings” (p. 709) that can influence both individual students and their peers. For Doorman (2002), the “supportive classroom environment” (p. 1) contains the five elements of:

1. Student direction – Do students determine specific activities or outcomes of the lesson?
2. Social support – Is the classroom characterised by an atmosphere of mutual respect and support among teachers and students?
3. Academic engagement – Are students engaged and on-task during the lesson?
4. Explicit quality performance criteria – Are the criteria for judging the range of a student performance made explicit?
5. Self-regulation – Is the direction of student behaviour implicit and self-regulatory? (Doorman, 2002, p. 2)

The following section presents CCL students’ comments on the impact of the learning environment with regard to the CCL programme. Firstly, students’ experiences of this context as a ‘safe space’ are discussed; this space is informed by participants establishing a “group culture” (Hunter, 2009, p. 42) thus creating a learning environment that is characterised by an atmosphere of mutual respect between tutors and students. Secondly, this section concludes with students’ comments on the development of

“personal meanings” (Paakkari et al., 2011, p. 709); this process unfolds when the context of the classroom becomes a place where the atmosphere is such that learners feel comfortable to become more aware of their own thoughts and the thoughts and opinions of their peers.

Table 11 offers a view of the interrelatedness of a referential aspect and a structural aspect (Pang, 2003. p.148) for this category of ‘The supportive environment and learning’.

*Table 11. Pang’s (2003) referential and structural aspects applied to ‘The supportive environment and learning’.*

### **Category 5**

#### **The supportive environment and learning**

| <b>Referential aspect</b><br><b>(‘what’ aspect)</b>                                                                                                                                              | <b>Structural aspect</b><br><b>(‘how’ aspect’)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1.</b> The learning environment as a safe-space.</li> <br/> <li><b>2.</b> The learning environment and the development of personal meanings</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1.</b> Students’ thinking expanded through the establishment of group culture which results in an atmosphere of mutual respect between tutor and students, and between students.</li> <br/> <li><b>2.</b> A climate that supports students to transform long-held personal opinions of by applying curriculum to life-experiences.</li> </ol> |

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#### 8.6.0 The learning environment as a 'safe space'

Within the context of the NIID, staff put a significant amount of time and resources into creating a safe-space for CCL students so they can learn and develop on a number of levels – personally, academically and emotionally. A 'safe-space' has been defined above as a learning environment that students perceive as safe, supportive, and offering helpful relationships (Dart et al. 2000), and where teachers present opportunities for "exploration, inquiry, and experiment by providing problems to be solved" (p. 269).

One of the first classroom activities for new CCL students (as well as returning students) to create a safe space is creating a 'group culture', which is defined by Hunter (2009) as "how we are together... the way we do things around here... the group agreement, the group contract, charter, ground rules, mores, understandings or desired behaviours" (p. 42). Students are facilitated by the tutor to come up with their own ground rules or list of behaviours that they feel is desirable as a group. In this way a collective decision is reached which for Hunter (2009) is part of the "the technology of co-operacy" (p. 23). Underpinning collective decision making include values and beliefs that:

- All people are intrinsically of equal worth
- Difference is to be valued, honoured and celebrated
- It is possible for people to live and work together co-operatively
- The best decisions are made by those who are affected by them.

Once students have reached an agreement on the group culture, the completed 'contract' is graphed onto a large sheet of paper in an accessible format by a tutor. Students then collectively agree to abide by these rules, and a personal copy of this group culture is entered into their workbooks.

For the following student a 'safe classroom space' was informed by the class group culture; this space was somewhere where she could feel comfortable to ask questions and share ideas that were about "*important things*" (P13) with her classmates. She said:

*Students are just like friends and they are there to support me and I'd do the same for them... I picked this up since I started Trinity. I picked it up the first day... Plus I'm getting to know them, each individual.... we're bonding... it's important to know that you're able to ask people questions without getting grief... There's 26 of us in the group – we are a strong group and we're able to share with everyone else, and get feedback how we cope with (the demands of) college. (P13)*

For the following student the learning environment of the NIID supports his particular learning needs; he explained that the tutoring was not beyond him because in this environment "*everything goes on at my own level*" (P11). He elaborated:

*The course is being tutored to me in such a way that I can understand it. The course is designed for people like myself who have problems with learning. Everything is taken at its own pace... (Tutors) use words that you can understand and if you have problems you can ask questions and nobody will start judging you or start smirking. (P11)*

For this learner feeling comfortable in a learning environment meant knowing that other students were not laughing behind your back and behaving in a judgemental or an antagonistic way. This student felt that the NIID managed to achieve a safe environment through encouraging students to reflect on the agreed group culture and promoting an environment *"where people... who have problems with learning... are able to take everything at (their) own pace"* (P11).

For another student a good way to commence a class session was for students to remind each other of the group culture; this started with each person taking turns to say how they were feeling; it meant *"starting a session with a round"* (P6). This particular learner felt that it was important to start with a round because it enabled her to offload her own *"good or bad"* feelings, and if there were problems emerging within the group, it also offered an opportunity to address this and *"revisit the group culture"* (P6).

In the opinion of another student, the sense of *"feeling safe"* (P13) was an essential ingredient for learning to unfold. He continued:

*You can remember that stuff when the teacher is telling you stuff (when) you are in an environment where you feel safe... You're safe when you're with your friends at college, learning the same thing.* (P13)

#### 8.6.1 The development of personal meanings

Students feel valued and safe in a learning environment where they receive positive affirmation from both tutor and students alike (Crick,

2007). When an education space such as the NIID embraces an ethos that values the contributions of all its members, it offers the potential for students to develop a range of personal meanings from the curriculum. In this type of teaching space, students are encouraged to articulate and develop their own views in relation to the curriculum presented. This is done through reflecting on and responding to the teaching topics from the point of view of learners' own ways of behaving or seeing.

The comments below present how one student's thinking had been expanded through her engagement with Gardner's (1983) theory of Multiple Intelligence (MI Theory), a core curriculum component on the Personal Effectiveness module. In contrast to her internalised beliefs of a 'fixed' intelligence, she described her current growth in awareness and how intelligent she perceived herself to be now. She said:

*I didn't realise I was that intelligent... we all are intelligent in different ways. We learned that from that (MI) quiz. I found out that I (scored) higher points at some stuff, like interpersonal, words and linguistic (intelligence)... it was a good way to learn about yourself. (P8)*

For this student learning about herself was becoming aware of her strengths, as well as being accepting of her weaknesses; it's like two sides of the same coin. She considered "money and counting" and a tendency to "get angry" to be her weaknesses, and having the ability to get on with people, her 'Interpersonal Intelligence', as her strength. She elaborated:

*I am a people person, that's my strength... I've good communication skills. And my weakness is anger, because of my anger... sometimes I can't control my temper, but I don't do that in college, I don't get angry in*

*college. If I get angry in your class I would say "could I go outside for a minute? I'd count ten down to one, and (take) a big breath. I don't need to get angry... it important to know what you are good and weak at because if you want to get a job, they will probably ask what strengths do you have, what weaknesses do you have. You need those skills in a job.*

(P8)

For another second-year student, the self-confidence to persist was achieved because of her success in passing the first year of the programme. This self-assurance developed in part through her work on the 'Reflective Studies' module which involved keeping a reflective journal and endeavouring to become more meta-cognitively aware. She explained that she would try to "*rise above things that were getting (her) down... she'd write down (her) problems... or draw them... and try to deal with it everyday*" (P8). This process enabled her to keep her focus on her long-term goals. She said:

*I sometimes work better with a challenge... everything's really a challenge to me in the beginning... It makes me learn better; you challenge me and I work a lot harder, and I become a better person all round... I actually want to be an SNA... after this (course). I need all of the spelling, and all of the computers and everything, so if I say, here's my certificate, they can't turn me down, so basically I'll want to do what I love... if I want something, I actually fight for it, I'd would work day and night if I had to get it... I am very determined to get what I want.* (P8)

For this student learning was about developing a greater level of motivation and self-awareness. This was achieved through a facilitative learning environment that allowed her to develop her reflective and meta-



cognitive skills which was drawn from the point of view of her own way of behaving or seeing. For Paakkari et al., (2011), the social environment in the classroom also offers a context for comparing one's thoughts with other student's thoughts. This mode of learning is described as "growing through learning about oneself, others, and the world" (p. 709). For these authors the role of the learning environment can create supportive conditions for students' personal thinking. Moreover, it not only supports learners' individual thinking; in so doing, it supports the growth of fellow-learners' thinking and behaviour.

The following student's comments address her response to attending English Literature lectures; in doing so she related how her insight into her own particular life-experience was reflected in the poetry she studied. She spoke of two particular poems; one was *Wild Oats* by Philip Larkin which she found interesting because it was about a girl "*like me who tried to get on in life, and she tried to get a job and she loved roses*" (P13). The other poem *An Arundel Tomb* also by Larkin, resonated with her because

*it reminds me of me sometimes. Like doing work and baby-sitting... And the tomb reminds me of the films I like, The Mummy and Horror films and they way they put them into tombs. (P13)*

This student not only spoke about her growing self-awareness through her contact with English poetry; she also related how this insight into poetry had come up in classroom exercises with another student who also attended English lectures. She said:

*In class we could be asked to write down your own opinions... and other people would write down their own opinions... afterwards I spoke (to*

*another student) about when life is difficult (how) I just shy away from it, and them on the other hand I just stand up and say I have to get on with it.*

Larkin's poems helped her understand

*The person that I am... a bit more than what I did. I learned a bit more poetry and the way they feel and their writing the poems. It reminds me of me. A bit like me when they are writing. (P13)*

For the above learner, the classroom offered a context for students to communicate thoughts and ideas, which in turn supported the growth of a fellow-learners' thought processes. This two-way interaction led another student to reflect on how other students perceive him: he related how the classroom was an environment that promoted diligence in students, and where he felt being a 'good' student was an attribute noticed by fellow students. He explained:

*They would notice how you would listen in class or how you answer questions... I answer questions all the time. I help people out as well... I listen all the time; I get involved in the group activities... Some people will notice and some people won't notice, because they are too busy sorting out their own work... I know that by the way I answer the questions; they would pick up on those questions on how I answer that question in class. (P10)*

This student's understanding of being a 'good' student supports both his own individual thinking of someone who is being helpful and industrious, and also the effect his attitudes and actions can have on others in the group. He sees himself as someone who supports the growth of fellow

learners' thinking and behaviour. It can be argued that this process can only take place in a learning environment that is "safe, supportive, and that offer helpful relationships" (Dart et al, 2000, p. 269); it also can be argued that such spaces support conditions for the personal growth of both students' and their peers.

Students feel valued and safe in a learning environment where they receive positive affirmation from both tutor and students alike (Deakin-Crick, McCombs, Haddon, Broadfoot & Tew, 2007). When an education space embraces an ethos that values the contributions of all its members, it offers the potential for promoting higher attainment that can result in "learning power" (p. 303). This is a "way of being" that is influenced by "the relationships within which individuals find themselves learning, particularly with their teacher and (other)... key people" (p. 303). For these authors there is a "complex ecology" (p. 303) of learning in classrooms that promotes or inhibits learning. Through promoting values and beliefs of "collective decision making" (Hunter, 2009. p. 23), the ecology of the NIID promotes a learner-centred classroom culture where trust is encouraged through respectful and inclusive dialogue, and where students are challenged through meaningful classroom experiences.

Finally, Table 12 summarises CCL students' qualitative different ways of experiencing learning, and offers a summary of the second research question: What kind of variation exists in intellectually disabled adult learners' ways of experiencing their learning while attending college?

Table 12. Summary of the variation in the ways CCL students experience learning

| Categories                                         | Descriptions                                                                                                                            | Sample comments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>(A)</b><br><b>Cognitive Stages of Learning:</b> |                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| A1. Learning as increasing one's knowledge         | Focus on <i>adding new knowledge</i> .<br><br>Students learning about facts and adding new quantifiable knowledge to previous knowledge | <i>I... learn(ed) things from books...when I was doing the Yeats thing in class...and I found out about his children, his son and his daughter, and I found out what year they were born and what year they got married in and it was kind of interesting (int * 9)</i>                                                                                 |
| A2. Learning as memorising and reproducing         | Focus on <i>reproduction</i> . Students being able to memorise new information.                                                         | <i>I actually learned about... long and short-term memory... in college last year in first year... if you're going out to the shop to get a loaf of bread, that would be in your short term memory so... I just remember that for a few minutes. But like stuff for college, I remember in my head for a long time... I write it down... (int * 13)</i> |

|                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| A3 Learning and applying knowledge               | Emphasis on <i>application</i> . Students being able to apply knowledge into practice, i.e. researching in class, for home assignments, socialisation through networking site, learning to pass course. | <i>... (I) want(ed) to find out... (about) different people who took over... America and I was looking at it yesterday on the internet and I just typed in, do you know the way you get the Google thing, you can look up different ones, you type in whatever you find out about and it's kind of handy, that's how it's kind of good. (int * 9)</i>                                                                                                                               |
| <b>(B)</b><br><b>Self-regulation of learning</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| B1. The forethought phase                        | Students' processes and beliefs that occur <i>before</i> efforts to learn, i.e. task analysis and self-motivation.                                                                                      | <i>I wanted to be an SNA again. I actually was a special needs assistant beforehand, and I loved it, but my back kept me from doing it, because I wasn't able to lift them out of chairs or anything, so after this I'm actually going to go back and do an SNA course, and I need all of the spelling, and all of the computers and everything, so if I say, here's my certificate, I would like to try it, they can't turn me down, so basically to do what I love. (int * 8)</i> |

|                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>B2. The performance phase and</p> | <p>Students' processes that occur <i>during</i> behavioural implementation (i) self-control and. (ii) self-observation.</p> <p>(i) Self-control, i.e. the deployment of specific methods or strategies that were selected during the forethought phase. (Example given a 'Spidergram')</p> <p>(ii) Self-observation, i.e. self-recording personal events... (and) cognitive tracking of personal functioning. For example: time-management, being organised, taking the responsibilities of being a third-level student seriously, and an awareness of cognitive tracking.</p> | <p><i>In the middle of the circle (of the Spidergram)... you draw legs with ideas to do with that particular topic, kind of like the brain storm. It's shouting out to the tutor (and) in the Spidergram you put them on the legs... the proper Spidergram leg might be with say William Butler's (Yeats) marriage... his love life, and another leg coming out of it might be to do with his education, and another one would be whatever like, but with a brainstorm you just shout them out... a spidergram is more organised.(int 5)</i></p> <p><i>I sit down and (do) the homework for each day. I spread out the homework throughout through the weekend, so I can learn a bit more. I'm working towards getting a certificate so it's very important for me to do that... I like to have things organised, have the books ready in the bag for the next day. (int * 13)</i></p> |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>B3. The self-reflection phase</p> | <p>Students' processes that occur <i>after</i> each learning effort: (i) Self-judgement and (ii) self-reaction.</p> <p>(i)Self-judgement</p> <p>(ii) Self-reaction, i.e. engaging with one's emotions during the performance of learning.</p> | <p><i>I like doing the reflection journals... if we do things a certain way and then you think back, you can think back and (see) if we could have done that better, or have done it differently... It's a way of trying to do things better. Doing things better for the next time, yeah (Int 9)</i></p> <p><i>It's good to let your feeling come out so people will know how you're feeling, instead of keeping them inside you all the time. I am a reflective person before because I think about myself and I think about others. It's important to let other people know how you're feeling so they can sympathise with you and talk you through it or be there for you if you need somebody, instead of them not knowing what is wrong. (int 13)</i></p> |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>(C3)</b></p> <p><b>Learning as collective meaning making</b></p> |                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <p>C1. Collective learning from discussions and debates.</p>           | <p>Students exchanging views and creating new knowledge that was shared through collective reflection.</p>                                                                         | <p><i>Just say if a few of us were in class, and say if another student has an idea, that I, I thought it was a good idea, but I didn't agree with it, so I say, I'd put my point across, and then there's a whole big debate thing about it and everyone starts joining in. (int 9)</i></p>                                                                                                                                            |
| <p>C2. Peer support and home assignments</p>                           | <p>Students' awareness of the variety of different learner's strengths and weaknesses; the collective knowledge bank that friends could offer especially for home assignments.</p> | <p><i>My friends help me. Yeah, we all help each other if somebody gets stuck. We'd work in pairs – (I'd say) would you help me with this essay, you can't copy off me, but I'll give you a hand... if I have to get one part of my homework done and I ask (my friend) could you help me with the maths? 'Cause she's good at maths and she would help you. Somebody would ask me (for help with) English, or drama. (Int * 1)</i></p> |
| <p>C3. Collective learning from parents/guardians</p>                  | <p>Students' learning in collaboration with family, and/or with support from dedicated agency key-staff.</p>                                                                       | <p><i>I try and break down each word, break the sound down. Sometimes I'd just try to figure it out. I'd either look it up or I'd either ask my parents what it means... I ask my Mam or my Dad.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |



|                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <i>But I try and remember the word for the next time. I go over the page again. (Helen)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| C4. Collective learning from ISR mentors                                   | Students' collective meaning making with mentors.                                                                                                                                                          | <i>At the beginning I was nervous but having a mentor helped. They're there to help you... knowing that's there someone else in the lecture with you really helps. It also helps when some of the people in your class are (going to) lectures as well, and having them there as well gives you a feeling of being safe. (int 13)</i>                 |
| C5. Collective meaning making through situational and contextual learning. | Students' learning through tasks that simulate real-life situations, i.e. the workplace where CCL students undertake their job-placement /work-experience while undertaking the Career Development module. | <i>You're in the work environment (and) it gets you out there so you know what work is actually like. I was shown how to use a franking machine, and I find I learn best from being shown (what to do)... I also learn about how to scan letters on the computer (and) logging the stuff you finished scanning on your computer on Excel. (Int 7)</i> |

| <p><b>(D)</b></p> <p><b>The supportive environment and learning</b></p>                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>D1. The concept of environment referring to the atmosphere, tone or climate of the learning setting. A learning environment promoted that students perceive as safe, supportive, and offering helpful relationships.</p> | <p>Environment as a safe-space informed by students establishing a 'group culture', i.e. 'how we are together... the way we do things around here'.</p>                                                                                                       | <p><i>The course is being tutored to me in such a way that I can understand it. The course is designed for people like myself who have problems with learning. Everything is taken at its own pace... (Tutors) use words that you can understand and if you have problems you can ask questions and nobody will start judging you or start smirking. (Int 14)</i></p> |
| <p>D2. The context of the classroom as an environment for students to develop 'personal meanings'</p>                                                                                                                       | <p>The tutor's use of the environment as a context for facilitating learners to articulate and develop their own views in relation to the curriculum presented, and become more aware of their own thoughts and the thoughts and opinions of their peers.</p> | <p><i>I didn't realise I was that intelligent... we all are intelligent in different ways. We learned that from that (MI) quiz. I found out that I (scored) higher points at some stuff, like interpersonal, words and linguistic (intelligence)... it was a good way to learn about yourself. (Int 1)</i></p>                                                        |

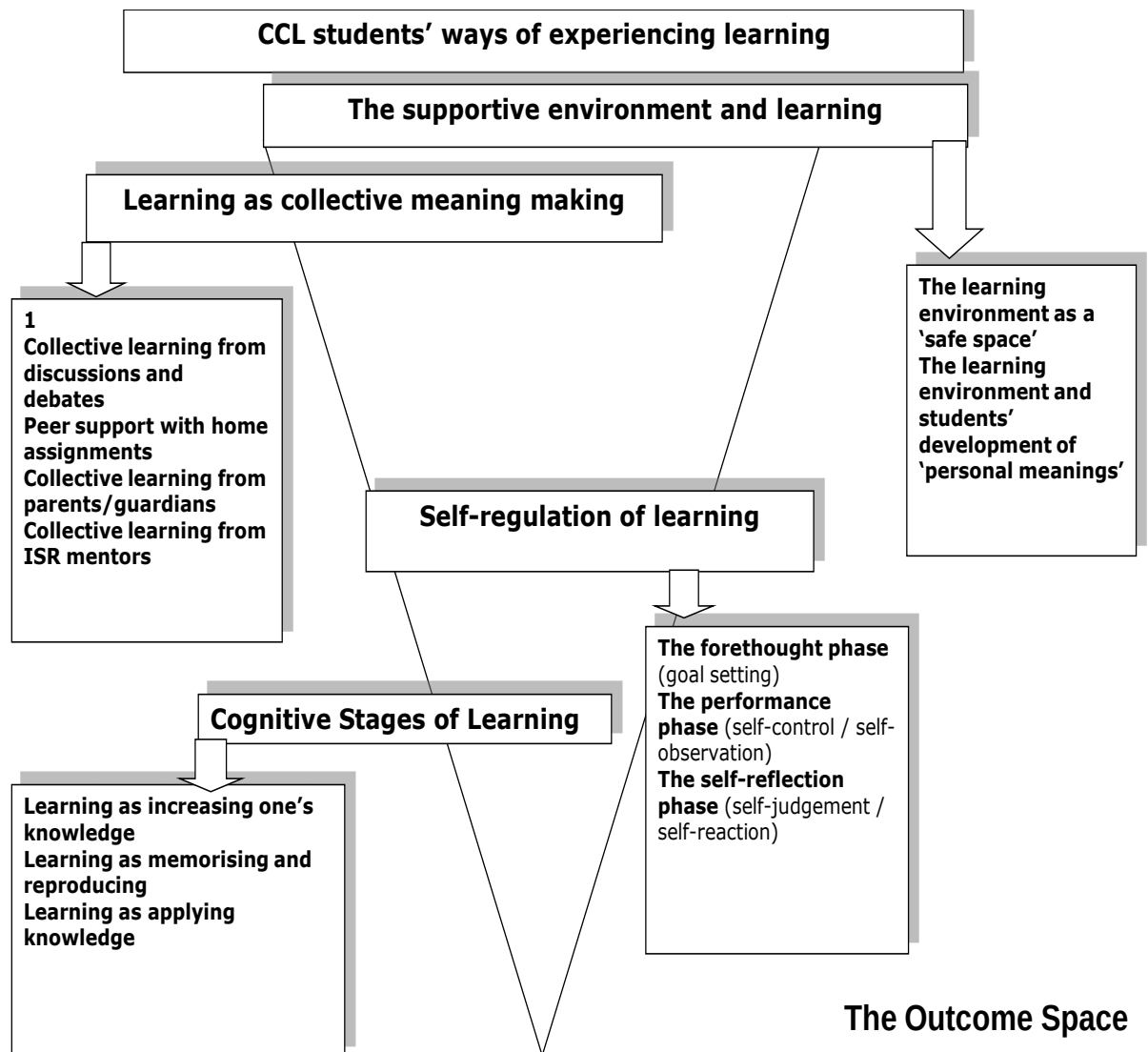
## 8.7 The outcome space

As discussed above the analysis of the data resulted in four categories of description. Phenomenography involves the identification of logical relationships between the categories of description to form an *outcome space* (Marton and Booth, 1997). Whilst a hierarchically structured outcome space is not a phenomenographic essential (Green, 2005), it is a recognised part of the phenomenographic method (Marton and Booth, 1997), the rationale being to show structure in the variation, key aspects and variation between the categories (Prosser, Martin, Trigwell, Ramsden and Lueckenhausen, 2005).

The outcome space forms an inclusive, hierarchical unity in which the categories further up the hierarchy subsume those preceding them (Åkerlind, 2005a; Järvinen & Järvinen, 2000). In structuring this outcome space “bracketing” (Åkerlind Bowden & Green 2005, p. 98) was adhered to by this author as much as possible. This outcome space presented at the end of this chapter provides an empirically based description of learning as experienced by CCL students. This collective level description represents variation in experiences across the participants of the research (e.g. Marton, Watkins & Tang, 1997). Whilst phenomenography does not seek to generalise, it is expected however, that the “range of meanings within the sample will be representative of the range of meanings within the population” (Åkerlind, 2005a, 2005b, p. 104).

Figure 21 presents the outcome space of CCL students' ways of experiences of learning.

Figure 21. The outcome space of CCL students' ways of experiences of learning



# **Chapter 9**

## **Discussions of Findings**

### **9.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings from Stage 1 and Stage 2 of this study. Key conclusions from each stage are outlined: for Stage 1, the gains of working inclusively are described and attention is given to the distinctive nature of the questioning process of inclusive interviewing. For Stage 2, comparisons between this research and other phenomenographic studies are made and similarities and differences are discussed. It is finally argued that when intellectually disabled students are engaged as equal partners in a research project, they challenge the negative and stereotyped views that are held by many in society about who they are and who they can become. In this context, inclusive research and inclusive learning is envisaged as a means to gain empowerment for people with intellectual disabilities. It challenges the existing ideas about the nature of knowledge, the methods and materials that are used and the role of learners with intellectual disabilities in the teaching and learning process.

### **9.1 Acquiring cultural capital through inclusive research**

In this study, co-researchers successfully collected data on their peers' experiences of learning. They also advised the lead researcher in making

materials accessible, presented information of the research project to their peers and undertook interviews with the research sample.

It is argued that the above level of co-researcher involvement has the potential to increase the cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) of people with intellectual disabilities. In the field of education an academic degree would be considered cultural capital (Bourdieu 1978, 1984; Webb, Schirato & Danaher 2004) and the current author argues that in the field of academic research, first-hand knowledge of and experience in undertaking a social research project could also be considered cultural capital.

It is further argued that the cultural capital gained by co-researchers goes some way to address the paucity of capital possessed by people with intellectual disabilities to participate in the field of disability studies. Co-researchers stated that their function encompassed a variety of roles: they gave advice on designing accessible materials; they presented information in an accessible format; they suggested alternative ways of gaining informed consent, and they offered advice on how to disseminate research findings to other people with intellectual disabilities. They also personally gained from the research experience and expressed a real sense of achievement in their accomplishments. These achievements ranged from: gaining new knowledge and "*learning new things*" (CR5); feeling positive and "*excited about doing something new*" (CR3); a growing awareness of the skills an interviewer needs such as "*paraphrasing...and asking open and closed questions*" (CR4), to seeing themselves in the role of advocate who "*speaks up for people with disabilities*" (CR6). Other positives reported by co-researchers were that

being involved in this project *"built up their self confidence so that they can inform others"* (CR6) regarding how people with intellectual disabilities learn at college. As CR1 stated: *"it's good to do (this research) because when we leave... people will know how we learn... we can come back and say our piece and... tell them about it"*.

According to Bourdieu (1984), 'gambling' for capital can improve your standing in a field; those who possess highly prized knowledge are more connected to mainstream social institutions, and it is these individuals who have greater opportunities to shape the *norm*. In other words those who have most power in a cultural field are also those who decide what constitutes capital. As a result of this inclusive research project, it is hoped that the *norm* of the academy's understanding of learning for people with intellectual disabilities in tertiary education will be informed by this project's findings. It is further anticipated that this knowledge can in some way influence what constitutes capital in the field of learning in tertiary education for people with intellectual disabilities.

Furthermore, co-researchers have expressed a willingness to disseminate the main findings of this research to people with intellectual disabilities as well as to academics and educational researchers. A number of suggestions were proposed for this including: 1) including an outline of the four categories of description in a module on the CCL curriculum, 2) co-researchers presenting their experiences of researching at conferences, and 3, summarising the main findings though an accessible link on the NIID homepage (see McCarron, Swinburne, Burke, McGlinchey, Mulryan, Andrews, Foran & McCallion, 2011).

## **9.2 The role of learners and co-researchers in curriculum development**

Co-researchers were adamant that the information gained from this study is a valuable resource for understanding student learning and should be used in the development of the CCL curriculum; as one person said: *"it should be made in to a booklet to be taught in class so other students know how we learn"* (CR4).

Seeking students' advice on curriculum design of the CCL programme is not something new for me. When I first arrived in the NIID in 2006 I knew that designing and implementing the CCL curriculum would need some considerable thought – it would not be a straightforward process of transferring what I had already been teaching in the context of adult education to a new and different set of students. It needed an innovative approach; one that I felt should be informed by the students themselves. Through subsequent conversations with students an agreement was reached: as I wrote the curriculum it made sense to design a PowerPoint presentation or a set of worksheets and get feedback and recommendations from students. After receiving advice on content and delivery on a number of modules it became the norm for me to incorporate the recommendations of the CCL students into my practice.

This has remained the way I design new material for the CCL curriculum and it is now the method that informs the current development of the CCL to a Level 5 qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications



(National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, 2009). When introduced, the level 5 CCL programme will be unique course for people with intellectual disabilities within third-level education both within Ireland and internationally. Based on the findings of this study, I am currently developing a new module entitled "Applied Learning Skills" (see Appendix 15 for working module descriptor) which will form a core part of this new curriculum. This module aims to equip students with the skills to carry out three cyclical phases of self-regulated learning: forethought, performance and self-reflection. In the context of the CCL programme, students will apply these competencies to their experience of auditing undergraduate lectures.

Informed by this research study, this new CCL structure has the potential to allow people with intellectual disabilities, a much marginalized group within third-level education, to engage with learning in a unique and diverse way and to gain accreditation on the National Framework of Qualifications. This accreditation project has received considerable interest from colleagues both nationally and internationally who are seeking similar accreditation for their own courses.

#### 9.2.0 Supporting the co-researcher: demystifying the inclusive research process

Walmsley (2004) acknowledged that the skills acquired by researchers over years of experience, the sheer hard work and self-restraint necessary for supporting inclusive research, should not be camouflaged or glossed

over by individuals supporting inclusive research projects. Walmsley also argued for more transparency about the role of the non-disabled researcher in order to highlight the challenges of working inclusively on research projects; in her opinion “the roles of both non-disabled researchers and researchers with intellectual disabilities have been hidden and obscure” (p. 65). For the current researcher, it was vital to document how the process worked in this inclusive research project because without some honest reflection on exactly what roles people played, the inclusive research agenda could become trapped in a “cycle of sentimental biography or individual anecdotes” (p. 65).

Heeding this concern, I was keen to redress the power imbalance between myself (the “active doer of research”) and the CCL students (the “passive subjects of research”) (p. 66). I also wanted to show that I was not the oppressor described by Barnes (1996) or the coloniser described by hooks (1990, pp. 151-2) who “want(ed) to know your story... (to) tell it back to you in a new way”. My intention was to put my skills at the disposal of students with intellectual disabilities so that they might take their rightful place as co-researchers and have a meaningful yet realistic role.

It can be argued that those involved in facilitating inclusive research projects should be both serious and skilled in their supportive role; for Walmsley (2004, p. 68) a skilled supporter is “as vital as a wheelchair is to a person who is unable to walk”. According to Chappel (2000), working together is the central component of inclusive research, yet Perry and Felce (2004) maintain that remarkably little has been written about what researchers do when supporting people with intellectual disabilities.

In contrast to prevailing practice which takes for granted the roles of the supporter/researcher (i.e. Wickham, 2001), it is this author's opinion that these positions deserve more than the passing mention they receive in the literature. Based on the current author's experience of this project, supporting inclusive research is a skilled activity that deserves recognition and acknowledgement and should not be camouflaged by the rhetoric of participation. Hiding the role of skilled supportive researchers can be done with the best of intentions and can be seen as a way of enhancing the image of the person with an intellectual disability – in other words, social role valorisation (SRV) (Wolfensberger & Tullman, 1982). Yet for Sinason (1992), this enhancement of roles can erase differences and can be seen as a way to reverse the power roles where the researcher become an 'enquirer' and the people with intellectual disabilities become the 'experts'.

#### 9.2.1 My role in the interview process

Co-researchers considered that weeks nine, ten and eleven of the data collection stage (i.e. when co-researchers carried out the interviews) were pressurised and challenging. However, this period also provided a key learning experience for them as they embraced their new identities as interviewers in a research project. As this research was a collaboration that involved participants undertaking different roles, my functions were of a practical nature: I booked the room, supplied recording equipment and made sure the session was recorded. My presence in the room was described by co-researchers as comforting and reassuring. During the interviews I always sat slightly away from the interviewer and interviewee

and tried to remain silent, although co-researchers frequently turned to me, mainly for advice and reassurance.

Transcripts from the tapes show that there were some points in the interviews where I frequently needed to redirect the conversation back to the relevant track. Although the interviewing was mainly led by co-researchers, some felt that this was a challenging experience for them, stating that the work was “tough”, “worrying” (CR1) and “nerve-wracking” (CR2). However, controlling what will count as relevant knowledge is perhaps the most powerful act that these co-researchers performed, since in this act they were challenging the very powerful discourses written by others about them. Therefore, the importance to them of being in charge of this project’s interviews and ultimately making the tools of research their own cannot be overestimated.

#### 9.2.2 Focusing on the abilities of the interviewer: ‘desirable’ interviewer characteristics

It has been argued that conducting interviews is one aspect of the research process which is readily open to the active involvement of people with an intellectual disability, at least for those with adequate cognitive and language ability (Perry & Felce, 2004). There is also evidence that interviewer characteristics can affect interviewee responses (e.g. Dailey, Rene & Claus, 2001), with age, gender and ethnic background influencing social interaction during interviews (Vesala, 2002).

Amongst people with intellectual disabilities there is evidence that they are prone to response bias and have low levels of responsiveness during interviews which might vary as a consequence of the characteristics of the interviewer (e.g. Perry & Felce, 2002). Stage 1 of this study aimed to address this concern and the issue of the perceived imbalance between the status of the interviewer and the interviewee. By training CCL students to become co-researchers in this study it was hoped that the level of responsiveness of the interviewees might be increased sufficiently to successfully conduct a study of student learning.

### 9.2.3 The importance of the abilities of the interviewer

It was highlighted above that the process of interviewing was challenging for the interviewers; however, being interviewed can also be demanding for the interviewees, albeit in different ways. According to Sanders, Creaton, Bird & Weber (1997), the process of encoding and recalling information is challenging for intellectual disabled people, with the recalling of detail being particularly problematic as information can take longer to encode, understand and store (Milne & Bull, 1999), and their free recall is often incomplete (Bull 1995, Milne & Bull 1999). However, the information that is reported is not necessarily less accurate (Milne & Bull, 2001); the limited research to date does not suggest that people with intellectual disabilities are more likely to fabricate or distort information as long as they are interviewed appropriately (Milne & Bull, 2001).

To retrieve information that is accurate and reliable, the focus should be on “the abilities of the interviewer rather than the capabilities of the interviewee” (p. 96). While social research prescribes interviewing methods which suggest how interviews should take place and how the interviewer should behave, applying these standards to inclusive research is not always useful. According to Williams (2011), when people with intellectual disabilities do research they “create a new form of social activity based on peer identity which is a rich form of research and has its own hallmarks and standards” (p. 170).

Although co-researchers undertook some basic training in qualitative research methodology and methods, they were always encouraged to challenge the ideas that were offered to work out their own meanings. This is particularly relevant with regard to the interviews themselves: although it was suggested by this author that the step-by-step approach to questioning (Bull 1996) could be used for the interviews, in reality co-researchers questioned how useful these tools were. As a consequence they altered these step-by-step strategies and ultimately made them their own. How they adapted the techniques during the interview process is outlined in the following section that covers the following: building rapport, introducing questions, follow-up questions, probing questions and direct questions.

#### 9.2.4 Building rapport by sharing a labelled identity

Each interview commenced with the interviewer welcoming the student and thanking them for attending before asking if they were happy to

proceed with the interview. According to Milne and Bull (2001), rapport is essential for a successful interview and people with intellectual disabilities need extra time to feel comfortable with the interviewer. As co-researchers were students attending the same programme as the interviewee, it can be argued that the possibility of power difference between interviewee and interviewer was minimised instantly; it has been shown that this helps to create a psychologically comfortable environment where the interviewee can gain some control in the interview (Perlman, Ericsson & Isaacs, 1994).

In most social research interviews, the interviewer stands apart from the interviewee; the main purpose of the interaction is to tap into the views of the interviewee with the interviewer's own identity and views remaining irrelevant. In the present project however, interviewers occasionally gave accounts of their own experiences of learning thereby 'blurring' the roles between interviewer and interviewee. Rather than seeing this deviation as a negative, this sharing of experiences is viewed as something unique to inclusive research (Williams 2011). In this way the common experience of being labelled disabled can become a positive force for change in relation to disabled people more generally (Corbett 1991; Corker 1999).

#### 9.2.5 Sequence of questioning used by co-researchers

With regard to questioning people with intellectual disabilities, there is some evidence that non-leading questions can result in accurate information (Cardone & Dent 1996). In the current study it was also found that once interviewers established a rapport with their interviewees, they

did not ask leading questions but instead invited interviews to talk freely about their drawing or spidergram that they brought with them. Using this visual stimulus as a reference, co-researchers used open questioning (i.e. "Tell me about this part of your drawing"/"What does this figure mean?") to allow the interviewee to talk freely. This sequence of questioning allowed the interviewer to use follow-up questions for clarification and further information.

Kvale (1996) has suggested that in qualitative interviews nine possible types of questions can be asked: "introducing questions/follow-up questions/probing questions/specifying questions/direct questions/indirect questions/structuring questions/silence and interpreting questions" (cited in Bryman 2004, p. 326). In the interviews conducted by co-researchers for this project, four similar types of questions (to the ones mentioned above) were identified: introducing questions (open and closed), follow-up questions, probing questions and direct questions. These similarities and differences with regard to questioning, supports the views of Williams (2011) who states that "research undertaken by people with intellectual disabilities has its own hallmarks and standards" that "make the communication both rich and challenging" (p. 160). Other hallmarks of the qualitative interview include co-researchers starting the interview with an open introduction question, (i.e. "Can you please tell me about your drawing / spidergram?"). However, some closed questions were also used at this stage and the interviewees' "yes" or "no" answers had the effect of stalling the flow of the conversation, providing no additional information



(e.g. interviewer: "So did you have a good knowledge of computers when you came into the programme here?" Interviewee: "Yeah").

Generally co-researchers used follow-up questions after introduction questions when interviewees were asked to elaborate on his/her answer (i.e. "What do you mean by that?"). Some probing questions were also asked by interviewers following responses given to direct questioning; in one instance CR3 sought clarification by asking the interviewee to expand on a topic: "Would you talk a little more about that?" On a number of occasions however, rather than using a follow-up question, the interviewer often asked a direct question that quickly moved on to a different part of the drawing or spidergram (i.e. "Do you like to use computers?"). On these occasions I normally intervened, recommending that a follow-up question should be used and offering an example. Co-researchers usually responded to this suggestion by repeating the question that I suggested.

In summary, although there are prescribed ways in which interviews in social research should take place – particularly regarding the roles of interviewer and interviewee – co-researchers of this project adapted these rules and methods, occasionally clouding the distinction between interviewer and interviewee. Rather than being perceived as a hindrance, this blurring of roles created an opportunity for CCL peers to share their experiences of learning during the interview process.

## **9.3 Presenting the findings from the categories**

### **9.3.0 Introduction**

This author used a phenomenographic research approach (Martin & Booth, 1997) because it was seen as “a specialisation that is particularly aimed at questions of relevance to learning and understanding in an educational setting” (p. 111). Equally important is that the methods used in this approach (i.e. one-to-one interviews that were transcribed verbatim) foregrounded the ‘voices’ of CCL students, enabling them to articulate their experiences of learning. Understanding how CCL students’ experience learning has the potential to help students to understand and control their own learning and inform practitioners to use a wide range of teaching methods and approaches that draw on different ideas about learning.

### **9.3.1 Working inclusively using a phenomenographic approach: comparisons with other studies**

On the basis of the data analysis of this phenomenography, CCL students’ experiences of learning are grouped into four categories. These are:

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

These findings show both similarities and differences to previous phenomenographic studies on learning. The first category (The cognitive stages of learning) is similar to the first two categories as identified by

Marton et al. (1993), i.e. learning as increasing one's knowledge, and learning as memorising and reproducing. The second category of this study (Self-regulation of learning), has some similarities to a study of adult learners' conceptions of their learning carried out by Roisko (2007). The third category (Learning as collective meaning making) has commonalities with Paakkari et al. (2011) and their study of student health education teachers' conceptions of their learning. The fourth category of this research (The supportive environment and learning), has not been previously described in a phenomenographic study, so this analysis reveals an additional category of descriptions of learning. (However, it is noted there is a body of (non-phenomenographic) literature which addresses the classroom environment from the perspective of the learner-centred classroom (Nichols & Zhang, 2011).

This data analysis did not indicate the strong presence of what Boulton-Lewis (1994) call quantitative conceptions, i.e. conceptions that are essentially reproductive and that reflect a lower level quantitative view of learning. This may be explained in terms of the NIID's use of socio-constructivist theories in education where the idea of learning as social meaning-making is the norm.

The above four categories of CCL students' experiences of learning confirm the claim of Marton et al. (1993) that there is a watershed, or dividing line between the categories. For Marton et al. (1993) this lay between the categories 2 and 3 (Learning as memorising and reproducing Learning as applying) when the focus of seeing ways of learning changes to *meaning*. The first three conception of Marton et al. (1993) are all

essentially reproductive, and reflect a lower-level, quantitative view of learning (Boulton–Lewis 1994). The latter three conceptions reflect a higher-level, qualitative view of learning as an active process of seeking meaning, leading to some kind of transformation in one’s view of things, or bringing about a more fundamental change: in other words changing as a person (Marton et al., 1993; Marshall, Summer & Woolnough 1999). In this study the dividing line falls between category 1 and 2; it is at this point that the nature of knowledge is seen as problematic: the role of reflection is first mentioned. The categories that follow see the role of the social environment as covering the potential for students to expand their perspectives on learning. In addition, as this dividing line is crossed, the question within the categories arises: what does a student learn *through* the CCL curriculum and its context – not what a student learns *about* the CCL curriculum.

As with students’ conceptions of learning as described by Marton et al. (1993), this study’s four categories of CCL students’ experiences of learning forms a nested hierarchy. This implies that a student who adopts category 4 will also be aware of the three other categories. However, if a student adopts conception 1, it cannot be inferred that they are aware of conception 2, 3, and 4.

### 9.3.2 Reflecting the categories through themes

In this section, this study’s four categories are reflected through three themes comprising the “educationally critical aspects for advancing a

higher level understanding of learning” (Paakkari et al., 2011, p. 708).

These themes, which are adapted from the above authors’ study of learning in health education, are presented in Table 13 and consist of:

1. The nature of the knowledge involved
2. The nature of the reflection involved, and
3. The role of the social environment.

*Table 13. Categories of CCL students’ experiences of learning in terms of themes of expanding awareness (Adapted from Paakkari et al. 2011, p. 708)*

| <b>Themes of expanding awareness</b> | <b><u>Category 1</u></b>         | <b><u>Category 2</u></b>                         | <b><u>Category 3</u></b>                           | <b><u>Category 4</u></b>                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                      | The cognitive stages of learning | Self-regulation of learning                      | Learning as collective meaning making              | The supportive environment and learning                                                             |
| The nature of the knowledge          | Non-problematic                  | Problematic                                      | Problematic                                        | Problematic                                                                                         |
| The nature of the reflection         | None                             | Descriptive reflection                           | Dialogic reflection                                | Dialogic reflection                                                                                 |
| The role of the social environment.  | None                             | The context for becoming aware of one’s thinking | The context for dialogue with peers and / or tutor | The supportive context created by the tutor that encourages a positive student-teacher relationship |

What follows is a brief description of each category with special attention given to the educationally critical aspects.

#### Category 1: The Cognitive Stages of Learning

In this category the focus is on *reproduction* of knowledge gained by students as they engage with the CCL programme. Students achieve this mainly by accumulating new knowledge and memorising and reproducing

information, which can take place either in the classroom or at home.

Biggs (1994) identifies such a view as quantitative; a perspective which proposes that learning is concerned with acquisition and accumulation of content.

In this category the knowledge that is handled during class is seen as non-problematic, involving merely facts that need to be memorised about aspects of the CCL curriculum. Handling knowledge in a non-problematic way refers to the student's tendency to take knowledge for granted, without reflecting further on the nature of the knowledge or on the ways of acquiring and constructing knowledge. However, in the data, this conception rarely occurred in isolation: in contrast to the principal of the hierarchical inclusiveness of categories mentioned above, it was found that some students might articulate their awareness of the possibility of seeing learning as more than just the reproduction or memorisation of information.

## Category 2 Self-Regulation of Learning

Unlike the previous category discussed above which manifested the *outcomes* of learning, the category *Self-regulation of learning* deals with the learning *process*. In this category students are aware of their learning in terms of triggering, supervising and reflecting on their learning practices towards their study goals; the essence in this category lies in the learners' ways of self-regulating their learning process.

In this category knowledge is seen as problematic, since the focus of learning expands towards meaning-making; the personal and relational aspects of knowledge are brought up, and include students' experiences as a vital element. The learning focuses on students' own personal goal setting plans, the learning strategies used, and their own personal reflections, which cannot be said to be right or wrong. Thus, the critical difference between the four categories of this research is found between category 1 and category 2.

*The nature of reflection* was the second theme that could be discerned in this category, and this highlights another main difference between category 1 and 2, since the first mention of reflection comes in this category. Unlike the findings of Paakkari et al (2011) where the nature of reflection deepened throughout their categories from "descriptive (to) critical" (p. 711), this study revealed evidence only of students' descriptive writing and/or descriptive reflection. Descriptive writing is described as a type of writing that is "not reflective at all, but merely reports events or literature" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p.40); descriptive reflection however does attempt to provide "reasons based often on personal judgement or on students' reading of literature" (p. 41). Although this study did not attempt to analyse students' journal writings, the nature of reflections learners were engaged in could be inferred from the interviews. The most common type of reflection mentioned was descriptive reflection, and also included some evidence of descriptive writing.

### Category 3 Learning as Collective Meaning Making

The focus in this category moves from individual meaning to collective or shared meaning; groups of students plus the tutor form a community in which, through dialogue and discussion, they ponder particular aspects emerging from the CCL curriculum. The difference between this category and categories 1 and 2 is that the learners do not only learn on their own, but also participate in a dialogue with others in order to create new understandings. In this category knowledge is seen as problematic, since the focus of learning moves from individual meaning-making (category 2) to collective meaning-making where students' collective experiences are a vital element.

It can be argued that for this category, the nature of reflection is "dialogic" (Hatton & Smith, 1994, p. 45), This reflective practice is described as "a form of discourse with one's self" (p. 41), and is also open to "weighing competing claims and viewpoints, and then exploring alternative solutions" (p. 45). In the context of this research, dialogic reflection is seen when students articulating their own voice, and subsequently using that voice to explore alternative ways to solve problems in a learning situation with another person. For one student, reflecting with fellow peers has the potential "*to build confidence*" in students and promote a sense of a "*good community where ... lots of people have lots of ideas*" (P17).

In this category the third of Paakkari et al. (2011) themes, i.e. the role of the social environment arises; this highlights another main difference between the first two categories and this current category. In this third



category, the classroom environment is seen as a context to offer the potential for students to expand their personal perspectives on interpreting the curriculum. Moreover, the learning environment not only supports learners' individual thinking, it also supports the growth of fellow-learners' thinking and behaviour.

#### Category 4 The Supportive Environment and Learning

This category highlights the importance attached to a supportive learning setting and are viewed as places that create an atmosphere or a climate that is "safe, supportive, and that offer(s) helpful relationships" (Dart et al, 2000, p. 269). The social environment is the third of the themes of expanding awareness (Paakkari et al. 2011) and are spaces that support conditions for the development of students' own views, i.e. their "personal meanings" (p. 709) that can influence both individual students and their peers.

In a study of the design of educational systems that would be supportive of student learning and achievement, McCombs (1994a) and McCombs and Whisler (1997) have suggested that schools (and by extension colleges) should be *living systems* and that their central function is to provide a supportive learning environment. Advocates for learner-centred classrooms propose that educational systems must concern themselves with how to provide the most supportive learning context for diverse students and their teachers (McCombs & Whisler, 1997). Educational environments that are sensitive to promoting student-teacher

relationships ultimately result in classrooms that are learner-centred and give students greater control over their own learning (Nichols & Zhang, 2011).

The nature of knowledge of category 4 is problematic, since the focus of learning is on individual and collective meaning-making. Knowledge is also contested, as students have the opportunity to put forward their own ideas which may be different to those of their peers, or their tutor. The nature of reflection in this category is descriptive and dialogic; students reflect on their own personal judgement as well as reflecting on alternative ways of viewing something through dialogue with peers.

### 9.3.3 The outcome space

The logical relationship between the categories of description is called the “outcome space” (Åkerlind, 2005b, p. 232) and forms an inclusive, hierarchical unity in which the categories further up the hierarchy subsume those preceding them (Åkerlind, 2005a; Järvinen & Järvinen, 2000). In general, this part of the research shows that CCL students’ qualitative ways of experiencing learning varies from relatively simple to more sophisticated. They ranged from experiences that see learning as an isolated collection of knowledge parts, through to experiences that see the importance of the supportive environment for allowing learning to unfold. Such a learning environment, initially created by the tutor/educator was described by one CCL student as a place that supports positive learning experiences: *“students... are there to support me and I’d do the same for*

*them... I picked it up the first day when we agreed on the group culture with the tutor” (P16).*

#### **9.4 ‘Inclusive’ phenomenography**

This study attempted to marry phenomenography to “inclusive research” (Walmsley & Johnson 2003, p. 10), the latter term being described as:

[embracing] a range of research approaches that traditionally have been termed ‘participatory’, ‘action’, or ‘emancipatory’... Such research involves people who may otherwise be seen as subjects for the research as instigators of ideas, research designers, interviewers, data analysts, authors, disseminators and users.

The term ‘inclusive phenomenography’ created by this researcher states that this phenomemography exhibits the features of inclusive research as defined above, and outlined in detail by the current author in Chapter 4. The rationale for this marriage was informed by Marton & Booth (1997) who stated that in order to make sense of how people handle problems, situations and the world, one has to understand the ways in which they experience these things. As phenomenography is a proven and rigorous empirical research methodology that uses the interview method to gather people’s experiences of the world, this author’s decision was justified as it empowered CCL students to have a meaningful and manageable role in data collection, and to become competent and capable co-researchers.

## **9.5 Marrying inclusive research and phenomenography**

Foucault stated that with knowledge comes power (Foucault 1987). If we accept this view it can be argued that the marriage of inclusive research to phenomenography could potentially increase the power of the voices of people with intellectual disabilities, and hence their capacity to gain a greater understanding of their learning. It can be further argued that pedagogues' understanding of how students with intellectual disabilities learn in college can also be raised. This study was also prompted by the assumption of Biggs (1999) who stated that experience of learning affects approaches to learning which in turn affect learning outcomes.

It has been argued by Walmsley (2004) that learning disability research – like normalisation/SRV (Wolfensberger & Tullman 1982) and many other developments in learning disability – has been largely driven by “values of social justice, redressing past and present wrongs, promoting valued social roles rather than an evidence base” (p. 69). In an effort to address this observation, inclusive research and phenomenography were married in this project in order to provide empirical evidence that outlined the research process in detail – looking at what was done and how it was done. This process addresses the concerns of Walmsley (2004) who calls for researchers to demystify the process of inclusive research.

This author found that the most exciting (and possibly the most challenging) part of this inclusive project was ‘demystifying’ the process of data collection, in particular the process of collating co-researchers’ experiences of interviewing their peers. The method of eliciting information on CCL students’ experiences of learning is documented in

detail in Chapter 7 and foregrounds the importance of the distinctive nature of the co-researcher's role in inclusive research, such as the difficulties in "bracketing" preconceptions in order to remain unbiased (Åkerlind et al., 2005, p. 98), and "blurring" the roles between interviewer and interviewee (Williams 2011, p.166). Coupled with these observations was the necessity for co-researchers to use role play to prepare before the actual event; this involved practising the process of questioning (creating a rapport, asking introducing, follow-up, probing and direct questions) and the use of deep listening.

This empirical evidence is invaluable, as according to Milne and Bull (2001, p. 94) "there are few experimental studies which have examined the extent to which accurate information can be elicited if people with intellectual disabilities are questioned appropriately". The classic work of Loftus (1979) demonstrated that the particular wording of questions can affect the later recall of an event among adults in the general population. As people with intellectual disabilities rely more on external cues to aid recall (Milne & Bull 2001), more care is needed with careful interviewing techniques (Milne & Bull 1999).

For this reason co-researchers used participant generated images (Loxley & Prosser 2007) which proved to be an effective tool that evoked ideas and memories in CCL students. These drawings enabled interviewees to select a starting point for the conversation to unfold, allowing the interviewer time to think about further questions. Consequently, the choice of topics was decided by the interviewees who chose the section of the image they wished to elaborate on.

Allowing the interviewee to choose what to talk about goes some way to addressing the concerns found in the studies outlined by Milne and Bull (1999) which stated that people with intellectual disabilities tend to be more vulnerable to suggestion when poorly questioned. Misleading questions were found to have a deleterious effect on the adults with intellectual disabilities in the study by Cardone and Dent (1996). Milne and Bull (2001) attributed this effect to "increased susceptibility to compliance, as the interviewees' non-verbal behaviour intimated that they realised that something was wrong with the questions" (p. 95). For Sanders and Young (1994), this vulnerability to suggestion among people with intellectual disabilities results from a number of factors, including their susceptibility to influence by authority figures, acquiescence, having problems understanding the language used, lack of knowledge of appropriate words and an inability to concentrate. These authors advise that misleading and poorly put questions which may prompt suggestible responding, should be avoided as far as possible, since information from such questions have limited evidential value.

It is argued that the interview process for this project was successful as it managed to address a number of the concerns outlined by Sanders and Young (1994). Firstly, CCL students were interviewed by non-authority figures (i.e. co-researchers/peers) who were able to build a rapport with the interviewee very quickly. According to Bull (1999), rapport is essential for a successful interview and people with intellectual disability may need extra time to feel comfortable with someone. Rapport can also help to

identify language idiosyncrasies; as co-researchers were also fellow students who worked on the programme for over a year, co-researchers and interviewees were familiar with each other's language. Coupled with this co-researchers let CCL students dictate the pace of the interview, allowing them to decide when to take a break and when they wanted the interview to stop.

With regard to environment, interviews took place in the NIID, a familiar location for CCL students. This venue was important as studies have shown (Bull 1995) that people with an intellectual disability do not always adapt well to unusual environments and this can distract them, increase their stress levels and have a deleterious effect on memory and communication. Furthermore, the visual aids (a spidergram or drawing) created and used by the interviewees became memory enhancing techniques which helped to overcome their difficulties with memory accessibility.

#### **9.6 A comparison of this research project with other relevant phenomenographic studies**

When the findings of this study are compared with the findings of other phenomenographic studies on the phenomenon of learning, similarities as well as differences emerge. It is worth noting however, that the studies critiqued below were conducted in different cultural settings and participants were mainstream university students and not adults with intellectual disabilities attending a tailor-made tertiary education programme.

Among the best known categories of description concerning learning experiences are those of Säljö (1979) and Giorgi (1999), who investigated the conceptions of learning among students of the Open University. These were later revised by Marton et al. (1993) who conceptualised learning as:

1. Increasing one's knowledge
2. Memorising and reproducing
3. Applying
4. Understanding
5. Seeing something in a different way
6. Changing as a person.

These six sections can be divided into two groups, quantitative and qualitative – the first three are all essentially reproductive conceptions; the latter three conceptions reflect a more qualitative view of learning (Boulton-Lewis et al. 2000).

In comparison with these studies, the current research found four categories of expanding awareness (The Cognitive Stages of Learning; Self-regulation of Learning; Learning as Collective Meaning Making and The Supportive Environment and Learning). The main similarities between these categories and Marton et al. (1993) lie in the current study's first category The Cognitive Stages of Learning. Like categories 1 2 and 3 of Marton et al. (1993), the Cognitive Stages of Learning category of this study was found to be an essentially reproductive one. It centres on CCL students increasing, reproducing and applying new knowledge, processes which can take place either in the classroom, the home or at other sites



on campus. As well as supporting the studies of Marton et al. (1993), this study also contributes some new insights to discussions of experiences of learning, namely, the three additional categories that were found: 1) Self-regulation of Learning, 2) Learning as Collective Meaning Making and 3) The Supportive Environment and Learning.

Self-regulation of learning is described in this study as the process that deals with what happens *before* efforts to learn, *during* behavioural implementation and self-reflecting *after* a learning effort. Unlike category 1 – The Cognitive Stages of Learning – which deals with the *outcomes* of learning), the Self-regulation of Learning category deals with the learning *process*, what Zimmerman (2002, p. 62) calls “the forethought phase, the performance phase and the self-reflection phase”. The current study found that this phase is complex and consists of a) task analysis and self-motivation, b) self-control and self-observation and c) self-reflection (i.e. self-judgement and self-reaction).

A similar but less detailed category describing self-regulation was found in a study of adults’ learning experiences while in university conducted by Roisko (2007). In this project, self-regulation of learning was described as students being aware of their learning in terms of “triggering, supervising and modifying their learning practices towards their study goals” (p. 174). Roisko also stated that motivation and volition played a crucial role in the self-regulation of learning as it forms the preconditions for learning and the maintenance of a desire to learn.

The third category of this study – Collective Meaning Making – centres mainly on the learning that happens through interactions (discussions and

debates) with others either in the college, the home or in the workplace. This category moves from individual meaning to collective or shared meaning, moving beyond the single *me* and *I*. The difference between this category and categories 1 and 2 of this study is that students do not only learn on their own but also participate in a dialogue with others (i.e. peers, family, mentors and work colleagues) in order to create new understandings.

The category entitled Collective Meaning Making was also found in a recent study entitled "Widening horizons: A phenomenographic study of student teachers' conceptions of health education and its teaching and learning" by Paakari (2012). Among other things, the author stressed the importance of the class as a learning community; she identified conceptions of teaching as building a learning community with the students and experiences of this learning were identified as collective meaning making.

The final category of this study –The Supportive Environment and Learning – presents a new phenomenographic category of understanding learning. The field of psychology has shown the benefits of learning environments that are "safe, supportive and offer helpful relationships" (Dart et al. 2000). The Supportive Environment and Learning category identified by the current author places emphasis on the importance of a protected, secure and supportive education setting that encourages and nurtures helpful learning relationships. This safe space is created by the establishment of a group culture defined by Hunter (2009) as "how we are

together... the group agreement, the group contract... understandings or desired behaviours" (p. 42). In the context of the CCL programme, students are facilitated by their tutor to create ground rules or behaviours that they feel are desirable as a group. Underpinning what Hunter terms the "technology of co-operacy" (p. 23) are values and beliefs that recognise and celebrate the difference between and the equal worth of all people. It is argued by the current author that the Supportive Environment and Learning category builds on the values and beliefs of the Collective Meaning Making category: the ecology of the NIID promotes a learner-centred classroom culture where trust is encouraged through respectful and inclusive dialogue and learners are challenged through participating in meaningful learning experiences.

To summarise, the conceptions of learning presented by Marton et al. (1993), and the experiences of learning outlined by Roisko (2007) and Paakari (2012), are not completely identical to the findings of this research project. However, neither are they completely different; to some extent they overlap with this project's findings. Indeed the Cognitive Phases of Learning category of this project closely resembles the qualitative conceptions (i.e. 1, 2 and 3) of Marton et al. (1993) and found in other studies including, Boulton-Lewis, Marton, Lewis and Wilss (2000). Furthermore, when comparing the present results with the experiences of learning identified by Roisko (2007) and Paakari (2012), this research identifies two categories that are similar to the findings of Roisko and Paakari: Self-regulation of Learning and Learning as Collective Meaning Making. The final category identified in this project – The Supportive Environment and Learning – has not been identified in other comparable

phenomenographical studies on learning and offers an additional category to the literature of phenomenography.

The principal findings of Stage 2 are:

- There are variations in CCL students' experiences of learning in a college environment.
- The outcome space shows that CCL students' ways of experiencing learning consist of cognition, self-regulation, learning collectively and a supportive climate for learning.
- The findings indicate that a hierarchy of increasing completeness is formed from different ways of experiencing learning.
- The most complete category of CCL experiences' of learning identifies the importance of the environment which is the atmosphere created by both students and tutor. Such a setting is perceived as safe, supportive, and one that can foster helpful relationships.

To summarise, this research has shown that there are variations in the way CCL students experience their learning. The resulting outcome space indicates that students' experiences of learning comprise cognitive, self-regulative, collective and environmental elements. When learning, this study shows that CCL students undertake it holistically – they are, to varying degrees, aware of all the elements outlined in the outcome space simultaneously.

## **9.7 Conclusion**

The hierarchical structure of the outcome space of this study serves as a tool for students to improve knowledge and awareness of their own learning. This research has shown that learning for intellectually disabled students is a complex undertaking: learning is cognitive (memorising, reproducing and applying knowledge), self-regulated (setting goals, monitoring and reflecting) and social (discussions and interaction with people). These stages of learning are underpinned and strengthened by an environment that promotes and supports positive student-teacher relationships.

On the basis of these findings it is argued that for students undertaking the CCL programme, it is important for tutors to create conditions that approach learning for students from the points of view of the nature of knowledge, the nature of reflection, and the role of social environment. These conditions are seen by this author as ones that support the expansion of awareness for students attending the CCL programme.

It is also vital that these findings are disseminated to students with intellectual disabilities engaging in tertiary education as well as their teachers. Becoming aware of these results may help these students and their educators to become more conscious of the ways they experience learning. This can ultimately encourage these individuals to reflect on the differences between their current way of understanding learning, and more advanced ways of understanding the nature of this learning.

In the following and final chapter, the implications of this study for practitioners and policy makers are outlined. The chapter concludes by making suggestions for future research directions.

# Chapter 10

## Research Summary and Conclusions

### 10.0 Introduction

This final chapter uses two themes to provide a summary of the main findings of this research and their implications for practitioners and policy-makers. It begins with the theme 'Inclusive learning and researching' which outlines the value of practitioners and students working together towards a common goal and where students are recognised as the experts. It is argued that much can be learnt from researching with students with intellectual disabilities: it can help practitioners reflect on and identify the principal theoretical perspectives which inform effective teaching approaches for this group of students. Understanding the way students with intellectual disabilities experience their learning can also help provide a theoretical framework for evaluating current provision and inform the development of future provision for learners with intellectual disabilities. The second theme entitled 'Learning, empowerment and the supportive environment' outlines how the setting influences not only what is learned but how it is learned through the social interaction that occurs and the networks that are created. The climate created by the teacher in the classroom can also transform how learners see themselves and how they are seen by others. Empowerment for learners is therefore developed as much *where* learning occurs and *with whom*, as through the methods of teaching that are used.

The implications of these themes for how provision is organised are as follows:

- Practitioners should take time to consider their beliefs and assumptions about people with intellectual disabilities – for example, how they learn, their role in society and how these ideas influence the nature of provision they offer and the methods they use for teaching.
- Decisions about teaching approaches should draw on a range of theories of learning rather than a single model, for example, cognitive constructivism, social constructivism as well as a phenomenographic constitutionalist perspective. Using such an informed eclecticism and matching it to a clearly articulated set of purposes has the potential to greatly enrich the student's learning experience.
- Learning should focus on purpose rather than outcome, shifting the attention away from a reductive and functional notion of learning toward one that is purposive. The phenomenographic outcome space of this study has shown that CCL students' ways of experiencing learning consist of cognition, self-regulation and learning collectively; these are underpinned and supported by working in what's perceived as a safe environment. This complex re-definition of learning for this group of people with intellectual disabilities reflects a number of aspects of learning – acquisition of skills and knowledge, metacognition, active participation, and the emotional and psychological aspects of learning. The



teaching methods used by the practitioner should enable these purposes to be fulfilled.

- Teaching methods and approaches should actively contribute to the development of learners' self-advocacy and empowerment. Approaches that engage students in action methods of learning (for example, rounds, role play, continuums, opinion maps and graphic facilitation) are more effective in developing understanding as it enables participants' experiences to be the basis from which they move to clarify concepts, gain new information and acquire changed perceptions.
- As students with intellectual disabilities are experts of their own learning experiences there is a valued role for them to play in informing current understandings of the learning process. Being co-researchers challenges the negative and stereotyped views that are held by many in society towards this group of individuals. In this context, learning is envisaged as a quality-of-life issue that emphasises respect for the experiences and aspirations of people with intellectual disabilities combined with the notion of community regeneration and empowerment. By accessing progressively more demanding learning environments, people with intellectual disabilities widen their social networks and can be supported in how they see themselves and how others see them.

## 10.1 Theme 1: Inclusive learning and researching

*Inclusive learning (is) a way of thinking about further education that uses a revitalised understanding of learning and the learner's requirements as its starting point. The aim is not simply for students to 'take part' in further education, but to be actively included and fully engaged in their learning* (Inclusive Learning, 1996, pp. 25-6, cited in Learning and Skills Research Centre (LSRC) (2005).

The above extract from *Inclusive Learning* (also known as the Tomlinson Report) argues that unless educators understand how students learn they cannot begin to make the right provision for them. Current teaching approaches and strategies for people with intellectual disabilities are sometimes confounded with forms of provision that make it difficult for students with intellectual disabilities to be truly actively included and fully engaged in their learning (Nic Dhonncha, 2011). Irish educational policies such as the Warnock Report (1978) has seen inclusion as a necessity, and The Special Education Review Committee (SERC) (Ireland 1993) has recommended that inclusive education be provided for pupils with special educational needs in a mainstream setting alongside their peers. Despite these developments however, it has been shown (Nic Dhonncha, 2012) that educators, parents and guardians are still calling for "more collaboration to ensure that pupils with special educational needs are able to avail of an inclusive education (and) an education that is suited to the needs and the abilities of all pupils in the school" (p. 5).

This project recognised that to understand the learning experiences of CCL students, collaboration was paramount – researching with them has

helped to identify the principal theoretical perspectives which indicate or reflect effective teaching approaches for this group of individuals. These theoretical perspectives are individual constructivism (also called cognitive constructivism), and social constructivism. Individual constructivism sees learning as “an active individual construction” (Cobb, 1994, p. 136), whereas social constructivism views learning as “a process of enculturation into the ... practices of wider society” (p. 136). These ideas are not mutually exclusive and have influenced and have been influenced by one another’s insights into how people in general learn best. How effective teaching methods are depends on their underlying purposes. Beliefs about people with intellectual disabilities and how best to teach them tend to flow from ideological positions than an informed view of teaching and learning (Learning and Skills Research Centre, 2005). For learners with intellectual disabilities, teaching approaches are more effective when they draw on a range of theories of learning rather than an adherence to a single theoretical model.

### **Implications for practitioners**

- Consider your beliefs and assumptions about people with intellectual disabilities and their role and place in education and society. This reflection will influence the nature of provision that you offer and the methods that you use for teaching and learning.
- Draw on a variety of teaching methods and approaches (i.e. action learning, discussion and group work, role play, graphic facilitation and the use of ICT [PowerPoint presentations] ) that draw on

different ideas about learning and match these to a clear set of purposes.

- Redefine your notion of how you view learning. Learning for students with intellectual disabilities is a complex undertaking. Shift your understanding away from a reductive and functional notion of learning towards a more complex redefinition that reflects cognition, self-regulation, collective meaning making and be proactive in creating a safe learning environment.
- Process is as important as outcomes. The nature of teaching methods and approaches can have a profound influence on the development of a student's sense of self and emotional well-being as well as their beliefs and attitudes about themselves as learners. Support initiatives where students have the opportunity to teach their peers and allow opportunities for discussion and debate.
- Explore regularly with students their reasons for wanting to learn – how can you empower them to fulfil their aspirations. This exercise should shape what and how you teach. Students with intellectual disabilities need also to acquire tangible learning outcomes that are regarded by themselves and society as valuable. Explore these using a model of self-regulation.
- Recognise as fundamental to the learning process the uniqueness of each learner with regard to their learning styles (Visual Auditory & Kinaesthetic [VAK] models), their past experiences (negative/positive memories of school) and their motivations (Self-regulation).

- Support opportunities for students to learn in different and more challenging settings. Effective learning combines experiences of real-life settings (the CCL programme supports presentation at conferences, employment placements and auditing undergraduate lectures) with controlled classroom settings. Network with other professionals working in these contexts to ensure how students can be supported socially.

### **Implications for policy makers**

- Support the development of in-service teacher training programmes that focuses on the expansion of the repertoire of teaching methods and approaches. These should include facilitative teaching, action learning, graphic facilitation, learning style awareness and ICT.
- Value and fund research projects that are inclusive to ensure the voices the 'experts' are captured and heard.
- Support the development of third-level education initiatives in Ireland for people with intellectual disabilities. During 2008—2010 the CCL programme was funded through the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) to transfer the CCL programme to five partner sites in Ireland. The NIID worked together with these sites to increase the number of third-level institutions running the CCL. The findings from this research can provide leadership and advice in the areas of teaching and learning for staff working in these sites. Indeed co-researchers of this project have expressed a desire to disseminate their findings to others colleges and institutes both in Ireland and

internationally. There also has been considerable interest in the CCL programme from international universities. This level of attention has the potential to raise T.C.D. and the NIID's profile in the areas of Post Secondary Education and individuals with intellectual disabilities. Presenting at the 2011 State of the Art Conference on Post Secondary Education and Individuals with Intellectual disabilities in the Mason University in Washington DC. has allowed the NIID to form partnerships and connections with six other universities in the US. Groups from the George Mason University Newfoundland, the University of Delaware and the University of Vermont are keen to visit the NIID in the winter of 2012. Representatives from Syracuse University NY meanwhile are also keen to create a partnership based on the work of the NIID in the area of inclusive research.

- The value of gaining an insight into the complexity of how CCL students learn can inform inclusion policy within third-level education environments. For example, a social justice ethic permeates the institution of Trinity College with its emphasis on supporting non-traditional students, such as mature students, ethnic minorities and those who have a disability. The Trinity College Strategic Plan 2009-14 has articulated as a core value "the inclusivity of our community, which offers equality of access and opportunity to all, seeking out and recognising talent wherever it exists" (TCD, 2009, p. iv). Based in this inclusive environment, the NIID and CCL programme advances this inclusive ethos by

empowering its students to become co-researchers along with NIID staff to assist the development of self-advocacy. In this way, the 'voices' of students with intellectual disabilities can help College create a more diverse student body. For example, when launching the Discussion Paper of the Working Group on Admissions and the Curriculum (2012) in May 2012 at TCD, the Senior Lecturer, quoting Edmund Burke, noted that innovative initiatives such as the Discussion Paper needed to be "grounded in practical experience" (p. 1). It is argued by the current author that this current study provides examples of such practical experience which can inform College in its effort to be "radical in its thinking in relation to teaching" (p. 1).

- The modes of teaching practice that have been outlined in this study can be transferred to other contexts, such as child, workplace and adult education. These transferrable models not only include so-called 'alternative' teaching strategies (e.g. action, graphic and facilitative teaching) and philosophies (i.e. humanistic philosophy and affect/emotions, i.e. Rogers 1980; Knowles 1970/1980, 1975), but also inclusive research approaches (i.e. empowering students to become co-researchers and using the 'voices' of students to inform our understanding of teaching and learning), and innovative approaches to research dissemination (i.e. evidence-based research that informs the curriculum and alternative dissemination through DVD and accessible websites).
- Humanistic/adult education philosophies and teaching approaches can inform higher education provision. According to Haggis (2009)

the teaching methodologies and ideas of humanistic adult education are still relatively new to higher education, where they do exist, he argues, it is often in rather simplistic and reduced forms. These include self-directed learning, experiential learning, learning contract and ideas such as 'learner responsibility' and 'autonomy' which underpin such methodologies. Furthermore, the literature of adult education also contains much information about the nature of workplace learning which is increasingly becoming more directly related to the work-focused agenda imposed on higher education. It is argued by Haggis that teachers in higher education should "stand outside their histories" (p. 389) to examine their ontological and epistemological assumptions. Indeed it has been argued that teaching "is more than transmitting skills; it is a living act" (Ayers 1993, p. 20) that requires a mix of "intellectual and personal qualities" (Zumwalt & Craig 2005, p. 183).

## **10.2 Theme 2: Learning, empowerment and the supportive environment**

Studies have shown that the context in which learning takes place is crucial (Lave & Wenger 1991). This current research has demonstrated that the creation of a positive climate or learning environment can empower individuals to become active and participating learners. If the context is perceived by learners as one that is safe, supportive, and that can foster helpful relationships, it influences not only what is learned but how it is learned.



This study has shown that CCL students' ways of experiencing their learning consist of a hierarchy of increasing completeness that consists of individual effort and group effort. This community of learners can consist of peers, family, mentors or tutors. This relationship between social networks and learning is crucial; according to Field (2005, p.140)

people whose social capital consists mainly of close ties and where their bonding connections are with others who have low levels of human capital, are very likely to enjoy very limited access to ways of acquiring and generating new skills and knowledge.

Empowerment for learners is therefore developed as much *where* learning occurs, and *with whom*, as through the methods of teaching that are used.

### **Implications for practitioners**

- Develop your awareness of emotional competencies. Emotional intelligences as defined by Goleman (1995) begins with five parts: knowing emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognising emotions in others and handling relationships (see Appendix 16). It has been shown that emotionally intelligent teachers inform healthy classroom environments which minimise negative stress and contribute to more effective learning (Nelson, Low & Nelson 2005).
- Establish group culture in the classroom. A safe classroom space is informed by the class group culture (Hunter 2009) and is

somewhere where students with intellectual disabilities can feel comfortable to ask questions, take risks and share ideas with their classmates. Nelson, Low and Nelson (2005) recognise that “safe” (p.3) learning environments are critical to the development of “constructive thinking as well as problem solving, goal setting, achievement and leadership behaviours” (p. 3). For these authors, the creation of such an environment by educators “requires an understanding and emphasis on affective as well as cognitive skills” (p. 3).

### **Implications for teacher education**

- Include training programmes that cover emotional intelligent competencies. Failure to recognise the power of emotion when teaching can result in teachers becoming distracted and diverted from instructional goals, leading to high anxiety which impairs working memory and task processing (Eysenck & Calco 1992).
- Regarding pre-service teacher education: possessing emotional intelligence competencies has the potential to improve the area of teacher recruitment and education where currently the emphasis for selection and progress is almost entirely made on measures of academic intelligence and IQ. In a similar vein, the curriculum in teacher education has tended to privilege pedagogical subject knowledge over emotion awareness, and in doing so, the place of emotion within mentoring in pre-service teacher education has been neglected (Hawkey 2006). Goad (2005) and Justice (2005) have

indicated the value and importance of the inclusion of emotional intelligence skills training in teacher preparation programmes. Their research has indicated that pre-service teacher education, induction experiences, alternative certification programmes – and even teacher retention rates – could be strengthened by providing emotional intelligence training to both new and experienced teachers.

- Promoting achievement, productivity, leadership and personal health in teachers. Research has shown (Fredrickson 2001) that teachers who generate positive emotions can generate more and better teaching ideas and may also develop broad-minded coping skills. A growing body of interdisciplinary research has connected the relationship of emotional intelligence to achievement, productivity, leadership and personal health (Goleman 1995; Epstein 1998; Sternberg 1996; Gardner 1993; Weisenger 1998; Nelson & Low 1999, 2003, 2005).

### **10.3 The shortcomings of this study and suggestions for future research directions**

#### **10.3.0 Time restraints for inclusive analysis**

For Williams (2011), the role of the relationships within a research project is an all-important bedrock on which the research process is built and must remain solid and self-reflective. In this inclusive phenomenography,

the role of this author was that of lead researcher who supported co-researchers active engagement with their peers' learning and, on an equal basis, to discuss issues that arose. However, as this study forms part of a doctoral research programme, time limitations restricted the evolution of a more equal relationship between co-researchers and this author, particularly with regard to the analysis of the data collected.

It can be argued that the central part of any research is the analysis; it is through this that the researcher exerts his or her real power over the findings that have been created. In this study, I analysed the data in line with phenomenographic research methods, observing the importance of an iterative process of reading and rereading, drafting and redrafting the categories of descriptions and going back to the empirical data in order to confirm the accuracy of the researcher-interpreted collective voice. I also avoided moving "too quickly from the data in an attempt to structure the data" when formulating the categories of descriptions (Ashworth & Lucas 2000, p. 298). I also was aware of the need to constantly maintain the focus on "the collective voice derived from the contextualised individual voices" (Bowden & Green 2010b).

Therefore, in relation to my heavy involvement in the analysis stage, it was vital for me to raise this as a concern and reflect on whether this stage could have been conducted more inclusively. The bulk of the write-up of this doctorate thesis is confined to the fourth and final year of the programme (the data collection stage takes place in year three and the taught components in years one and two). Working within this limited time frame I made a deliberate decision to analyse the data myself. The

choice was informed by Walmsley (2004) who raised concerns over researchers who, in the name of inclusion, fail to identify “what skills people with intellectual disabilities have, and what extra skills they might need to be effective researchers, or where the work is better done by trained researchers” (p. 58). According to this author, it is as if having the label ‘intellectual disability’ confers on a person some special properties which enable him or her to do things for which others have had to undertake extensive training. Walmsley stresses that this had led to some poor research which adds very little to the current knowledge base and risks undermining the reputation of inclusive research.

The lessons from research practice suggest that people with intellectual disabilities should not be asked to carry out tasks relating to research for which that have undergone no training or preparation (Walmsley 2004). Thus, within the limited time frame of an academic year, to ask co-researchers to carry out interviews, *as well as* gain an knowledge and an understanding of phenomenographic analysis (i.e. devise a set of descriptive categories in an outcome space symbolising a range of qualitatively different ways of experiencing the phenomenon of learning) and co-write up the findings, would likely take a lot of time on the part of the current researcher. Constrained within the timeframe allocated by the requirements of this thesis, minimal information on college students’ experiences of learning would have emerged. What was more favourable, this current author argues, was to support a process that would contribute to an evidence base which can inform the current phenomenographic literature on experiences of learning and contribute to improved awareness for educators in the field of teaching and learning.

Research, disabled activists would argue (Morris 1993), is not taking all the steps in isolation and doing everything for one's self: on the contrary, the most subtle but necessary task for the research supporter is to find ways of enabling members to appreciate the significance of what they are doing as researchers (Williams 2011). In commenting on the role of non-disabled supporters in research, Chapman and McNulty (2004) found that it was possible to work as part of a team, with different people having their own roles within that team. What was more important for the current researcher was that the voices and autonomy of CCL students were both fostered and respected in this project.

The decision to exclude co-researchers from the analysis stage does not mean that this project is less inclusive or even less valuable than other inclusive research studies. To ask CCL students to contribute information on the role of researchers, on how to make material accessible, how to gain consent and how to disseminate good ideas makes eminently good sense. In this research context it is argued that the inclusion of these students as interviewers of their peers heightened the likelihood of obtaining insights unavailable by other means. Co-researchers were also CCL students and, as it has been argued above, this helped to create a psychologically comfortable environment where the interviewee could gain some control of the interview (Perlman, Ericsson, & Isaacs, 1997).

#### **10.4 How the research findings can inform future inclusive research projects regarding participation and 'voice'**

Although the literature on inclusive research has been growing over the last 25 years (Walmsley 2004), the current author argues that there are still relatively few examples of studies which have explored and documented the 'voices' of people with intellectual disabilities during the process of training co-researchers and collecting data through one-to-one interviews. It was also the aim of this study to get behind the rhetoric of 'participation' and 'voice' and analyse how participation can practically be supported. Being involved for 6 years in supporting people with intellectual disabilities in conferences or in research, I am aware of the tensions and criticisms surrounding worries about their intellectual capacity and the role played by supporters like me. For example, Redley and Weinberg (2007) found that people with intellectual disabilities were frequently not speaking for themselves in participation forums but were prompted, guided and moulded by non-disabled supporters.

Like the Redley and Weinberg study above, this project sought to find direct evidence of interaction in order to gain a deeper understanding of 'having a voice' in inclusive research. It is also anticipated that the information gained of both "front stage" at presentations, and "backstage" during role play sessions (Williams 2011, p. 184) will help to offer a fuller picture and ultimately, inform educators in how to meaningfully involve intellectually disabled students in further studies on learning.

The implications for the findings of Stage 1 of this project are far-reaching: it has been shown that people with intellectual disabilities are not incapable or incompetent researchers and thinkers; co-researchers of this project have challenged the negative and stereotyped views that are often held by many people in society. In this study, co-researchers participated in the collection and creation of their own knowledge: in this way these individuals were empowered to speak up for themselves and advocate for what they feel is right. Doing the "self-advocacy talk" (Williams 2011, p. 141) allowed these individuals to articulate their own issues so they can begin to instigate change. One example from this research process illustrates this newfound confidence: when I asked co-researchers to reflect on their learning experiences using the framework of the learning cycle of Honey and Mumford (2000), their response was to voice their discontent by articulating how this framework was too difficult and complex to use. They recommended the use of an alternative and more 'user-friendly' framework by adapting the model I originally presented. This is just one example of the self-confidence and self-assurance co-researchers possessed. Other examples include their desire to present the findings of this research at the next NIID Summer School of Inclusion in 2013. It is argued that an example such as this highlights that these individuals (and by extension other intellectual disabled people) can challenge the dominant orders of discourse relating to intellectual disability and research. The collective power that people possess when they come together to express their own ideas has enormous potential to challenge the status quo (Beresford 2001) and ultimately change policy and practice.



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## **Appendices 1 - 16**



# Co-researcher's Handbook

*How do CCL Students Experience  
their Learning?*



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Timetable

|            |                                                                                                                             |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Week one   | <b>Establishing a baseline:</b><br>Exploring current understandings of research and the role of the researcher              |
| Week two   | <b>Stages of the research:</b><br>Introducing the stages involved in a social research project and the meaning of key words |
| Week three | <b>The research question:</b><br>Addressing the question: ‘What and why are we researching?’                                |
| Week four  | <b>Inclusive research:</b> Understanding the theory and application of inclusive research                                   |
| Week five  | <b>Consent form:</b> Designing the consent form and exploring ways                                                          |

|                           |                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                           | <p>to share information of the project to people with intellectual disabilities</p> <p><b>Signing up:</b> Getting consent, ensuring that participants know what they are signing up for</p> |
| Week six                  | <b>Interview techniques:</b> Exploring facilitation and questioning                                                                                                                         |
| Week seven                | <b>Role play:</b> practising interviewing skills                                                                                                                                            |
| Week eight                | <b>Presentation:</b> Presenting the research project and gaining consent accessibly                                                                                                         |
| Week nine, ten and eleven | <b>Data collection:</b> Interviewing the research sample                                                                                                                                    |

When you think of research and researchers,  
what do you see?



Is it ☐



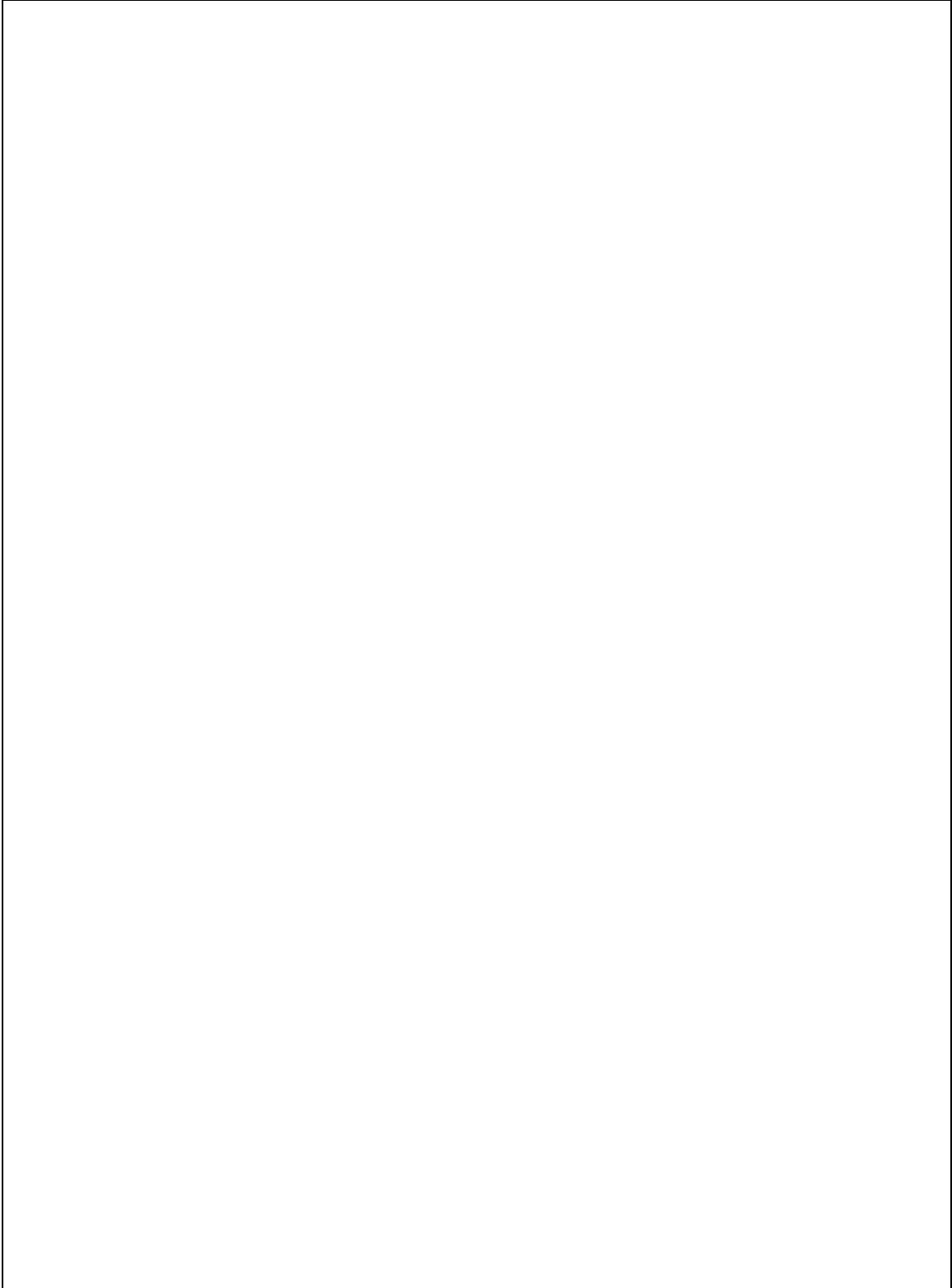
Is it ☐



or ☐

Draw an image of **yourself as a researcher**

“Me as a researcher”



# Stages of research

## 1. Identify the research question



## 2. Select methods



## 3. Collect data from sample



## 4. Analysis



## 5. Dissemination



# Meanings of key words explained:

## 1. Identify the **research question**



The **research question** describes what the research project is all about

## 2. Select **methods**



The **methods** are the tools used to collect data. In this project we will be using **interviews** as a method.

## 3. Collect **data** from **sample**



**Data:** the information that you collect from the people that you interview.

The people that you interview are called the **sample**.

The **sample** will be the **CCL students**.

## 4. Analysis



**Putting** all the information you collect **together**

## 5. Dissemination



**Communicating** what you found out on the project **to other people**.

# Identifying the research question

What are we researching?

We are researching the question:

**“How do CCL students experience their learning?”**

- Is this topic important to you? Yes ☐ No ☐

Why?

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- What questions should we ask CCL students on **“how they learn”**?

➤ \_\_\_\_\_

➤ \_\_\_\_\_

➤ \_\_\_\_\_

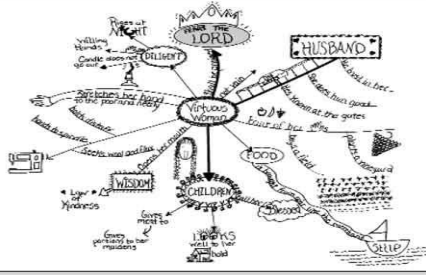


# Deciding on a learning task for CCL students

If we give CCL students a **learning task** to do, what should it be?

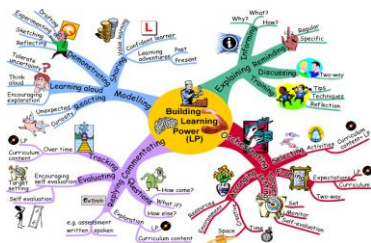


A brainstorming exercise



A spider-gram exercise

Or



A mind map exercise



Any other ideas on what **learning task** we could give to CCL students?

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## Giving out the information

Explaining what the study is about.

*You could say:*

- We are carrying out a project about:

**“How CCL students learn”**



- We would like to get your opinions on:

**‘learning’ and**

**‘how you go about your learning’.**

## Why are we carrying out this project?

*You could say:*



- We would like to ask you to take part in this project because your ideas **on how you learn** and **how you understand learning are important.**
- Most research on how students learn is carried out by **experts or professional researchers.**



- We think that it's important that research is also **carried out by students** like ourselves as well as the experts.
- In this way we can make sure that the **things that are important to us are heard** by people who make decisions in research and in education.

## Information on ‘Inclusive research’

*You could say:*



- This is an **‘inclusive research’** project.
- Inclusive research is different to other types of research.
  - This inclusive research project **will be carried out by us – CCL students.**
- **Your voices and opinions are important** for inclusive research.
- This research will help us find out more about what needs to be done to help students on the CCL programme learn better.

## What questions will we ask the group?

*You could say:*



If you decide to take part in this project it means that we will interview you and ask you questions about:

- ✓ What do you understand by the word **“LEARNING”**
- ✓ **How do you learn** a particular task?
- ✓ What do you **find easy** with your learning?
- ✓ What do you **find difficult** with your learning?
- ✓ What **support** do you need with your learning?

Any other questions you would like to ask?

- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_

## What information will we give to the group?

*You could say:*

If you don't want to take part in the research, that's fine.

If you decide to take part in this project, we will ask you to sign the consent form.



A consent form is a form that you sign if you're happy to take part in the project.

If you decide to take part in this project, you can to stop at any time.

Please think if you would like to take part in this project and ask us any questions you're not sure about.



If you have any questions you can talk to:



John Kubiak and (*co-researchers' names*)

## **Designing the consent form**

**Have a look at the consent form on the following page.**



**See if you can:**

**✓ Read the words**



**✓ Understand the words / pictures**

**✓ Understand what the information on the form is about**



**✓ Make comments on how to make it more accessible for students on the CCL course**



**Name of project:** ‘Intellectually Disabled Students’  
Experiences of Learning in Tertiary Education: an Inclusive  
Phenomenography

Researchers: John Kubiak and *(co-researchers’ names)*  
National Institute for Intellectual Disability, Trinity College, Dublin

**Please read these carefully**

|                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>I have had this research explained to me.</p>                  | <p>I would be happy to talk to another person if I have any big concerns.</p>  |
| <p>I have been able to ask questions and have them answered.</p>  | <p>I am happy to have the interview tape recorded</p>                          |
| <p>I understand what is expected of me.</p>                     | <p>This project is about learning</p>                                         |
| <p>I can stop being involved any stage of this project</p>      | <p>I agree to take part in this project.</p>                                 |

|                                                            |                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Signed: _____<br/>Print name: _____<br/>Date: _____</p> | <p>Witness: _____<br/>Print name: _____<br/>Date: _____</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|

**Are you happy with this consent form?**  
**Use a pen to show what you would like**  
**to change about this consent form?**

## Revised consent form

**Name of project:** ‘Intellectually Disabled Students’  
Experiences of Learning in Tertiary Education: an Inclusive  
Phenomenography’

**Researchers:** John Kubiak and (co-researchers’ names)  
National Institute for Intellectual Disability, Trinity College,  
Dublin

**Please read these carefully**

|                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>I have had this research explained to me.</b>                   | <b>I would be happy to talk to another person if I have any concerns.</b>  |
| <b>I have been able to ask questions and have them answered.</b>  | <b>I am happy to have the interview tape recorded</b>                     |
| <b>I understand what is expected of me.</b>                      | <b>This project is about</b><br><br><br><br><b>learning</b>              |
| <b>I can stop being involved at any stage of this project</b>    | <b>I agree to take part in this project.</b>                             |

|                             |                             |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Signed:</b> _____        | <b>Witness:</b> _____       |
| <b>Print name:</b><br>_____ | <b>Print name:</b><br>_____ |
| <b>Date:</b><br>_____       | <b>Date:</b><br>_____       |

## How do we make sure that everyone understands what the study is about?

*We could:*

- ✓ Give them a questionnaire
- ✓ Do a quiz
- ✓ Ask them to do a poster
- ✓ Have a discussion
- ✓

What other ideas do you have?

- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_



## Gaining consent

In this session we will discuss:



- **Meeting** with the group

- **Reading the information form** to the



- Checking if everyone **understands**



- Asking people if they are happy to **sign up**



## Meeting with the group



## Announcing the meeting



- ✓ Let the group know that you would like to talk to them about a project you are planning to do.
- ✓ Arrange a time and a place to meet up. (It could be done during a class break).

After you've done this:



**Where** and **when** will you meet with the group?

Where? \_\_\_\_\_

When? \_\_\_\_\_

## Reading the information form to the group



*You could say:*

- Thanks for coming to this meeting today.



- Over the next few weeks, the six of us, John, (*names of co-researchers*) will be carrying out a project on **'learning'** and **'how CCL students learn'**.



- We are doing this with the support of John.
- You don't have to take part in this project.

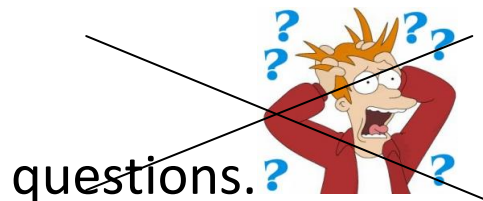


- If you **do** decide to take part it means that we will interview you. We will ask you questions about:

- ✓ What do you understand by “**LEARNING**”
- ✓ **How do you learn?**



- We **will not** ask you any personal



- We are only interested in finding out **how you go about your learning.**



- We feel that this is important because there is very little information available about how people with an intellectual disability learn.



- We are doing this study with John's support
- We hope that it will help tutors in the NIID understand how to make learning better and more enjoyable for students on the CCL.





# Checking if everyone understands



*You could ask some questions such as:*

What is this project about?



Is it about **relationships**?

Yes ☐ No ☐



Is this project about **jobs**?

Yes ☐ No ☐



Is this project about **learning**?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Asking people if they are happy to sign  
up



*You could:*



Read the consent form out loud once  
more



**Explain** the consent form



Ask the group if they have **any questions**



Ask the group if they would like to **sign**  
**the consent form**



## Doing the interviews / Collecting data

- Equipment needed



- Facilitation skills for interviewing



- Recording the interview



# Equipment needed

Dictaphone to record the interview



Notebook / paper / pens



What other equipment do you think you would need?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

# Preparing the Room



- ✓ Find a quiet room to have the interview

Make sure that the room:

Is comfortable



(not too hot, not too cold)

Is bright



Is easy to get to



- ✓ Place a sign on the door stating:

**“Please do not disturb. Interview in progress”**

**Please do not  
disturb.**

**Interview in  
progress**



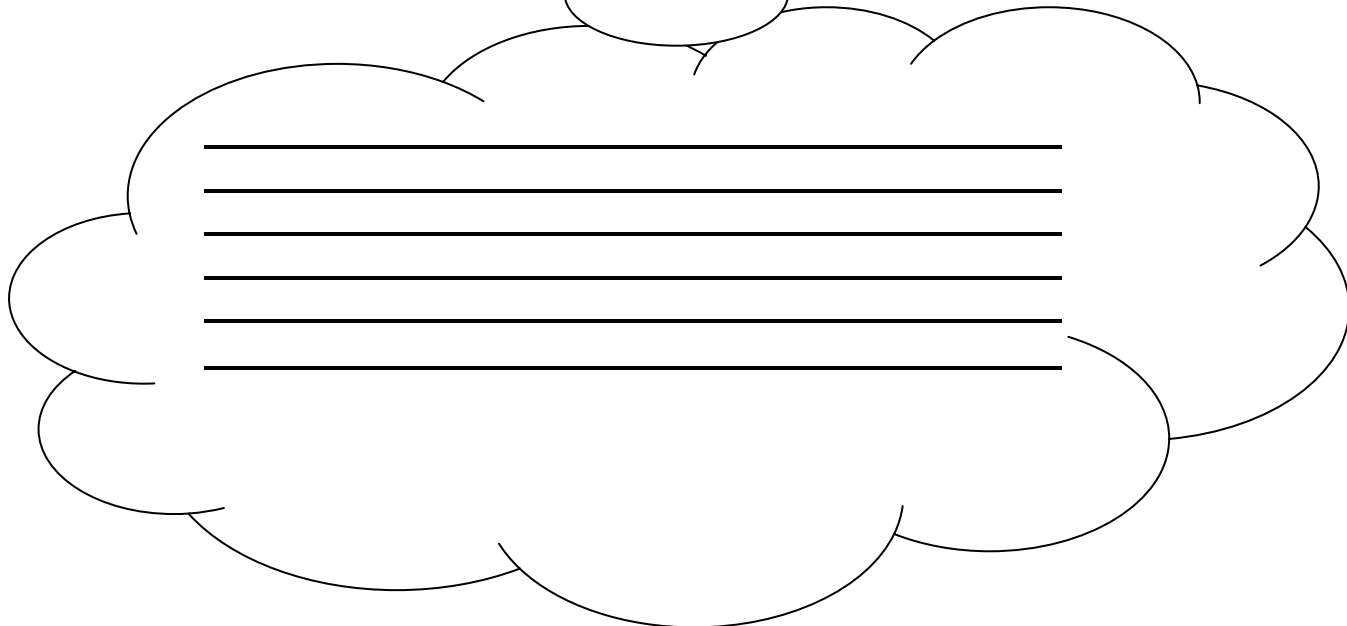
# Facilitation skills for interviewing



**Facilitation –  
what is facilitation?**

**Brainstorm!**

What do you think facilitation is?



- Facilitation is a way of working with people



- A facilitator uses certain skills and techniques that helps people reach decisions



- Facilitation encourages people to share ideas, opinions and to think seriously



- To be a good facilitator **you need to develop your listening skills**





## **Listening – a basic skill of facilitation**



Question: How do you listen best?

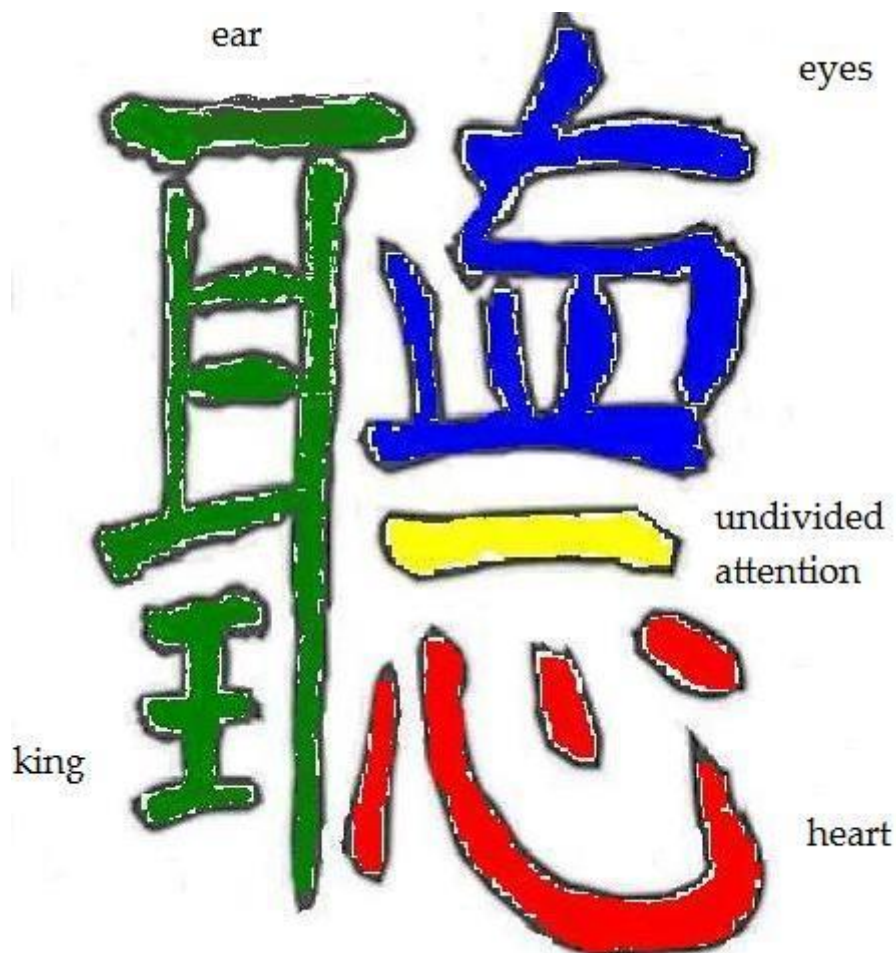
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## Chinese symbol for listening



What does this symbol mean to you?

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# Stages of the listening process

## 1. RECEIVE



The **physical** act of listening

## 2. FILTER



**Filter out** external noises /and internal thoughts

## 3. FOCUS



Focus on the speaker. Give **full attention** to what is being said and what is not being said.

#### 4. GRASP



Grasp the speaker's **message**.

#### 5. REMEMBER



Remember what the **speaker** said.

#### 6. CONSIDER



Consider what to do with the **information**.

*and*

#### 7. RESPOND



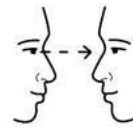
## RESPOND

You can respond in **four possible ways**:

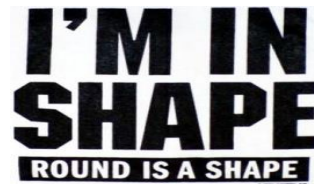
➤ direct verbal response



➤ non-verbal response



➤ paraphrasing



➤ clarify



## Write examples of:

1. A **direct verbal** response



to *"I am*

*well"*

---

2. A **non-verbal** response to



*"I'm happy to*

*answer the questions"*

---

3. Paraphrase this: *"I'm a bit worried about this interview"*

---

---

4. Clarify this:



*"I'm not sure if I can be a researcher"*

---

# Interviewing skills

## Open and Closed questions



There are **two** different types of questions you can ask in an interview:

### 1. Open questions



An **open question** is likely to receive a **long answer**.

### 2. Closed questions



A **closed question** can be answered with a **single word** (such as: yes / no)

## Examples of closed questions:

“What time is it?” “Where do you live?”

“Are you well?”



What closed questions do

- Closed questions are easy to answer.
- Closed questions are quick to answer.

A **closed question** can be answered with a **single word** such as yes / no.

| When to use closed questions                        | Example                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| At the <b>start</b> of the interview.               | <i>How are you today?</i><br><i>Are you ready to start?</i> |
| To <b>test</b> that a person understands something. | <i>Did you find the questions difficult?</i>                |
| To <b>end</b> an interview.                         | <i>Thanks for the interview, did you enjoy it?</i>          |



# Open questions

An **open question** is likely to receive a **long answer**.



Open questions begin words with such as:

**what**

**why**

**how**

**describe**

## Examples of open questions:

**“What** does learning mean to you?”

**“Why** did you draw a picture of a computer in your picture?”

**“Describe** what’s going on in the drawing”

**“How**

”

---

When you ask an open question you:

- Asks the person to **think and reflect**.
- Encourage a person to give their ***opinions and feelings***.
- Hand **control of the conversation** to the person answering.

| When to use open questions                                                       | Example                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| To <b>open up</b> someone who is rather quiet.                                   | <i>What did you do in class today?</i><br><i>How do you keep focused on your studies?</i>           |
| To <b>find out</b> more about a person, their wants, needs, problems, and so on. | <i>What's keeping you motivated to complete the CCL?</i><br><i>Why is that so important to you?</i> |
| To show that you care about them.                                                | <i>You're looking upset today. What's wrong with you?</i>                                           |

## Information for CCL students

### Name of project:

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

**Researchers: *Names of co-researchers omitted* & John Kubiak.**

**For more information please contact: John Kubiak Tel: 896 3442 or email: [kubiakj@tcd.ie](mailto:kubiakj@tcd.ie)**

**National Institute for Intellectual Disability, Trinity College, Dublin 2**

- Over the next few weeks, the six of us, (*names of co-researchers*) will be carrying out a project on:

**learning**

**and**

**how CCL students experience their learning**

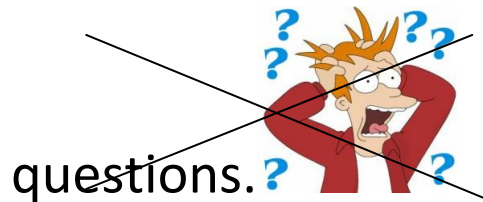
- If you decide to take part in this project it means that we will interview you. We will ask you questions about:

- ✓ What do you understand by **“LEARNING”**  
and
- ✓ **How do you learn on the CCL?**





- We will **not** ask you any personal



questions.

- We are only interested in finding out **how you go about your learning.**



- This is important because there is not much information available on how people with an intellectual disability go about their learning.



- We are doing this study with John Kubiak's support. We hope that it will help tutors in the NIID understand how to improve learning for students on the CCL.
- You don't have to take part in this project – it's your choice. **NO**

## Final Quiz design

If you have decided to take part in this project  
please answer these questions:

What is this project about?



Is it about **relationships**?

Yes ☐ No ☐



Is this project about **jobs**?

Yes ☐ No ☐



Is this project about **learning**?

Yes ☐ No ☐

## Task: after each session...



- Photocopy these two pages
- Complete the three questions

**Reflections on session** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



1. Describe **what we spoke about** in this session:

---

---

---

---

2. How did you **feel** the session went for you?



Very well ☐



Well ☐



O.K. ☐



Not well ☐

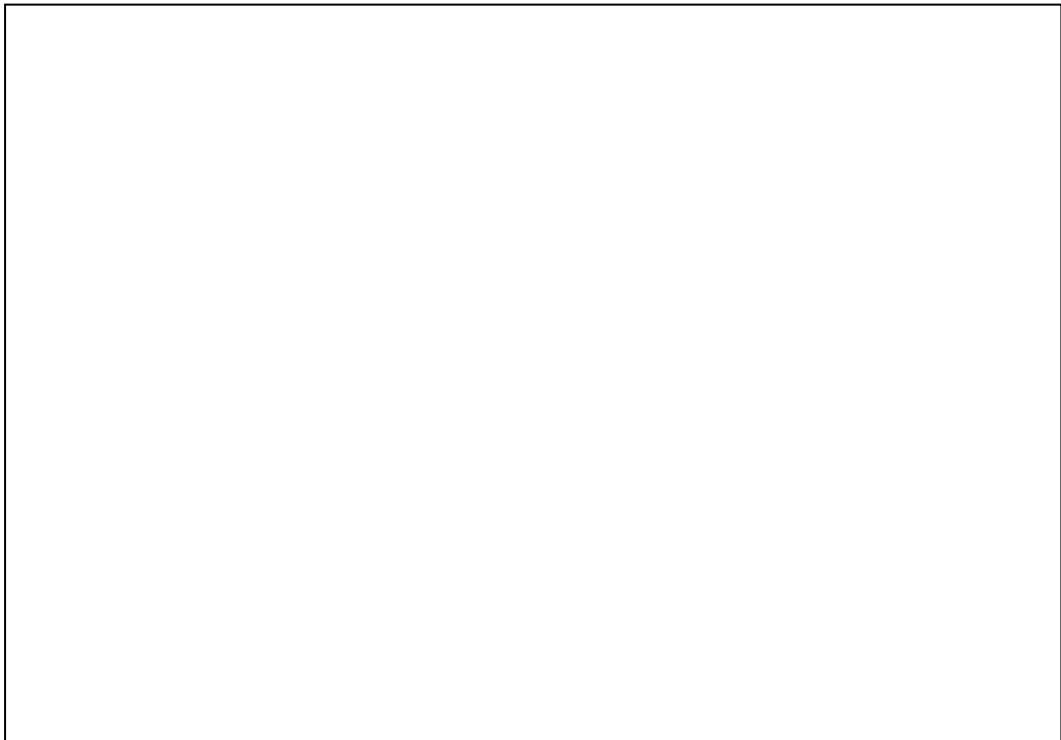
**Why** do you feel like this?

---

---

3. Could you sum up **the main ideas** that we covered in this session? (You can write or draw your answer)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_





## Appendix 2 PowerPoint presentation to CCL students



### Our Research Project

[Names of co-researchers]  
& John Kubiak.



#### Today we will talk about:

- **What** we are researching
- **Why** are we researching this subject
- **Inclusive** research
- **Questions** we will ask



### What are we researching?

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



We would like to get your opinions on:  
**'learning' and**  
**'your experiences of learning on the CCL'.**



### Why are we carrying out this project?

We would like to ask you to take part in this project  
because your ideas on

1. **learning**
  2. **how you learn on the CCL**
- are important.



This research will help us find out more about how  
we can **help CCL students learn better.**





## 'Inclusive' research



Should research be only carried out by the 'experts' or professional researchers?  
or



Should research be carried out by students like us **as well as** the 'experts'.



Why this is important?

- ✓ To make sure that our voices are heard and
- ✓ To let others know about the **things that are important to us**.



## Inclusive Research – what is it?

- Inclusive research is different to other types of research.
- Most research is done by paid 'professionals'
- **Inclusive research** is done by paid professionals **AND** people who are interested in carrying out research.
- For example, inclusive research about intellectual disability is done by professionals **and** people with an intellectual disability.



## Inclusive research about 'learning'

- This research will help us find out more about:
  - **CCL students' views on 'learning'**, and
  - **How students learn** on the CCL.



? What **questions** will we ask?

If you decide to take part in this project we will interview you and ask you these questions:

## 1.What do you understand by the word “LEARNING”?

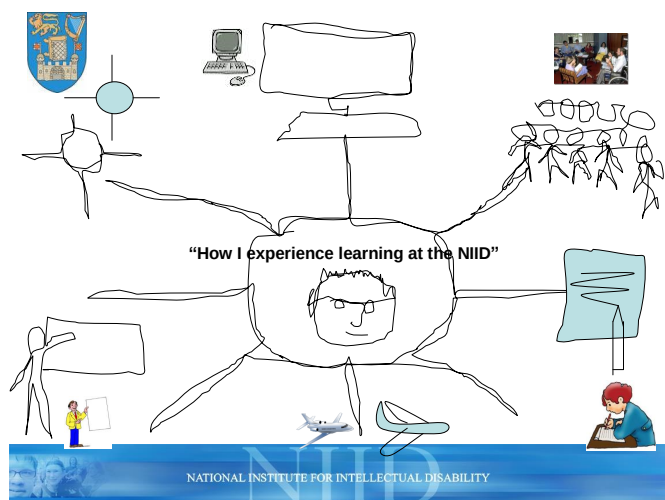
## 1.How do you learn on the CCL?



You will be asked to do one  
easy task:

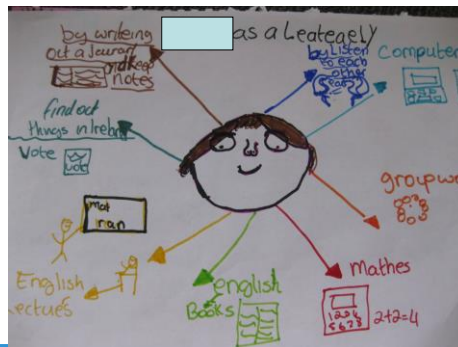


On a sheet of paper do a drawing  
on  
***'How I experience learning on the  
CCL'***

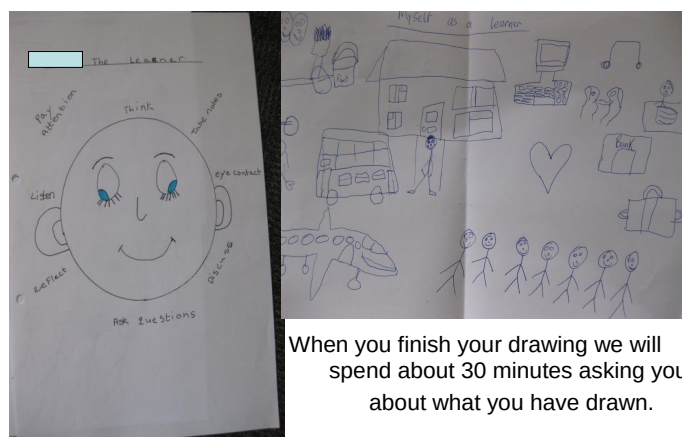




## (Co-researcher's) drawing



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY



When you finish your drawing we will spend about 30 minutes asking you about what you have drawn.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY



## Asking your consent



- A **consent form** is a form that you sign if you're happy to take part in the project.



- If you don't want to take part in the research, that's fine.



If you're happy to take part in this project, we will ask you to sign the **consent form**.



### Consent form

Name of project: 'Intellectually Disabled Students' Experiences of Learning in Tertiary Education: an Inclusive Phenomenography'  
Researchers: John Kubiak, & names of co-researchers

|                                                           |  |                                                                    |  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| I have had this research explained to me.                 |  | I would be happy to talk to another person if I have any concerns. |  |
| I have been able to ask questions and have them answered. |  | I am happy to have the interview tape recorded                     |  |
| I understand what is expected of me.                      |  | This project is about learning                                     |  |
| I can stop being involved at any stage of this project    |  | I agree to take part in this project.                              |  |
| Signed: _____                                             |  | Witness: _____                                                     |  |
| Print name: _____                                         |  | Print name: _____                                                  |  |
| Date: _____                                               |  | Date: _____                                                        |  |



*Thank you for your attention*

Any questions?



### **Appendix 3(a) Information form for CCL students**

**Hi!**



My name is John Kubiak and I tutor on the CCL programme.



Over the next few months I will be carrying out a research project on 'How CCL students experience their learning'.



I'm looking for six CCL students to research with me.

If you are interested I will train you in the skills you need to carry out interviews.



## What is this research about?



This research is about how **'learning'**

The title of the project is:

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



In particular I want to understand **what learning means** for CCL students **attending Trinity College.**



I'm interested in finding out **how CCL students understand and describe their learning** during the time they're at college.

# Inclusive research



What is inclusive research?



**Inclusive research** enables people with disabilities to carry out a research project.

**Inclusive research** gives you **control** over **what questions are asked** and **how the research will be carried out**.



This is important for inclusive research. **You decide** what is working well for you as researchers and what parts of the research needs to be improved.



**Volunteering to take part and meeting up**



I would like six volunteers from the CCL programme to become part of the first stage of this inclusive research project. I will train these volunteers to interview other CCL students.



In these meetings you will be asking other **CCL students** questions about **their learning while they are at college.**



As a group **you can decide** on what question should be asked.



The questions you will ask **are only about learning** at college.

No other questions will be asked.

For example some of the questions could be:

- 📖 What does the word 'learning' mean?
- 📖 What's helpful or **what's going well with your learning** at college?
- 📖 What's **not going well** or what's **difficult** for you as a learner?
- 📖 What parts of the **CCL are difficult** for you at the moment? Why are they difficult?

## Happy to be part of this research?



With your permission, I will send a letter to your parents / guardians telling them about this research. You might like to talk with them about what we spoke about today.

If you are happy to take part in our research, please read the next page and sign the consent form and return it to me.



If you have any questions please contact:

John Kubiak  
Teaching and Learning Officer  
on  
896 3442 or 087 7590956.

Thank you

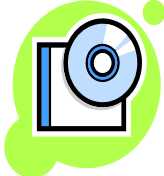
## Title of the research:

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

Researcher: John Kubiak

National Institute for Intellectual Disability, Trinity College, Dublin.

**Please read these carefully**

|                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>I have had this research explained to me.</b></p>                   |                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <p><b>I have been able to ask questions and have them answered.</b></p>  | <p><b>I would be happy to talk to another person if I have any big concerns.</b></p>  |
| <p><b>I understand what is expected of me.</b></p>                      | <p><b>I am happy to have the group meetings tape recorded</b></p>                   |
| <p><b>I can stop being involved at any stage of this project</b></p>    | <p><b>I agree to take part in this project.</b></p>                                 |

|                                                                                                 |                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>CCL student to Sign here:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Print name:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Date:.....</p> | <p>Witness:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Print name:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Date:.....</p> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## **Appendix 3(B)**

### **Information form for family members / guardians**

This information sheet provides you with information on a research project entitled:

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

This proposed research plans to carry out an 'inclusive' research project with students on the Certificate in Contemporary Living (CCL) about ***how they experience their learning***. This will be a unique opportunity in which CCL students will interview their peers about what helps and hinders their learning process. **A major purpose of this research is to understand how to improve and deepen awareness of learning for people with intellectual disabilities and their educators in third level education.** This research proposal received ethical approval from Trinity College's School of Education in November 2010.

#### ***What is this research about?***

This research aims at addressing the following questions:

1. How do students on the CCL programme understand the concept of 'learning'?
2. What strategies of teaching do CCL students find most beneficial and most engaging for their learning?
3. How can CCL students become more informed about, and pro-active in their learning process?

#### ***What's the point of undertaking this research?***

People with intellectual disabilities may lack the self-knowledge and self-awareness of what pertains to knowing what effective learning approaches and strategies are for a given situation. Consequently, there is a need to be taught these strategies directly in the classroom through an increased awareness of self-reflection. The topic of learning for people with

intellectual disabilities is an area that has received very little attention in the research literature. There is currently little knowledge of how to best facilitate the learning process for students with intellectual disabilities, particularly in the context of third level education.

### **CCL students as co-researchers**

This is an 'inclusive' research project. 'Inclusive research' is a type of research used in the NIID that enables people with intellectual disabilities to become researchers or co-researchers. This approach has a dual focus: firstly, it will empower students to become researchers and/or co-researchers and to raise and explore issues in relation to areas of concern to them. Secondly, it will enable students to explore and develop their understanding of *how* their learning takes place on the CCL programme and how this learning could be transferred to other situations. The 'voices' of the students are an important part of this research. Only the students themselves can talk about their experience of their own learning; it should not always come from an academic 'expert'.

I'm asking six CCL students to volunteer for this research. I will train these co-researchers in the skills needed to undertake one-to-one interviews with their peers.

I have spoken with (*name of student*) about this research project. I have given (*him/her*) information about the nature of the research and I have also let (*him/her*) know that I'm sending a letter to you informing you of what's involved.

### **Training to be co-researchers**

For 11 weeks (until December 2010), six students will be trained in the theory of 'inclusive' research and how to facilitating one-to-one interviews. In January 2011 these co-researchers will undertake interviews with other CCL students. The focus will be on **how CCL students experience their learning while on the CCL programme.**

***What if a student does not want to take part of the research?***

If a student chooses not to be part of this research, it will *not* affect their studies on the certificate programme at the NIID.

When the research is completed it will be of interest to people with intellectual disability and their families as well as education institutions and government departments. **The major purpose of this research is to understand how to improve and deepen awareness of learning for people with intellectual disabilities in third level education.**

Upon completion a summary of the findings of the research will be disseminated to students in accessible format. It is also hoped that CCL students will have opportunities to present their findings to interested third parties.

If you have any questions about this research entitled:  
‘Intellectually Disabled Students’ Experiences of Learning in  
Tertiary Education: an Inclusive Phenomenography’

Please contact:

John Kubiak, Teaching & Learning Officer, NIID, TCD.  
on (01) 896 3442 or 087 7590 956.

## Appendix 4 Ethical Approval

### Office Use Only:

#### Decision of the Ethical Approval Committee School of Education, Trinity College Dublin

|                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Student: John Kubiak<br>Title of Project: <i>How do Students with Intellectual Disabilities perceive and describe their learning in a tertiary setting?</i><br>DEd project |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Research Ethics Meeting Date                                                                                                                                               | 18 <sup>th</sup> November 2010                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Decision                                                                                                                                                                   | <p><i>The Ethics Committee grants ethical approval for this project but would like to draw attention to two matters of data protection in this case. Under questions 17 and 18 of the ethics approval form, the indication was made that no personalised data would be generated and/or stored and that there was no access to documents containing sensitive data. As John is working in the Institute, it is most likely that he has access to personalised and sensitive data on his research participants. For this reason, the Ethics Committee requires that no data provided to the Institute in the first instance should find its way into the data associated with this project. All data in the project must be generated as primary data from informed and consenting participants. Furthermore, the data generated in this project should not be held or stored anywhere in the Institute or on information systems or computers within the Institute.</i></p> <p><b><i>Participants should be informed of this data protection measure.</i></b></p> |
| Date                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>18<sup>th</sup> November</p> <p><i>Dr. Aidan Seery, Chair, Ethics Committee</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |



## **Appendix 5 Co-researchers' responses to CCL students after presenting the PowerPoint on the research**

### Consent form

Questions were invited from the group; the first one addressed why people should fill in a consent form. CR5 responded by saying that a consent form was like a type of contract: you read it and if you're happy with the agreement you sign it – it's your choice to take part or not. He continued: "A consent form is necessary because everybody will understand what we are actually doing... other (students) might not want to do what we've asked them to do so, it's making it much better for them."

### The research process

Another CCL student requested what was involved in the research process. CR4 responded by replying: "You (be asked to)... talk about your learning – what makes it easier for you and other CCL students to learn... you have to draw yourself in the middle of the spidergram and think of words that (describe) how you learn." The student sought more clarification on two points: how many researchers will interview her, and could she stop the interview if she signed the consent form. In response CR4 stated that it would be just one person carrying out the interview and even if she signed the consent form she could still stop.

### Use of colour

Other students commented on two drawings displayed on the PowerPoint slides: one student liked slide 10 saying that CR1 used really nice colours. CR1 responded by saying that she really loved using colours and that they were an important part of her learning. She continued: "When I'm designing a poster I pick out coloured markers to make it easier for me to learn... colour is important for me". Another CCL student agreed with CR1's remark and added that colour was also important for self-expression. The student said that "most people would... be able to express themselves through colour. I agree with that".

#### The spidergram

Another CCL student was interested in finding out the length of time it took to complete a drawing and, how many you had to do. The group responded with a number of varying answers by saying that it took: 1) a minute (CR1); 2) a second (CR5); 3) a couple of minutes (CR4); 4) 5 minutes (CR3), 5) 3-4 minutes (CR6), and 6), 5-10 minutes (CR2).

CR6 added that only "one drawing was needed with the interview taking about 20-30 minutes". It was also stated that putting together the visual stimulus was not like an art competition – it was not necessary to complete a highly finished, good quality art-piece. Rather, it was explained that a drawing, or a spidergram, or even some written words on a page that expressed how they learn on the CCL programme was adequate.

Despite this reassurance however, one CCL student was still concerned about his perceived inability to undertake a drawing. He said: "I know it's

not an art competition, but I'm not very good at drawing. If I also find a spidergram hard, can I just write a few lines on an A4 page? CR1 informed him that it was fine to do this; she said if the written word came easier to him than a drawing then "it was fine to do that".

Finally, a concern was raised by a student over how people can be inspired to come up with ideas for the drawing or for the spidergram. Three co-researchers responded by saying that they were inspired by thinking about their favourite way of doing things in class and by using preferred colours in their finished piece: "I base it on the things that I actually like, the way I learn, like music (CR5), and "I use the colours that I love – the colour blue" (CR3).

#### Data protection

A concern over data protection was presented. A student asked: "Who will see all of this when it's finished? Will it be seen by other CCL students?" CR5 responded by saying that it will be "locked away"; CR6 added that the data was "confidential - the information would be locked in a drawer in (this author's) office".

#### Experience of becoming a co-researcher

The final student question was a broad one: "Over the last few weeks, what did you learn?" A number of answers were offered: CR6 responded: "We designed a presentation, and we practiced it". CR2 commented: "We practiced interviews... we put (the information) onto PowerPoint rather than giving out (written) information." CR4 responded by stating: "It was no pressure at all. We practiced how to interview each other and what to

ask and what not to ask, what people can talk about and what not to talk about". CR5 explaining her feelings on the benefits of group work: "I found it very interesting because we all worked together as a group so for me I found it quite challenging and very good". CR6 concluded with: "It was very challenging but you got used to it – it was no problem at all"

## **Appendix 6 Co-researchers' understanding of 'facilitation' and 'listening'**

What is facilitation?

For some co-researchers, facilitation meant possessing certain interpersonal skills: facilitation was considered to be: "about listening" (CR1); "about learning. Getting people to learn, asking them why they like to learn, for example, brainstorming" (CR6); "about satisfying the other person" (CR5); "getting everything prepared" (CR4); "It's eye contact, body language, listening, sharing ideas" (CR3). Facilitation for CR2 was the skills an NIID tutor possessed while undertaking class:

*When you're doing a class or (working with) a group of people, you (this author) facilitate us in class, talking to us in class. It's talking to a group of people and showing them what you're doing. It's helping them out.*

Other responses from co-researchers indicated a strong awareness of the importance of facilitation with regard to the work they would be undertaking. For example, CR1 spoke about the need for the group to present themselves as serious researchers who can facilitate sessions informing people what they have done. She said: "we need to come across as a group of people who know what they are doing. It's good to do this 'cause we... can tell others about our research". Two other group members recognised that possessing facilitation skills was important "because we'll be working with CCL students and taking a class and

interviewing" (CR2); CR6 confirmed this by adding: "facilitation is communication skills, doing interviews, (finding it) easy to get on with a person... working with people."

What is listening?

Listening is a whole-body experience activity (visually represented in the Chinese symbol, Co-researchers' Handbook, p. 469) and, according to Sherfield, Montgomery, & Moody, (2006) involves the ears, eyes, undivided attention and the heart. In other words, listening is a conscious, active undertaking.

This author presented a reproduction of this Chinese symbol to co-researchers who were invited to respond their perception of its meaning. Two co-researchers commented on the complexity of the symbol and stated that it was "double Dutch" (CR4) and "complicated" (CR5). Another member of the group said that "it was "the ears, the eyes, the heart beat... and all your attention. The king (means that) you'll do well in exams. (CR1). Two other co-researchers recognised that listening was broader than just hearing someone speak. CR6 stated that "you listen with all your heart... the king is (being) best at what you do. The eyes (mean) look sharp. The ears – hear well; for CR2: "the king is an A+ student. They get special treatment. The heart means they take things into their heart. The eyes – focus. The ears – open, taking in information" (CR2).

When listening was related to the context of the classroom the issue of remaining focused on the task in hand came to the fore. CR6 felt that

listening was “tuning in”, while others felt that the ability to listen well was a difficult task: CR5 often “tuned out” (CR5) to what people were saying. For CR1 this was a frequent event: “It happens to me in class... I tune on and then tune out”; the ability to keep her mind focused on a task was an issue for CR4: “Sometimes I find it hard to keep focused. My mind drifts off”. Another co-researcher felt that eye contact was the key to effective listening: “To listen you need to look at a person” (CR4).

This session on listening also covered the stages in the listening process (Handbook pp. 468-477). The variety of levels of listening was introduced. These included: 1) Receive, 2) Filter, 3) Focus, 4) Grasp, 5) Remember, and 6) Consider. Co-researchers were asked for feedback on layout and visuals of the draft pages. Although there were no difficulties for the group to understand the contents of this page, a number of comments were raised however on the difficulties of carrying out stage 3 – the difficulty of staying focused. One person said: “I find that my mind wanders... I day-dream all the time... if I was in front of a person asking them questions I’d be concerned that they would notice I wasn’t listening. (CR4)

For this group, the tendency to “drift or daydream” (CR1) was affected by the time of day; as one person said: “I’m a good listener but I get tired in the afternoon” (CR2). This focus on energy levels highlighted the issue of the preferred time of the day interviews with CCL students should take place - in the morning, midday, or the afternoon. In an effort to respond to this concern, co-researchers’ reflected on their own energy levels in class during different parts of the day. Four said that they were at their best “in the early morning” (CRs 1, 2, 4, 5); the rest of the group

remarked that later in the day was better for them: "I'm best at lunchtime" (CR3), and "I prefer break-time in the afternoon, but not evening" (CR6). After some discussion, co-researchers agreed on two time frames to conduct interviews with CCL students: between 9.15 am and 10am (before morning classes commenced), and between 12pm and 2pm (during the lunch break). The group felt that this was a time of the day when students' levels of engagement should be most active; it was also had the added advantage of being a time-frame that minimised classroom disruption.



## **Appendix 7 Transcriptions conventions used in this thesis**

- Underlined word: Something that is stressed or emphasised compared with the surrounding speech.
- CAPITAL LETTERS: Something that is louder than surrounding speech.
- (0.4): Numbers in brackets refer to length of pauses (with 1=1sec).
- (.): Very short pause, under 0.1 sec.
- (*italics*): Used to describe what people are doing etc.
- [ ]: Square brackets indicates overlapping speech.

## **Appendix 8 Co-researchers' use of questioning (introducing, follow-up and probing)**

All co-researchers started the interview with an introduction question, (i.e. "Please tell me about your drawing / spidergram") inviting the interviewees to comment on their drawing. However each co-researcher had his or her own way of initiating this. For example, CR3's first question was a general question about the student's drawing. She asked: "Can you tell me what's in the picture please?" and probed for another response by requesting the interviewee to "talk a little more about that".

In a similar vein, CR2 invited both of his interviewees to talk about their spidergrams. On both occasions he commenced with the same open ended question: "Can you explain about your spidergram here? For the second interview he preceded the first question (as if addressing an anonymous listener) by adding: "I'm here with (H) today and I'm going to be interviewing her about her drawing". As the sequence of asking an open question and following with a probe formed part of the content of the research skills training sessions, CR2 then handed over control of the conversation to the interviewee by asking: "do you want to explain anything else you have here on the spidergram".

CR5 also started the interview with an opened ended question. She asked: "Can you explain how you learn in college?" CR4 did likewise but selected the topic for conversation. He said: "Can we start off here with the 'book'. Can you tell me about the book when you are ready?" However, he changed this tactic on his second interview by asking: "O.K

in your own words, if you would like to choose what to talk about first, what would you like to talk about on the poster?"

The two remaining co-researchers CR6 and CR1 started their interviews with a closed question. CR6 experienced some difficulty in starting the interview and received some prompting from this author ("Would you like to introduce what this project is about... let (CR4) decide what he wants to talk about"). CR6 quickly picked up on the prompt and started the conversation by asked the interviewee: "Do you want to talk about... how you go about your learning?" The interviewee replied: "Yes". Fortunately this student was a talkative and articulate individual and proceeded to elaborate on his initial response with: "The first picture is of a computer... for me... my weakness is I can't really read. I find the internet faster because I can find out more information than I can find in a book because of my reading disability". The ability of the interviewee to pick up on what was required in this verbal interaction enabled the conversation to flow despite the repeated use of CR6's use of closed questions. For example, in replying to the interviewee's comments regarding seeking help from support staff to help him read his letters, CR6 replied with: "Does it help with your learning?" On this occasion the interviewee elaborating on what he had originally said. He replied: "if there is something that I don't understand I get them to explain it to me, so it's just, it's like I listen". Throughout this interview it became more apparent that this co-researcher's understanding of when to use a closed question (i.e. at the start of the interview; to test that a person understands something; and to end the interview was minimal. However, the presence of a chatty and communicative interviewee managed to minimise the effect of the co-

researcher's inability to facilitate the asking of more probing open ended questions.

The final co-researcher CR1 opened the first interview by requesting that the interviewee clarify what was in his drawing. She asked: "What's this?" The reply was: "it's supposed to be a computer". CR1 however managed to build on her first closed question by probing further and asking a number of open ended questions. She followed with: "And what did you find interesting about using a computer?"; "What subjects did you find interesting on the CCL course?" and "What helps you learn on the computer?" On one occasion, she led the interviewee saying: "What other things would you like to do on the programme. Would you like to do drama"? However later in the interview CR1 redeemed herself by asking very pertinent probing questions in relation to the interviewee's reference to PowerPoint presentations. The conversation continued:

(CR1): *Why do you think a Power Point is important?*

(Interviewee [I]): *Well because you can write it down and you can remember them.*

(CR1): *For you as a person you can look back on it.*

(I): *I can look back on it, yeah.*

(CR1): *And learn from it?*

(I): *Yeah.*

(Cr1): *So if you had a Power Point straight in front of you, would you learn more than not having a Power Point?*

(I): *I'd learn more with a Power Point (in front of me).*

## **Appendix 9 Co-researchers' engagement with the reflective process**

It has been argued that reflection offers the potential to develop deeper understandings through becoming more metacognitive (Flavell, 1976). Metacognition is a form of cognition, a second or higher order thinking process which involves active control over cognitive processes (Flavell, 1979). Metacognition is defined as "knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena" (p.906), or "a "person's cognition about cognition" (Wellman, 1985a, p. 1).

Brown (1987) divided metacognition into two broad categories: (1) knowledge of cognition, and (2) regulation of cognition. Knowledge of cognition, are activities that involve *conscious* reflection on ones cognitive abilities and activities; these activities refer to the stable, state-able, often fallible, and often late developing information that human thinkers have about their own cognitive processes as it requires that learners step back and consider their own cognitive processes as object of thought and reflection (Brown, 1987).

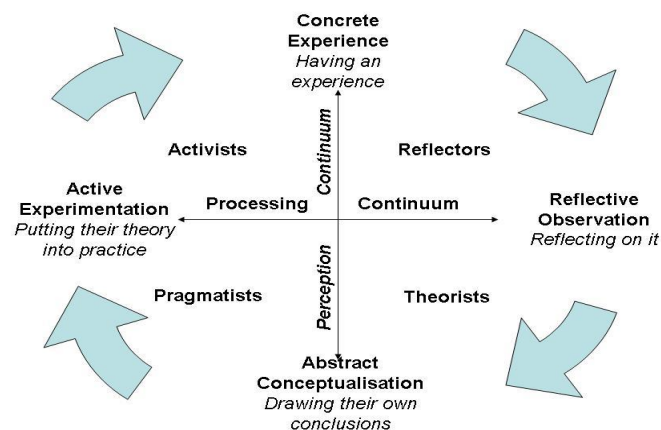
Regulation of cognition is activities regarding self-regulatory mechanisms during an ongoing attempt to learn or solve problems. This category consists of the activities used to regulate and oversee learning. These processes include planning activities (predicting outcomes, scheduling strategies, and various forms of vicarious trial and error, etc) prior to undertaking a problem; monitoring activities (monitoring, testing, revising,

and re-scheduling one's strategies for learning) during learning; and checking outcomes (Brown, 1987).

The method of reflection used in this context was informed generally by the above descriptions, but more specifically by the learning cycle made popular by Honey & Mumford, (2000). This model shown in Figure A takes the cyclical form of:

5. Describing the experience
6. Reflecting on the experience
7. Abstract conceptualisation (engaging with the theory presented), and
8. Actions to be taken to inform future learning – putting theory into practice.

*Figure A: Honey & Mumford's Learning Cycle*



Co-researchers were asked by this author to use this model to reflect on the training sessions they were undertaking during Stage 1. These sessions are outlined in the "Co-researchers' Handbook"

## Engaging with the reflective process

An account of co-researchers' use of Honey & Mumford's (2000) reflective cycle is now presented. A selection of individual's engagement with the process of reflection is outlined which offers a number of insights into the thought processes of the members of this group. This section also highlights some of the difficulties co-researchers had with the Honey and Mumford model and concludes with their recommendations to make this reflective cycle more accessible to learners with intellectual disabilities.

### "Having an experience"

In one of the first introductory sessions, co-researchers were asked to write about their experiences ("Having an experience"). In the context of the experiential learning cycle, Kolb (1984) describes this as *immediate experience*. For co-researchers in general, this task proved to be unproblematic. For example, two individuals responded: "we spoke about what the book was about. Also what is research about and what (does) learning mean to the students" (CR3). CR2 wrote that "we spoke about the stages of the research; we came up with questions to ask the students and talked about a spidergram exercise that the students could do".

A selection of further responses to "Having an experience" includes references in relation to giving out information to the CCL students:

*We talked about the research and how we would out it all together in a group. We talked about knowing how to let people know about the researcher and all the group comes up with doing a PowerPoint and a poster. (CR1)*



*We spoke about "giving out the information", why are we carrying out this project... information on "inclusive research". What questions we will ask the group. We spoke about letting know when we are doing the research and telling them that we are asking certain questions. (CR2)*

References were also made to the importance of listening skills: "We spoke about the different listening process in the session" (CR2), and the use of questioning: "We talked about open and closed questions. How to start a question by saying: How are you today?" (CR6).

"Reflective on the experience"

When co-researchers wrote their responses in relation to this second part of the Honey and Mumford cycle (their feelings in relation to the sessions), they spoke positively about the experience. Two noted their enjoyment in acquiring new knowledge:

*I feel very well. I'm learning new things about research... I learned a lot and I gave out good information in the session today. (CR5)*

*I feel good because I learned a bit more about researching and what it means and I am looking forward to looking up stuff about it. (CR1)*

One co-researcher also felt good about these sessions as it was a way to help future CCL students:

*It's very nice to help out students if they can't understand about a few different subjects. (CR6)*

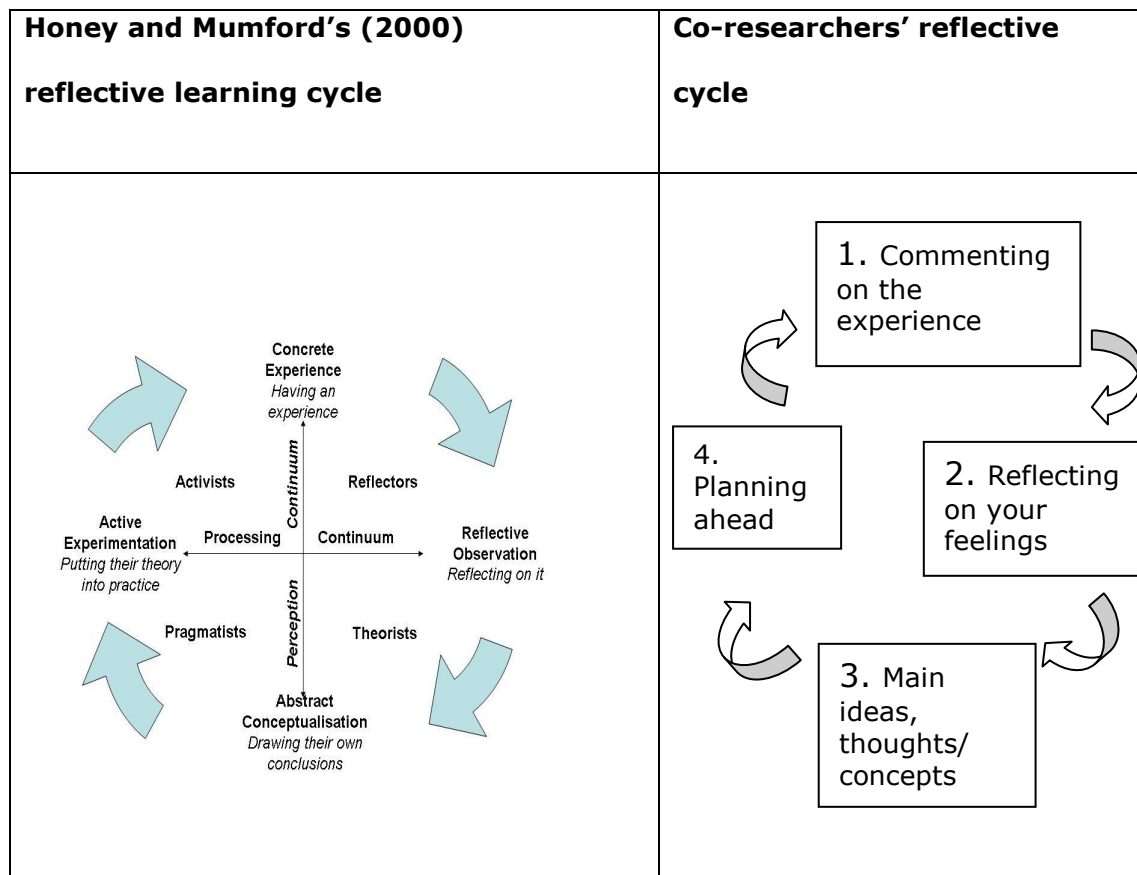
In general co-researchers wrote favourably about their feelings in relation to the training sessions, mentioning their joy in learning new things: "I felt that it went very well. I felt like this because I learned a lot" (CR2); "It was good...I felt excited" (CR3), as well as the importance of sharing ideas with other learners: "This session went very well... because it was very good to hear other people's ideas and ways of putting it together for the research" (CR1).

"Abstract conceptualisation" - engaging with the theory presented

The third stage of Honey and Mumford's cyclical model involves the individual to analyse their experience in relation to theory. The main concepts that were covered in these sessions included: inclusive research and qualitative research methods (gaining consent, interviews, and using a visual stimulus).

This author was aware of the potential difficulty that was placed on co-researchers to engage with the more abstract element of this part of Honey and Mumford's cycle; for this reason the language of this stage of the cycle was altered to make the demands of the process more accessible and easier to engage with. Consequently, the term "Abstract conceptualisation" was changed to "What do you think were the main ideas, thoughts or concepts of this session?" (see Figure B).

Figure B: Adapted learning cycle – this author’s version



CR2 wrote about the different elements of the research stating:

*We talked about the research... about the stages of the research and thinking of questions to ask CCL students... We came up with a spidergram exercise that the students could do.*

Other co-researchers wrote about the methods involved in qualitative research. One stated:

*We'll do a few interviews with each other... we'll ask open questions and closed questions too... we need to be sure that the person who is (undertaking) the interview does not get upset. (CR1)*

Another wrote:

*We'll make notes... lecture people... give good advice... use spidergrams.*

(CR6)

CR1 wrote about the importance of communicating to CCL students the nature of what the research was about. He said:

*In a group we'll talk to each other about the research... we'll ask the other students how they learn in college... we'll use PowerPoint... and spidergrams to help people understand in the group.*

CR2 wrote about inclusive research and the need to explain the methods of this concept to the CCL students:

*We'll give out information on inclusive research... we will (talk about) the questions we will say to the group... telling when we are going to meet up, telling them we will only ask question relating to their learning... and making sure they understand what it is.*

Further conversations with co-researchers revealed an element of confusion on their part centring on their confusion in understanding the third stage of the reflective cycle: "the main ideas, thoughts and concepts covered". All felt that it was tricky to distinguish between the first stage ("Having the experience") and the third stage. Co-researchers were of the opinion that it was a complex task to include new ideas in stage three, and often they found they were repeating themselves for the sake of filling in the reflection form.

In an effort to resolve this issue, the group suggested that the reflective cycle should just consist of three stages:

1. What are your feelings on this session?

2. What did we speak about?

3. Any other information?

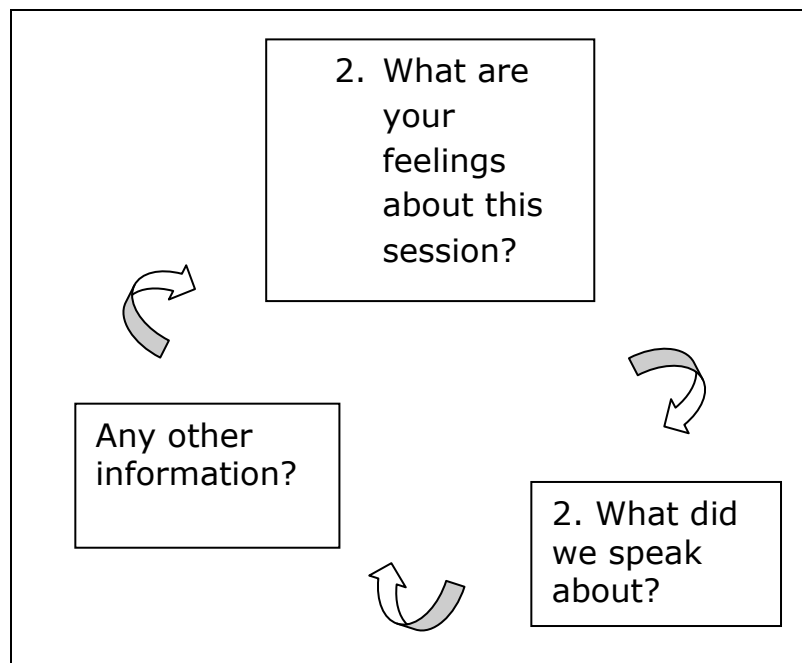
They were of the opinion that this design offered them more flexibility to engage with the reflection process. The revised reflective cycle (Figure C) took the following form:

4. Engaging with feelings (What are your feelings about this session?)

5. Thinking about content (What did we speak about?)

6. Any other information?

*Figure C: Adapted learning cycle – co-researchers' version*



“Actions to be taken to inform future learning – putting theory into practice”

The above section highlighted the difficulties co-researchers had in engaging with stage 3 of the reflective learning cycle. Consequently, stage 4 of Honey and Mumford’s learning cycle, which involves translating reflection and analysis of theory into an action plan regarding what has to happen next, proved to be difficult for co-researchers to realise. Nonetheless, one co-researcher who engaged with this stage saw himself as an advisor who would use his knowledge to support others to understand the nature of the research they were involved with. CR2 said:

*I will use these ideas by working with the students to see if they understand the questions and the information in the inclusive research project. I will also use these ideas by telling them that we are meeting up and we are going to ask them questions about the work and see if they understand this what research is all about.*

He continued:

*I will use the questions to find out how CCL students learn. The spidergram exercise will help me to see how other CCL students learn. Talking about the research will help me learn how other CCL students learn.*

In this section on reflection, it is argued that a most co-researchers demonstrated metacognitive ability and engaged with a higher order

thought process (five showed evidence of reflection for stage 3, and three demonstrated their ability to engage with stage 4). For Brown (1987) this metacognitive process ultimately leads to an awareness of knowledge of cognition which involves the ability to consciously reflect on one's cognitive abilities and activities. In the above passage, CCL students have demonstrated that they can step back and consider their own cognitive processes as object of thought and reflection; this is evidenced in the revised reflective cycle of Figure C. Furthermore, in the above passage, there is proof that co-researchers used reflective activities in attempting to solve a problem, (for example, their awareness of the difficulty in engaging with Honey and Mumford's learning cycle), and their willingness to plan an alternative strategy to resolve the problem. As CR2 stated:

*I was writing the same things (in the reflection). I found it hard to write new things down... there's a need to make them easier... it would be better to just have 'what are your feelings', 'what did we do', and 'any other information?'*

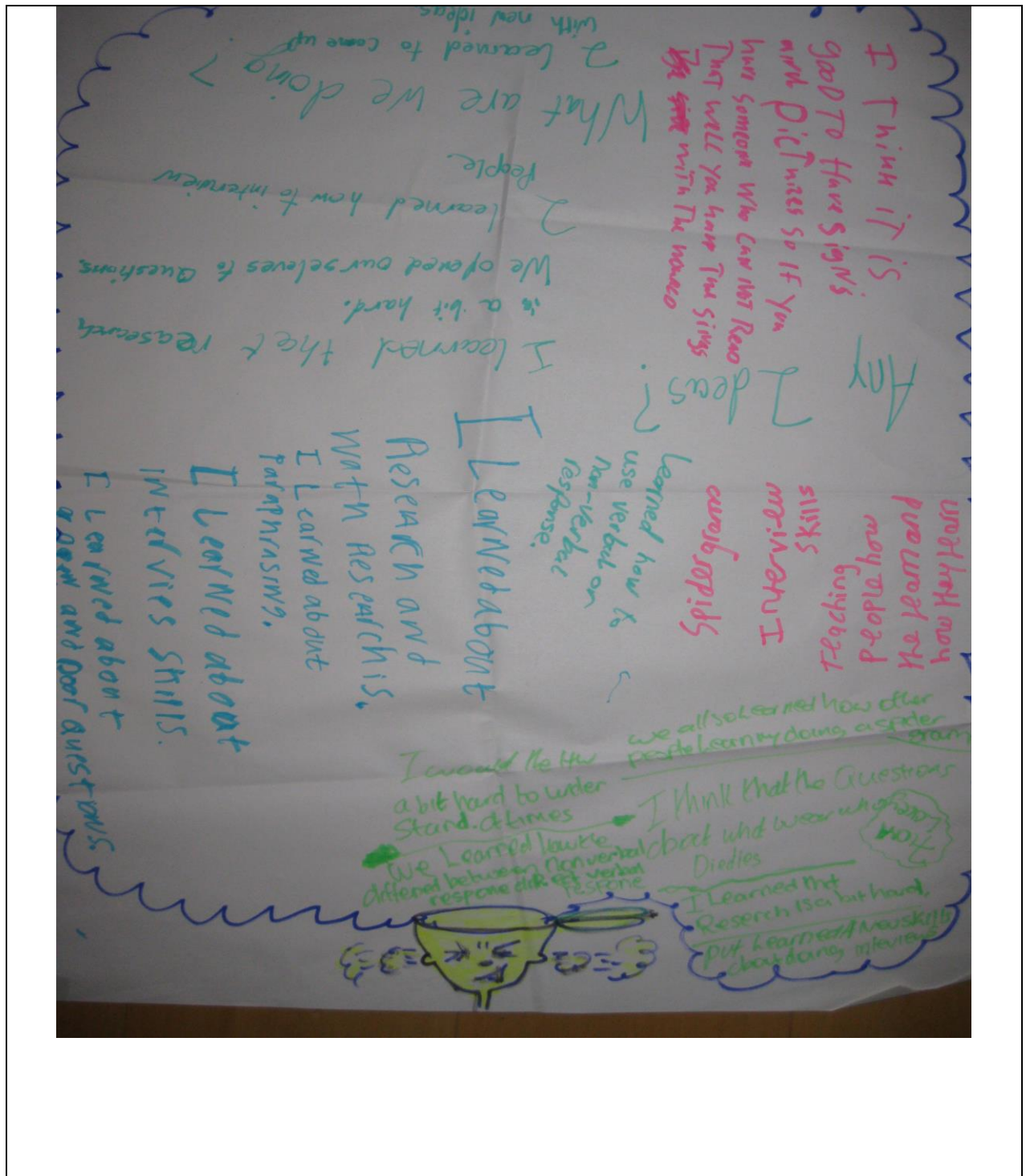
#### Recapping on work done

The final part of this section presents a recap and reflective session where co-researchers brainstormed the following questions:

- What have we learned over the last few weeks?
- What research will we be doing?
- What new skills have I learned?
- How do I now understand research/inclusive research?

Co-researchers' feedback was graphed onto a large piece of paper (Figure D).

Figure D: Co-researchers' brainstorm diagram





Upon completion of this exercise co-researchers were invited to feedback. The issue of literacy arose in conversation, and CR4 spoke about the inability that some people with intellectual disability have with the written word. This co-researcher spoke about the importance for clarity and consistency between visuals and their accompanying words. He said:

*It's important to communicate (our research) to people who don't read that well. They may be too embarrassed to tell anybody. They may not be able to read... or understand the word but they could look at the pictures beside it... and understand it.*

CR6 talked about his increased awareness of the language of interviewing, and how he could use his newly gained skills in the interview process. He also spoke on the benefits of a stimulus (students drawing a picture) for the data collection process. He explained:

*We learned how to use non-verbal or verbal responses in an interview. Verbal can be gestures – gestures can be verbal or non-verbal... We will be offering CCL students the opportunity to do a spidergram or draw pictures of their learning. If people don't understand what you say they are entitled to ask questions and we could put bullet points to help them.*

Another co-researcher also focused on his growing awareness of the skills an interviewer needs:

*I learned about research and what research is. I learned about paraphrasing, that means taking the word and changing it around. I learned about interview skills (and)... open and closed questions. (CR2)*

One member of the group however spoke about the difficulty of understanding the correct procedure for asking open and closed questions. She said:

*I found the homework a bit hard to understand sometimes. There was so much to do in the research skills, the searching, and the questions like where you have non-verbal and direct verbal hard to understand...I found the other questions, 'what', 'where' and 'describe' difficult; if you're in an interview, how to put them in the right order. (CR1)*

This co-researcher then spoke about the development of the PowerPoint and the positive impact this process of group collaboration had on her. She thought that it was a good idea of placing a quiz at the end of the consent form because "we would be able to feed back to them" (CR1) if they had difficulties. She concluded her feedback on a positive note by saying:

*I learned a lot of new things about research. I learned the questions to ask, what not to ask, how the research is going and how we have to train up to be researchers.*

CR5 spoke about the gains she had made in her confidence to engage with the people she was to interview: "I learned how to practice interview skills and not to be nervous when interviewing". She also remarked on how the process of teaching something to someone else can contribute to one's own learning:

*"I also learned how to teach people on the CCL and ask them about how they learn. This is a good way to learn".*

Before this session concluded, this author was keen to assess the overall level of the group's understanding in relation to the research project. They were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. What are we researching?
2. Why is this important?
3. What is inclusive research?

In relation to 1 above (What are we researching?), individuals (CR4 and CR5) said that they were researching how people with disabilities learn, while according to CR1 this study was about reflecting the difference in how people learn because "they are not all the same to each other", they have "different ways of learning" (CR2).

This research was important because co-researchers (CR4 and CR5) saw the benefits the research could have for co-researchers as well as other CCL students. CR4 felt that knowing this information about learning was "good for the CCL students" as it will "make them more independent and it will give them equal opportunities to learn and for education like everyone else". The research also had benefits for co-researchers themselves; CR2 said that: "I found out from different students how they learn and their experience of how they learn, what way they learn, and how they cope with it". Similarly, CR5 felt that the research would "make our brains more active and more knowledgeable". CR1 and CR6 were of the opinion that they could inform others about their research and that it would inform others:

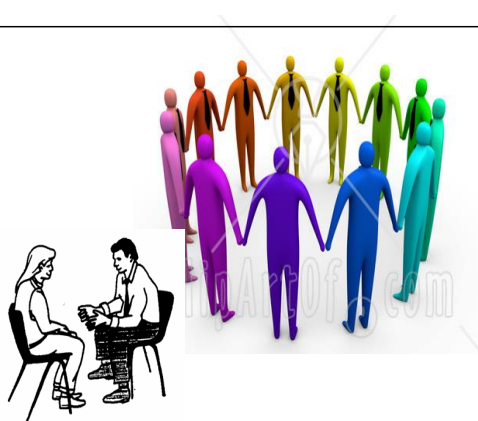
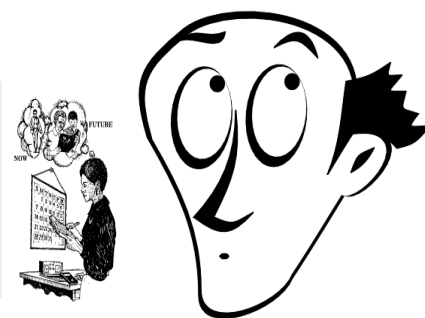
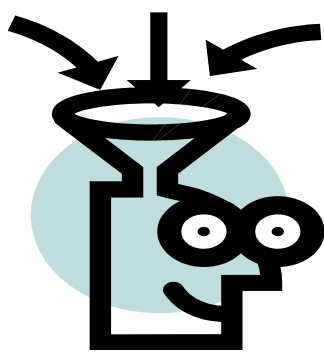
*It's good to do it because it helps to know people and their learning. It's also good to do it because when we leave... people will know how we learn... we can come back and say our piece and do it, tell them about it.*  
(CR1)

*Getting (the research) across the country for other people to learn about how students learn in college. 'Cause a lot of people are eager to get in here (the NIID) and learn a lot.* (CR6)

The topic of inclusive research was seen by CR1 as “more intense” than other research. CR6 saw inclusive research as something that is innovative and active: “inclusive research is new ideas... inclusive research is *doing* the interviews. For CR5 it was research that involved him as a learner and as a researcher: “we are actually researchers, and we are actually learning”. Finally, CR2 gave an in-depth analysis of what he thought inclusive research was:

*Inclusive research includes everybody... you're researching a topic you're interested in and you want to get the information out, like drag it out of your brains and out onto a PowerPoint so it's easy for people to understand and for you to understand yourself. Inclusive research is like learning in a different way ... and you want to get to the bottom of it. Research is a big topic that you want to get information from people and from books. (Inclusive research) it's like two different subjects put into one. It's very good.* (CR2)

## Appendix 10 Accessible categories of description



## **Appendix 11 PowerPoint of findings for co-researchers**

# CCL students' experiences of learning.

1. Categories of Description  
and
2. The Outcome Space

John Kubiak NIID, TCD 2012

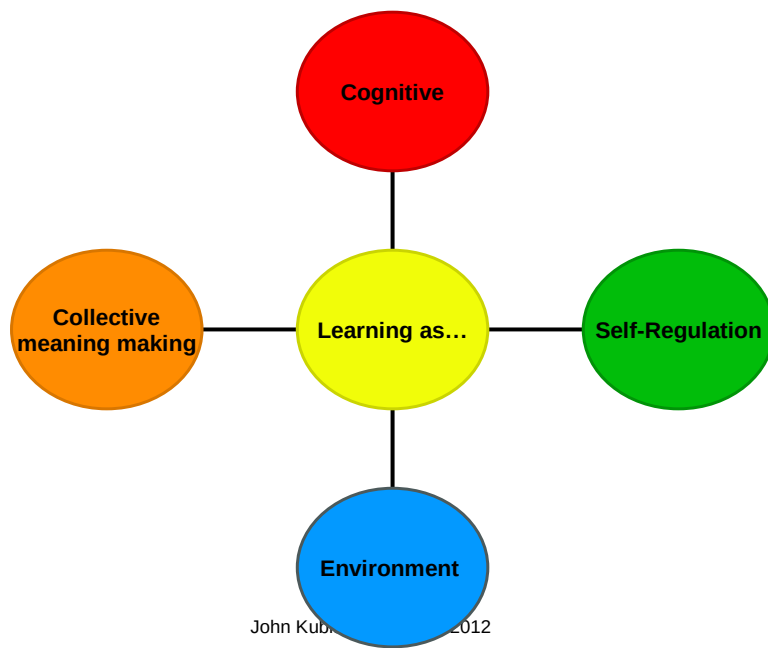
## **Categories of Description**

To explore the ways CCL students experienced and described their learning

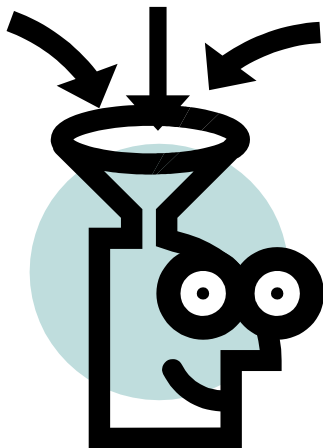
### **Categories**

- The cognitive stages of Learning
- Self-regulation of learning
- Learning as collective meaning making
- Learning as environment

John Kubiak NIID, TCD 2012



## Learning as **COGNITIVE**



- **Learning as increasing one's knowledge**  
(Focus on *adding new knowledge*. Students learning about facts and adding new quantifiable knowledge to previous knowledge)
- **Learning as memorising and reproducing**  
(Focus on *reproduction*. Students being able to memorise new information)
- **Learning as applying knowledge**  
(Students being able to apply knowledge into practice, i.e. researching in class, for home assignments, socialisation through networking site, learning to pass course)

John Kubiak NIID, TCD 2012

## Self-regulation of learning



- **The forethought phase (goal setting)**  
(Students' processes and beliefs that occur *before* efforts to learn, i.e. task analysis and self-motivation)
- **The performance phase (self-control / self-observation)**  
(Students' processes that occur *during* behavioural implementation (i) self-control (e.g. strategies) and. (ii) self-observation – (Time-management etc)
- **The self-reflection phase**  
(Students' processes that occur *after* each learning effort: (i) Self-judgement and (ii) self-reaction)

John Kubiak NIID, TCD 2012

## Learning as collective meaning making



- **Collective learning from discussions and debates**  
(Students exchanging views and creating new knowledge that was shared through collective reflection)
- **Peer support with home assignments**  
(The collective knowledge bank that friends could offer especially for home assignments)
- **Collective learning from parents/guardians**  
(Students' learning in collaboration with family, and/or with support from dedicated agency key-staff)
- **Collective learning from ISR mentors**  
(Students' collective meaning making with mentors)



John Kubiak NIID, TCD 2012



# The supportive environment and learning

- **The learning environment as a 'safe space'**

(Environment as a space informed by students establishing a 'group culture', i.e. 'how we are together... the way we do things around here')



- **The learning environment and students' development of 'personal meanings'**

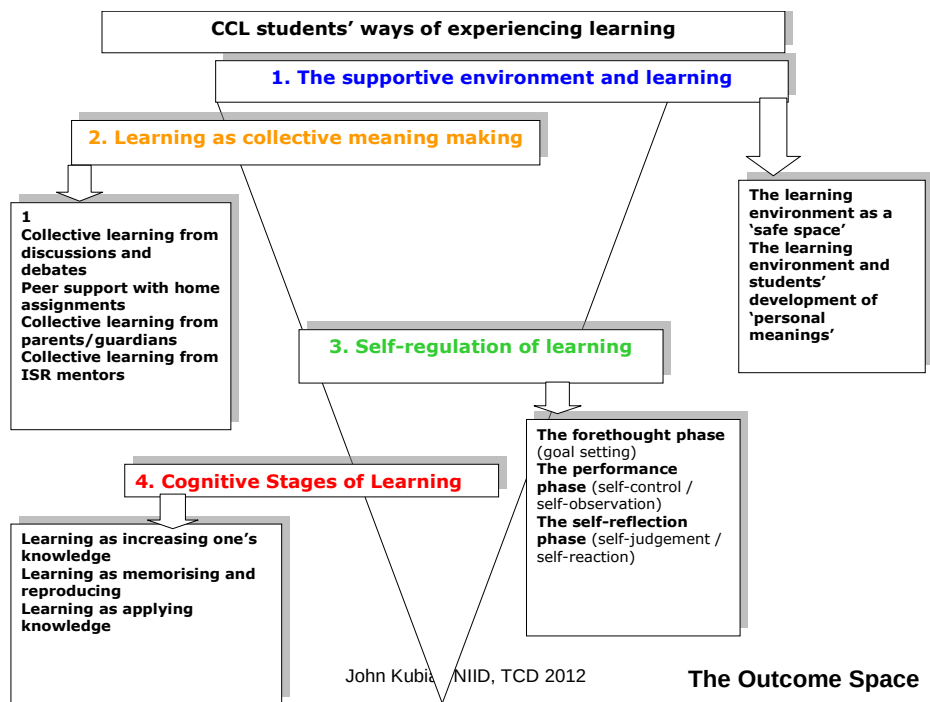
(The tutor's use of the environment as a context for facilitating learners to articulate and develop their own views in relation to the curriculum presented, and become more aware of their own thoughts and the thoughts and opinions of their peers)

John Kubiak NIID, TCD 2012

The outcome space:  
List which categories are more important  
1=least important  
2 = important  
3 = very important  
4 = most important



John Kubiak NIID, TCD 2012



**Appendix 12 A selection of Power Point slides on Multiple Intelligence theory (Howard Gardner)**



# Multiple Intelligence Theory ( MI theory)

Howard Gardner and MI Theory



## Multiple Intelligence theory

- This is a picture of **Howard Gardner**.



- He was born in Pennsylvania, U.S.A. in 1943.





## Books by Gardner

- For many years Howard Gardner has studied the way the human brain works.
- As a result of his studies he has written over 20 books on this subject.
- His most famous book is called “**Frames of Mind.**” It was published in 1983



x 20

‘*Frames of Mind*’ 1983



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

J. Kubiak, NIID 2009



## Claims of Gardner

- In this book Gardner claims that the only intelligences that are recognised and valued by society are:
- **reading**
- **writing**
- and **numerical** skills



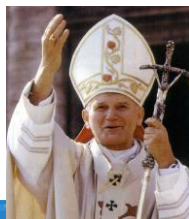
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**Interpersonal** – religious / political leaders; teachers; therapists; parents; salespeople.

- Frontal lobes of brain important in interpersonal intelligence.



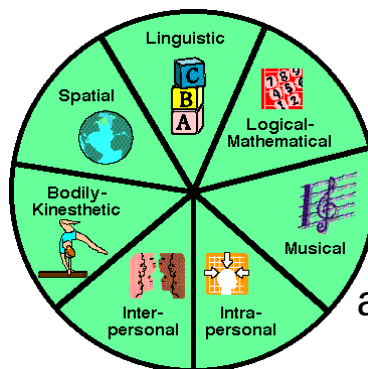
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**MI Theory is....**

- To put it another way....



and Natural

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## Appendix 13 Reflection sheet (written & tick box version)

### DAILY SELF-REFLECTION SHEET



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject: \_\_\_\_\_ Tutor: \_\_\_\_\_

---

**What did you do** in this class today?

- 1 **Firstly** I did \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Then I did \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 **Finally** I did \_\_\_\_\_



**What did you enjoy doing most of all?**

I enjoyed doing \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Why** did you enjoy doing this?

\_\_\_\_\_



What did you **NOT** like doing in this class?

I did **not** like doing \_\_\_\_\_ because

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## How did this class go for you?

1. I really enjoyed  this class  
Yes ☐ No ☐

2. I took part in discussion during class   
Yes ☐ No ☐

3. I learned **something new** in class   
Yes ☐ No ☐

**What** did you learn?

---

How did I **feel** after this class?

Happy  ☐

O.K. ☐

Unhappy  ☐

## **Appendix 14 Example poem by CCL student**

### **Daddy**

Not at home anymore.  
Because of my disability?

Divorced.  
(don't you love Mammy anymore?)

Please --  
Come home.  
(I'll be better, I promise.)

I miss the way things used to be.



**Appendix 15 Module descriptor: Self-regulated learning** (*work currently in progress*)

**Module Title and Code: Self-regulated learning (SRL)**

**Rationale and Aims**

This module aims to equip students with the skills and tools of self-regulated learning\* and apply these competencies to an educational setting (in the context of the CCL at Trinity College, SRL competencies will apply to students' experiences of attending undergraduate lectures).

\*The self-regulated learning process consists of three cyclical phases: the forethought, performance and the self-reflection phase.

**Course Content**

**The forethought phase**

- Identify and set goals for a small scale project
- Demonstrate effective note-taking techniques
- Express an awareness of self-motivational and self-efficacy beliefs

Assessment: Learning/Process Journal

**The Performance phase:**

- Explain the use of brainstorming and spidergram techniques
- Demonstrate an awareness of one's learning styles using the VAK model
- Present a small scale project (essay, poster or PowerPoint)

Assessment: Poster, Quiz and presentation (written or oral)

**Self-reflection phase:**

- Apply a model of reflective learning
- Produce a record of one's experiences of learning using a written or an electronic learning journal
- Identifying and plan further learning goals
- Identify the supports needed to achieve these learning goals

Assessment: Quiz, Learning journal. Poster/PowerPoint presentation

## **Appendix 16 Emotional Intelligence Domains and Associated Competencies, from Goleman, D. (2002, p. 29).**

**Personal Competence:** These capabilities determine how we manage ourselves.

### **Self-awareness**

- *Emotional self-awareness:* Readings one's own emotions and recognising their impact: using "gut-sense" to guide decisions
- *Accurate self-assessment:* Knowing one's strengths and limits
- *Self-confidence:* A sound sense of one's self-worth and capabilities

### **Self-management**

- *Emotional self-control:* Keeping disruptive emotions and impulses under control
- *Transparency:* Displaying honesty and integrity: trustworthiness
- *Adaptability:* Flexibility in adapting to changing situations or overcoming obstacles
- *Achievement:* The drive to improve performance to meet inner standards of excellence
- *Initiative:* Readiness to act and seize opportunities
- *Optimism:* Seeing the upside in events

**Social competence:** These capabilities determine how we manage relationships

### **Social Awareness**

- *Empathy:* Sensing other's emotions, understanding their perspective, and taking active interest in their concerns.

- *Organisational awareness:* Reading the currents, decision networks, and politics at the organisational level
- *Service:* Recognising the meeting follower, client, or customer needs

### **Relationship Management**

- *Inspirational leadership:* Guiding and motivating with a compelling vision
- *Influence:* Wielding a range of tactics for persuasion
- *Developing others:* Bolstering other's abilities through feedback and guidance
- *Change catalyst:* Initiating, managing, and leading in a new direction
- *Conflict management:* Resolving disagreements
- *Building bonds:* Cultivating and maintaining a web of relationships
- *Teamwork and collaboration:* Cooperation and team building

