

Centre for Promoting Academic Excellence

**An Investigation into Teaching and Learning Strategies that Promote Confidence in Students with Learning Disabilities**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

Master of Arts in Training and Education (QQI)

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April 2018

### Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the MA in Training and Education, is my own; based on my personal study and/or research, and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation. I also certify that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of anyone else, including other learners.

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Dated: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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### Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Marion and Colm, for inspiring me to complete a masters. They instilled a value for education within me and thought me to work hard for things that I aspire to achieve.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor, Orla Butler, for all her valuable input and guidance throughout the completion of this dissertation. I would also like to thank Dr. Fiona O’ Riordan for her influential contribution.

I would like to express gratitude to Miriam for the inspiration, Emma for her appreciated input and Alison for her support.

I would also like to thank Mary for her help, endless reassurance and for always being at the other end of the phone.

Lastly, I wish to show appreciation and thankfulness to Rory for his help, encouragement and care.

### Definition of Key Terms

The following is a list of the key terms as used in this dissertation and what their definition is with regard to this dissertation:

* Confidence: Belief in one’s ability, belief that others believe in you and feeling sure about what you are doing (Norman and Hyland, 2003)
* Further education (FE): “Further education covers education and training which occurs after second level schooling, but which is not part of the third level system” (Department of Education and Training, 2018)
* Learning disability: A neurological disorder giving rise to learning difficulties
* Learning style: A learning style refers to a consistent preference to what way subject matter is perceived and organised by a learner (Snowman and McCown, 2012 p121)
* Universal design for learning (UDL): “a framework of instruction that aims to be inclusive of different learning preferences and learners and helps to reduce barriers for students with disabilities” (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015 p.1).

### Abbreviations Used

* FE: Further education
* ADD: Attention deficit disorder
* ADHD: Attention deficit hyperactive disorder
* DCD: Developmental coordination disorder
* HEA: Higher education authority
* AHEAD: Association for higher education access and disability
* UDL: Universal design for learning
* ARCS: Attention, relevance, confidence, satisfaction
* FSD: Fund for students with disabilities
* SEN: Special education needs
* FET: Further education and training

### Abstract

This thesis investigates the use of specific teaching and learning strategies used by teachers in Further Education (FE) to promote the confidence of students with learning disabilities.

Students with Learning disabilities are more likely to suffer from issues relating to confidence than their peers without learning disabilities. Confidence is linked to academic achievement and there are specific teaching and learning strategies that can be used to promote confidence.

Within this research, the situational context of learning disability within further education is established in relation to demographics and policy. Confidence is discussed and how it relates to learning disability. Teaching and learning strategies that are proven to promote confidence in students with learning disabilities are ascertained based on the findings of the research. All the above is discussed throughout this research is based on an in-depth review of the literature and the analysis of interviews held with experienced teachers in further education.

This research finds that there is inconsistency and incoherence in how policy is put into practice within further education in Ireland. The research findings may be used as a resource to contribute to raising awareness among teachers, that specific teaching and learning strategies can be used to have a positive impact on the confidence levels of students with learning disabilities, resulting in positive outcomes such as equity, equality and inclusion.

Recommendations, based on the research undertaken, that would benefit students with learning disabilities have been put forward. Areas for further research are identified and outlined in chapter five.

### Chapter 1: Introduction

# 1.1 Title

An investigation into teaching and learning strategies that promote confidence in students with learning disabilities.

The researcher has chosen to investigate the above specifically within the area of further education (FE).

# 1.2 Background

Confidence is linked to academic achievement (Pino and Mortari, 2014). Studies show that students with learning disabilities have a distinct lack of confidence (Heiman and Precel, 2003). There is a wider diversity of intake into FE. As a result of this, educational environments must adapt to be inclusive of a range of teaching and learning strategies that appeal to all learning styles, empower confidence and enable students to reach their full potential (Mc Guckin et al., 2013). For the purposes of this research, confidence is defined as belief in one’s ability, belief that others believe in you and feeling sure about what you are doing (Norman and Hyland, 2003). There are specific teaching and learning strategies that teachers can use to promote and encourage confidence (Norman and Hyland, 2003). This research will investigate the use of specific teaching and learning strategies used by teachers in FE to promote the confidence of students with learning disabilities.

# 1.3 Rationale for this Study

In recent years, there has been an increasing number of students with learning disabilities enrolling into different forms of education (Heiman and Precel, 2003). There is a higher rate of drop out amongst students with learning disabilities than there is amongst their peers without a learning disability (The National Centre for learning disabilities, 2014). Lockhart (2004) found that an individual’s academic confidence, i.e. belief in one’s own ability (Norman and Hyland, 2003) in relation to the demands of the course, plays a role in students’ drop out decisions. The area of confidence amongst students with learning disabilities is paramount to their success within education. Holgate (2015) echoes Lockheart’s ideas (2004) by adding that teachers should be actively promoting confidence amongst students with learning disabilities to support them to reach their true potential.

# 1.4 The Aim of this Research Study

This research will ascertain what teaching and learning strategies are used by teachers to improve the confidence with students with learning disabilities.

This will be done by establishing teachers’ awareness of issues with confidence, as defined by the literature, that a student with a learning disability might encounter, how teachers actively promote confidence levels in students with learning disabilities through teaching and learning strategies and if these strategies are used on a regular basis.

The aim of this study is not to measure levels of confidence that students with learning disabilities are commonly experiencing, but to build awareness among educators, in FE, that specific teaching and learning strategies can positively impact on the confidence of learners with learning disabilities, resulting in more successful achievements. This is in addition to the negative impact that occurs when there is a lack of implementation of said specific teaching and learning strategies. The intent of this thesis is to review literature and conduct primary research resulting in recommendations that could be used to enhance capacity and raise awareness amongst educators. “Research can raise awareness about issues and, in best circumstances, influence change” (Kellett, 2010 p.116). The findings of this research will help inform teaching and learning strategies that are used by teachers, resulting in better outcomes for students. The findings of this research will be supported by offering recommendations and raising awareness that encourages action (Conrad and Serlin, 2006).

# 1.5 Research Question and Sub Objectives

## 1.5.1 The research question:

How can teachers in FE promote confidence in students with learning disabilities?

## 1.5.2 Sub objective one:

To establish a situational context of learning disability in FE. This will be explored in relation to demographic and policy related to the area of learning disability and FE.

## 1.5.3 Sub objective two:

To explore the area of confidence in FE and the relationship between learning disability and confidence.

## 1.5.4 Sub objective three:

To ascertain teaching and learning strategies that promote confidence in students with learning disabilities.

The above research question and sub objectives will be discussed throughout the literature review and analysis. Data will be gathered from interviews with teachers working in FE, from different institutions and areas of study.

### Chapter Two: Literature Review

# 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will outline a body of literature that is relevant to the research objectives, outlined in chapter one. The discussion will include information about the current situational context, confidence of learners with learning disabilities in FE, the relationship between learning disability and confidence and, outline a range of teaching and learning strategies that would be relevant for a teacher to employ when teaching students with learning disabilities.

# 2.2 Situational Context

FE is a popular route for many students as it provides them with qualifications i.e. QQI level five and six that enable access and progression opportunities within education and training (QQI, 2014). FE is acknowledged as an important option for students with learning disabilities as it can offer locally based courses. Teaching has a strong emphasis on student-centred learning with associated active learning methodologies and accessible teaching and assessment methods (Mc Guckin et al., 2013).

The population of students with disabilities within education is made up of students on the autistic spectrum, ADD/ADHD, blind/visually impaired, deaf/hard of hearing, DCD – dyspraxia/dysgraphia, mental health conditions, neurological/speech and language conditions significant ongoing illnesses, physical disabilities and specific learning disabilities (AHEAD, 2015).

As mentioned before, in recent years there has been an increasing number of students with learning disabilities enrolling into different forms of education (Heiman and Precel, 2003). “Over 20,000 people reported having a disability and benefiting from FET provision in 2016” (The 2017 FE and Training (FET) Services Plan, 2017 p.12). There has been an increase of 41.2% between 2012 and 2014, of students within FE, who benefitted from a financial fund available to students with disabilities (Higher Education Authority, 2017 p. 27). This increase in funding has a correlation with an increase of students within FE who have a disability. The total number of students supported by the FSD (fund for students with disabilities) has increased from approximately 3,800 in 2008, to almost 10,500 in 2016. This number is across FE and higher education (Byrne, 2017). This indicates a huge jump in the number of students who have learning disabilities in FE. Gallagher and McKernan (2011) anticipate that the number of students with disabilities within FE will increase over coming years.

learning disabilities are associated with neurological based processing problems. These problems can interfere with skills such as reading, writing, arithmetic, organisation, time planning, abstract reasoning, long or short-term memory and attention (learning disabilities Association of America, 2017). Each student with a learning disability is unique. Students with learning disabilities learn through an array of diverse learning styles (learning disabilities Association of Ontario - LDAO, 2017).

Specific disabilities that fall into this category are dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyslexia, language processing disorder, visual motor deficit and ADHD (learning disabilities Association of America, 2017).

Institutions of FE are required by legislation (Disability Act 2005, Equality Act 2004, Universities Act 1997) to ensure that “appropriate adjustments to the learning environment are made to enable a student with a disability to participate in education on the same basis as a student without a disability” (Charter for inclusive teaching and learning, 2009 p.1) This is relevant to physical access barriers for those who have physical disabilities, but it also must be make consideration for students who have a specific learning disabilities for the “provision of support services, teaching and learning strategies, assessment methods and administrative policies to ensure an inclusive learning environment” (Charter for inclusive teaching and learning, 2009 p.1)

The support infrastructure for students with special education needs in FE is not as highly developed as within higher education. Due to the localised nature of FE provision, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive overview of specific services available to students with SEN in further education” (Mc Guckin et al.,2013 p.28). Despite the laws mentioned above, there is a gap in national policy relating to students with learning disabilities in FE. There is currently no comprehensive overview of supports and services available to students with learning disabilities within FE, but each college should have their own policies and appointed staff member “to take specific responsibility for access transfer and progression of students with SEN (special education needs)” (O’Sullivan, 2012 cited in Mc Guckin et al., 2013 p.28).

An institution of FE can promote equal opportunities and anti-discrimination through internal policies. An example of this would be in Coláiste Íde, Dublin. Information regarding its disability support can be found on their website. “The College avails of the services of a disability officer who can assist students with accessing appropriate learning supports as may be required” (Coláiste Íde College of FE, 2018). The website also outlines supports such as assistive technology, notetakers and scribes. A second example would be Whitehall College, Dublin. They outline on their website that they provide accessible education and employ a disability officer. Whitehall College states that they provide services to students that aim to “maximise their learning experience” (Whitehall College, 2018).

# 2.3 Confidence in Further Education

“The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘confidence’ as the ‘mental attitude of trusting in, or relying on; firm trust, reliance, faith.... assured expectation, assurance arising from reliance (on oneself, circumstances, etc.)’” (Norman and Hyland, 2003 p 6).

Norman and Hyland (2003, p 8) discuss five categories of confidence in a learning environment. These are divided into the following;

* “Belief in one’s knowledge and ability”
* “The belief that others believe in you”
* “Certainty”
* “Feeling sure about what you are doing and why and thinking that it is the correct thing to do”
* “Knowing that you are doing the best you possibly can”

Brodie, Reeve, and Whittaker (1995; cited in Norman and Hyland, 2003 p 6) define confidence as “a situationally specific concept”.  The concept of this definition is that confidence can be raised and lowered depending on circumstances. For example, if a teacher appeals to a diverse audience with the use of varied teaching and learning strategies that appeal to a broader range of learning styles, it is more likely that a higher number of students will benefit from increased levels of confidence.

Higher levels of confidence can be advantageous for a student in a variety of ways. Students “adapt to new situations quicker, take on more responsibility, engage more fully in the learning process, enjoy learning, they are more relaxed, more motivated, and interact more easily with others” (Norman and Hyland, 2003 p 9)

Self-efficacy differs from confidence; however, they have relevant similarities. Confidence refers to the strength of one’s beliefs, whereas self-efficacy is the belief in one’s capabilities (Bandura, 1997). Bandura’s self-efficacy theory explains that an individual’s belief in themselves is imperative to their success. Self-efficacy is vital for the transferal of skills from theory to practice. “Students need more than ability and skills to preform successfully; they also need a sense of efficacy to use their skills well and to regulate learning” (Bandura, 1993: cited in Klassen, 2002 p 89).

# 2.4 The Relationship between Learning Disability and Confidence

Research shows that students with learning disabilities are more likely to suffer from a variety of confidence issues within the educational environment. It has been reported that these issues include persistent feelings of lower self-efficacy, lack of self-confidence, self-doubt, and extreme self-criticism. This results in “lower perceptions of academic and intellectual abilities, compared to students without learning disabilities” (Heiman and Precel, 2003 p249).

“Lack of confidence in written communication skills has been found to be correlated with poor performance” (Goldfinch and Hughes, 2007 p 260). Students with learning disabilities are directly affected by this statistic, as some learning disabilities are associated with literacy and related issues. Traditional assessment methods, such as report writing and exams, will not highlight the true potential of these students (Holgate, 2015). Lower results in these traditional forms of assessment will have a knock-on effect with confidence levels. If the chosen teaching and learning strategy, inclusive of assessment strategy, does not suit the particular learning style of a student, he/she will be at a disadvantage. **“**A learning style refers to a consistent preference to what way subject matter is perceived and organised by a learner” (Snowman and McCown, 2012 p121). Different learning styles include activist, theorist, pragmatist, and reflector (Mumford and Honey, 1992).

Norman and Hyland (2003) believe that educators need to direct more attention towards barriers that are linked to student confidence, and to what causes low levels of confidence in students. A range of potential triggers of poor confidence can include: new experiences or tasks, a student being unable to see themselves in their future profession, overestimating task requirements, self-doubt, feelings of inferiority and perceived knowledge deficit, negative thinking, feeling scared, being judged, and uncertainty of being successful (Norman and Hyland, 2003).

The lack of confidence experienced by students with dyslexia can be a barrier to their learning (Schunk, 2014 p 22). Collinson and Penketh (2010) suggest that students with learning disabilities have, on occasions, been “excluded” from formal education because of a cultural framework of educational practices, that prioritise literacy as a dominant discourse, used to define academic ability. This concept is derived from the medical model of disability, which defines people with a learning disability as “disabled as a result of personal or individual deficit” (Collinson and Penketh, 2010 p. 9). This concept further proposes, that the negative experiences of students with learning disabilities, are as a result of this deficit. This is as opposed to the social model of disability, which argues that students who have a specific learning disability, are “disabled by the societal structures and conditions that prioritise specific aspects of literacy, and define academic ability in relation to such definitions” (Collinson and Penketh, 2010 p. 9). The exclusion of students with learning disabilities is a consequence of a cultural framework that prioritises literacy, and does not value diversity of learning styles and multiple intelligences.

Students with learning disabilities can find writing, organisation and management to be problematic (Holgate, 2015). Goldfinch and Hughes (2007) outline that, when students face difficulties related to academic writing, organisation and management, they can withdraw from the learning experience. A barrier to learning faced by students with learning disabilities is, “not receiving accommodations that enable them to demonstrate what they know” (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015 p 2). Accommodations in these instances are frameworks that can be put in place to make existing features more accessible, such as, “modification of equipment or devices, appropriate adjustment of modifications to exams, training materials, or policies; provision of qualified readers or interpreter” (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015 p 2). It can also be a barrier for a student if inappropriate accommodations are put in place (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015)

A lack of confidence can affect a student’s academic performance (Pino and Mortari, 2014). Gilroy (2005, cited in Green 2014, p 5) observed a distinct lack of confidence in adults with dyslexia, often using words to describe themselves, such as, “useless” and “hopeless”. “An individual who expressed negative attitudes towards himself thereby indicates that he has little confidence in his abilities” (Norman and Hyland, 2003 p 7). Briggs (2014) states that confidence plays a huge part in learning. A strong body of research suggests that, if a student has academic confidence, his/her ability, motivation, and achievement is enhanced.

Norman and Hyland (2003) found in their research, that students perceived confidence to have an impact on their wellbeing and involvement in the learning process. Students conveyed that their lack in confidence made them self-critical, doubtful of their abilities, anxious, nervous, tense, uncomfortable and insecure. It was shown that students tend to avoid certain tasks, if they display these traits.

“Despite extensive research into dyslexia and its associated neurobiology over the past century, several commentators continue to maintain that the condition is a socially constructed phenomenon; in short, an excuse for poor performance in written and writing skills” (Holgate, 2015 p 89). If a teacher has this outlook on dyslexia, or any other form of learning disability, they lack the understanding and awareness that is necessary to support the students to strive towards and achieve their true potential.

Other misconceptions can include, that learning and attention issues are linked to IQ, people with learning and attention issues are just “lazy”, and people with learning and attention issues cannot have successful careers (Morin, 2017).

Learning and attention disabilities are not a sign of low intelligence. Gardeners multiple intelligences theory outlines that individuals differ is in the strength of various intelligences, i.e., intelligence is not dominated by one single ability, such as good literacy, it stems across various styles (Smith, 2008).

Norman and Hyland (2003) found that teachers must seek to break down barriers and obstacles, while facilitating learning. Barriers can be “situational” and “institutional” within the educational environment, but barriers can also be found throughout learners’ individual attitudes, perceptions and motivations. The obstacles that students with learning disabilities face, can be considered as individual problems, e.g., “the student has a disability that interferes with his or her ability to access the content of the course, to express knowledge, or to engage optimally in it” (Rose, 2006 p.150). Obstacles can also be considered as “environmental” problems, e.g., “problems in the design of the learning environment”, or “the typical overreliance on printed text for presenting content” (Rose, 2006 p.150). This outlook can help to overcome the perception, that it is the student with a disability that has a problem or weakness, but, instead obliges the education provider to address the limitations of the learning environment (Rose, 2006). Environmental limitations can be addressed through many inclusive teaching and learning strategies, such as, universal design for learning (UDL) which will be discussed later in this paper.

Teachers who lack awareness and understanding of learning disabilities can have a significant impact on students' learning experience (Pino and Mortari, 2014). It is important that teachers are adequately informed of learning disabilities, along with related issues. Without awareness, students are at risk of experiencing marginalisation and disempowerment. “Where staff lacked awareness or specific knowledge of the disability and support available, students reported adverse experiences” (Holloway, 2001). Teachers must have awareness of learning disabilities to promote confidence. Research carried out by Holloway (2001), outlined that some students with learning disabilities feel that teachers did not know how to help them. This literature outlines the detrimental effect that a teachers’ lack of awareness could have on a student with a learning disabilities. If a teacher has a good understanding and awareness of learning disabilities, they would be in a better position to promote confidence, help students and offer support.

# 2.5 Teaching and Learning Strategies that Promote Confidence in Students with Learning Disabilities

Inclusive teaching and learning strategies not only benefit students with learning disabilities but, in addition, they will have positive outcomes for all learners (AHEAD, 2009). There are many different types of learners and styles of learning that education providers will encounter when teaching diverse groups. “Students with and with and without disabilities reported having a variety of learning preferences” (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015 p.1). Teachers should incorporate inclusive teaching and learning strategies, such as, appealing to all intelligences and learning styles (David L, 2014), implementing a universal design for learning (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015), showing empathy and understanding (Rogers, 1967: cited in Smith, 2014), student centred teaching (Pino and Mortari, 2014), fostering positive relationships built on potential for success (Collinson and Penketh, 2010), implementing a model of instructional design such as ARCS (Kellher, 2009), providing opportunities for achievement (Norman and Hyland, 2003), providing appropriate adjustments for those who need it (Pino and Mortari, 2014), monitoring environmental factors (Sander and Sanders, 2003) and ensuring equitable assessment strategies (Miller, Collings and Kneale, 2015). All of the above will support learning and promote confidence in students with learning disabilities but, in addition, will also have a knock-on benefit to all students within the learning environment. Each of the above will now be discussed in more detail.

Students with learning disabilities are at higher risk of dropping out of their course because of challenges and lack of self-determination (Getzel and Thoma, 2008). Teachers can promote self-determination in students with learning disabilities, using confidence building strategies. Examples of confidence improving strategies can include highlighting potential for academic achievement (Collinson and Penketh 2010), positive reinforcement, providing students with opportunities for success (Schunk, 2014), appreciation, showing an interest and concern in the student, showing empathy, and providing encouragement at challenging times (Malik, 2014). The use of these strategies can influence the retention rates of students with learning disabilities in education.

Students value teaching approaches that consider learners' differences and individual learning styles (Pino and Mortari, 2014). A learning style refers to a consistent preference to what way subject matter is perceived and organised by a learner (Snowman and McCown, 2012 p121). As mentioned earlier, if the chosen teaching and learning strategy, inclusive of assessment strategy, does not suit the particular learning style of a student, he/she will be at a disadvantage. There are a variety of learning styles that appeal to different types of learners. Different learning styles include activist, theorist, pragmatist and reflector (Mumford and Honey, 1992). Educational facilitators should adapt elements of all four learning styles, to bring about learning opportunities that attend to the needs of four different learners. Mobbs (2003) breaks down Honey and Mumford’s learning styles.

* Activists learn by doing. Classroom activities that activists would benefit from are problem solving, group discussion and role play.
* Theorists like to understand the theories behind the actions. To engage in the learning process, these students seek facts, statistics, and background information.
* Pragmatists are people who put learning into practice in the real world. They would benefit from time to think about how to apply learning in reality, case studies and problem solving.
* Reflectors learn by observing and thinking about what happened. This type of learner likes to view alternative perspectives and takes time to choose an appropriate conclusion. A reflector would benefit from feedback from others, coaching, interviews and discussions.

Students with learning disabilities identified having positive experiences when academic staff were aware of, and adapted to, the learning needs and learning styles arising from their learning disability (Holloway, 2001). Inclusive teachers should have a broad knowledge of learning styles, so that they can incorporate elements of a variety of styles into their lesson plans.

Howard Gardeners theory of multiple intelligences states that there are seven ways that people understand and perceive the world (David L, 2014).

* Linguistic: spoken or written words
* Logical-mathematical: reasoning, logic, numbers, abstract pattern recognition
* Visual-spatial: to mentally visualise
* Body-kinaesthetic: to control body and physical motion
* Musical-rhythmic: to master rhythms, tones, and beats
* Interpersonal: communicate effectively with others and develop relationships
* Intrapersonal: understand one’s emotions and motivations, and self-reflection.
(David L, 2014)

Students with learning disabilities have been excluded from the traditional views of intelligence which recognises verbal and abstract reasoning (Carson, 2009). Howard Gardeners theory of multiple intelligences “defines intelligence as the ability to solve problems, handle crises and produce something of value for one's culture” (Carson, 2009).

The theory of multiple intelligences implies that students have a broad range of talents, and educators should recognise and teach to each set of intellectual strengths (Brualdi, 1996). From his experience, Howard Gardener, recognised that “a person’s ability in one area does not ensure an ability in other areas” (Butler, McCarthy and Bairre, 2017). It was noted in the discussion above, that literacy is the dominate discourse within the education system. A student’s ability in the area of literacy is not an indication of their ability in other areas. With inclusivity in mind, education providers should look upon all intelligences equally and should design lessons, using a range of teaching and learning strategies, that engage all intelligences. (Butler, McCarthy and Bairre, 2017)

Educators could incorporate elements of Gardener’s multiple intelligences theory into their teaching and learning strategies, to appeal to a wider number of intelligences rather than just literacy, verbal and abstract reasoning. This would be inclusive of a wider range of students, specifically those who have a learning disability.

Universal design for learning (UDL) can help educators appeal to all intelligences and learning styles. Pino and Mortari (2014 p 361) argue that obstacles to the inclusion of students with learning disabilities “can be prevented by adopting a universal design for learning”. The Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning was developed by AHEAD to promote inclusive teaching and learning, with the aim to “enhance the richness and quality of learning experienced by students and to support and guide teachers in their work” (AHEAD, 2009 p.1). The charter outlines UDL as a means to ensure that “students with disabilities have learning opportunities and experiences comparable to that of other students” (AHEAD, 2009 p. 2). The Disability Act 2005, also identifies the principles of UDL as a resource to be used by educators when making a learning environment barrier free and accessible (AHEAD, 2009). “Universal Design in education is a framework of instruction that aims to be inclusive of different learning preferences and learners and helps to reduce barriers for students with disabilities” (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015 p.1). There are seven original principles of UDL. The principles guide instruction, using various approaches and multiple formats, so that students with different learning abilities, intelligences and learning styles, can access the information through “multiple means of representation, expression and engagement” (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015 p.2). Representation is with regard to presenting material in a way in which diverse learners can understand and perceive the information. Expression is the way in which students demonstrate what they have learned, i.e., assessment, projects etc. Engagement includes a variety of means for student involvement and interaction, i.e., interactive activities, discussions etc. (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015).

The seven principles of UDL aim to maximise learning and are intended to be applied to all aspects within the learning environment, e.g., “delivery methods, physical spaces, information resources, technology, personal interactions, assessments” (Burgstahler, 2015 p.1). The seven principles are as follows:

1. Equitable use: Information must be useful and accessible to people with diverse abilities (Burgstahler, 2015)
2. Flexibility in use: Inclusive of a wide range of individual preferences (Burgstahler, 2015)
3. Simple and intuitive: Instruction is easy to understand and not unnecessarily complex (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015).
4. Perceptible information: Information is communicated in a way that is inclusive of each individual’s sensory abilities e.g. video including captions for students who have hearing difficulties (Burgstahler, 2015).
5. Tolerance for error: Instruction removes consequences for error and is accepting to all levels of learning pace and prerequisite knowledge (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015).
6. Low physical effort: Design course to eliminate physical effort to prevent fatigue and focus on attention and learning (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015).
7. Size and space for approach and use: Suitable environment that is inclusive of all physical and communication needs (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015).

When discussing universal design for instruction, Black, Weinberg and Brodwin (2015) added community of learners and instructional climate. Community of learners promotes interaction and communication between peers and teachers. Instructional climate is with regard to insuring that the climate is “welcoming and inclusive and high expectations are promoted for all students” (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015 p.4).

 “Staff efforts to understand and manage the impact of dyslexia in higher education studies was highly appreciated in terms of developing self-efficacy and confidence in students” (Holgate, 2015 p 87) This statement also applies to other forms of learning disabilities. Teachers need to be informed to actively promote and engage, foster success and promote confidence amongst students.

Collinson and Penketh (2010) found, in their research, that students had negative and unpleasant experiences with some teachers who lacked understanding and empathy. Carl Rogers firmly believed that the teaching and learning environment could benefit from accurate empathic understanding. “When the teacher can understand the student’s reactions from the inside, has a sensitive awareness of the way the process of education and learning seems to the student, then the likelihood of significant learning is increased” (Rogers, 1967: cited in Smith, 2014). Empathy and understanding should be fostered in the teaching and learning environment to promote inclusiveness and confidence.

Teachers should adapt a student-centred teaching and learning style to promote confidence. This style of teaching refers to “a variety of educational programmes, learning experiences, instructional approaches and academic strategies that are intended to address distinct learning needs” (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). This would then empower and enable students, resulting in satisfaction and successful learning experiences (Pino and Mortari, 2014). This would have a positive effect on the confidence levels of students with learning disabilities.

A teacher can promote and encourage confidence in students when relationships are built on a concept of potential for academic achievement, rather than individual deficit (Collinson and Penketh 2010 p 17). An example of this would be a teacher reading out the work of a dyslexic student in a tutorial, and commenting on the quality of the work, rather than on the quality of the spelling. Confidence can be fostered through positive reinforcement for achievements, given through relevant feedback. With social cognitive theory in mind, students should be provided with opportunities for success, resulting in the affirmation that they are capable of performing well, ensuing an enhancement of self-efficacy for continued learning (Schunk, 2014). Teachers can provide support that builds on confidence through appreciation, showing interest and concern in the student, showing empathy, and providing encouragement at challenging times (Malik, 2014).

“Instructional design models provide conceptual tools to visualise, direct, and manage processes for creating high-quality teaching and learning materials” (Merrill et al., 2014 p 77). Teachers can select an appropriate model of instructional design to meet the needs of their students. An instructional design model can assist a teacher to plan outcomes, select effective strategies for teaching and learning, and measure performance (Merrill et al., 2014 p 77). ARCS would be a suitable model of instructional design, to supplement the learning process, within a learning environment inclusive of students with learning disabilities. ARCS, designed by James Keller, is model is based on motivation. ARCS contains four main areas: Attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction (Kellher, 2009). “The confidence aspect of the ARCS model focuses on establishing positive expectations for achieving success among learners” (Malik, 2014). It was noted in the discussion, that confidence is an area that students with learning disabilities have issues with, resulting in barriers to learning. Therefore, the theme of confidence in ARCS model of instructional design is highly relevant for students with learning disabilities.

Norman and Hyland (2003 p 10) discussed how “learning, experiencing, and achieving” can promote and increase levels of confidence in students. By giving students opportunities to utilise relevant skills and knowledge, have successful accomplishments, take on responsibility, gain experience, and discover new practices, they can grow and develop into confident students and future professionals in their field. Norman and Hyland (2003 p 11) also discussed how receiving positive feedback, realism (i.e., accepting that they don’t have to know everything), receiving support and encouragement, relaxation and reassurance, self-management (i.e., recognising where they are lacking confidence and engaging in planning and goal setting to enhance their own self confidence), coping with constructive criticism, and being treated well, all have a part to play in the promotion of confidence within students.

Within the teaching and learning environment, frequent adjustments should be made for students with learning disabilities, depending on need. These can include; note-takers, dictaphones, spellcheckers, providing alternative testing environments, and extra time or support for assessments and exams. (Pino and Mortari, 2014). “While assessing students’ work, teachers should take into consideration their dyslexia and, hence, make allowances for incorrect spelling and grammar” (Pino and Mortari, 2014 p362). When students believe that they are receiving the allowances that they require, they can take on their assessments with a higher level of confidence, giving them a better chance to demonstrate their true potential and achieve success.

Sander and Sanders (2003) propose that the opportunities afforded by the academic environment within education, have an impact on student confidence. “The learning environment has the potential to positively or negatively impact student competence, confidence, and comprehension” (Adams, 2015). Teachers must monitor environmental factors, such as, the comfort of the learning space, brightness and air, and technology accessibility (Clifford, 2012).

Education providers should ensure equitability when designing assessment strategies. Students with learning disabilities should be able to “achieve and demonstrate all aspects of their learning with as limited a hinderance from their personal circumstances as is practical” (Miller, Collings and Kneale, 2015 p.1). Teachers must carefully consider inclusive assessment strategies, that give students with learning disabilities the opportunity to establish that that they have achieved the learning outcomes, whilst not compromising academic or professional standards (Miller, Collings and Kneale, 2015). Preferred assessment methods include student portfolios, independent projects, student journals, and assigning creative tasks (Brualdi, 1996).

# 2.6 Summary

There is a rising percentage of students with learning disabilities enrolling in FE. Research in the area tells us that students with learning disabilities face barriers in education that can result in lower levels of confidence. Confidence is an important element of academic success. Teachers play an important role in the promotion of confidence in students with learning disabilities. Teachers can promote confidence by using a variety of teaching and learning strategies that result in student success and achievement.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

# 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, methodology will be discussed. The use of methodology is determined by ‘what do I need to know and why?’ and ‘what is the best way to collect information?’ (Bell and Bell, 2010 p. 115). The chosen methodology will be underpinned by general philosophical questions that have arisen from the literature review (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006).

There is a “wide variety of methods available for designing, carrying out and analysing the results of research” (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006 p.58). A variety of methods must be considered, as each approach provides the researcher with different forms of knowledge and data (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006). The researcher will determine the most suitable and appropriate approach to this research study, that will enable fulfilment of the objectives of the study and to provide answers to key questions. The methodological approach will be decided based on the following considerations: the research objectives, philosophy, approaches, strategies, methods, time horizons, research design, pilot, sampling, data collection, limitations, ethics and, data analysis and findings.

# 3.2 Research objectives

The research objectives are clear and specific goals that the researcher intends to achieve through the study (Kumar, 2005). Ultimately, the objective is to collect the evidence that is required to answer the research question, as outlined in chapter one: How can teachers in FE promote confidence in students with learning disabilities?

The research question will be answered by exploring the following three sub objectives:

1. To establish a situational context of learning disability in FE.
2. To explore the area of confidence in FE, and the relationship between learning disability and confidence.
3. To ascertain teaching and learning strategies that promote confidence in students with learning disabilities.

# 3.3 Research Philosophy

A suitable philosophical approach enables a researcher to choose an appropriate methodology that will satisfy the research objectives (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The research philosophy should be chosen, based on what is seen as the best way to answer the research questions.

“The term research philosophy refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009 p. 124). The research philosophy will underpin methodological choice, research strategy, data collection techniques and analysis procedures (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). There are 4 main research philosophies: pragmatism, positivism, realism and interpretivism (Dudovskiy, 2018b).

## 3.3.1 Interpretivism

The goal of this research study is to gain an understanding of current reality, within the FE sector, and to raise awareness amongst educators to promote positive outcomes for students. With consideration of this, the researcher has chosen that an interpretive approach will be most suitable philosophical approach in attaining the research objectives.

Dudovskiy (2018a) gives an overview of interpretivism. The focus of interest within an interpretivist study is information that is specific and unique. The knowledge generated is current and relative to the specific topics within the study. The participant/researcher relationship is interactive and cooperative. The information that is desired by an interpretivist researcher is “what some people think and do” (Dudovskiy, 2018a).

 “The purpose of interpretivist research is to create new, richer understandings and interpretations of social worlds and contexts” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009 p. 140). Interpretivism focuses on “complexity, richness, multiple interpretations and meaning-making” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009 p. 141). The interpretive approach will give the researcher an in-depth knowledge of the subject and, in turn, a quality analysis can be made.

There are many benefits to using an interpretive approach. Data can be relied upon as trustworthy and honest, as interpretive data collection techniques are associated with a high level of validity, and allow for depth of understanding through discussion with research participants (Dudovskiy, 2018a). A drawback to interpretivism that the researcher must bear in mind, is that there is potential room for bias, because of the subjective nature of the approach (Dudovskiy, 2018a). The researcher must consider this and remain objective throughout the study to prevent bias.

# 3.4 Research approaches

There are two approaches that can be taken by the researcher: inductive or deductive. “The main difference between inductive and deductive approaches to research, is that whilst a deductive approach is aimed at testing theory, an inductive approach is concerned with the generation of new theory emerging from data” (Gabriel, 2018). An inductive approach fits well with an interpretive philosophy.

## 3.4.1 Inductive approach

For this study an inductive approach is more relevant. The use of research questions is common within inductive approaches to narrow the scope of study (Gabriel, 2013). Using an inductive approach, the researcher will be looking at previously researched knowledge and information, and adding to it by exploring different perspectives (Gabriel, 2013). This research is concerned with the generation of new theory emerging from data, and this is relevant to an inductive approach (Gabriel, 2013). A deductive approach was not chosen as it is more concerned with testing validity of a theory (Gabriel, 2013).

## 3.4.2 Quantitative and Qualitative approach

“Quantitative and qualitative research methodologies differ in the philosophy that underpins their mode of inquiry as well as, to some extent, in methods, models and procedures used” (Kumar, 2005 p. 17). The researcher has chosen that an interpretivist philosophy and an inductive approach is most suitable to the research and will be the most effective when fulfilling the research objectives. The corresponding research approach will be to conduct a qualitative research study (Gabriel, 2013 and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

In addition to interpretivism, an underpinning philosophy of qualitative research is empiricism: “the only knowledge that human beings acquire is from sensory experiences (Bernard, 1994 cited in Kumar, 2005 p.17). Kumar (2005) outlines that a qualitative approach to inquiry is unstructured and flexible, the main purpose of investigation is to describe current reality and the sample size is small and contains fewer cases. Qualitative research can cover multiple issues and values authenticity (Kumar, 2005). Topics that are usually explored through qualitative research are reflected through “experiences, meanings, perceptions and feelings” (Kumar, 2005 p. 18). Qualitative data research was chosen, because it is believed to provide a ‘richer’ and ‘more valid’ basis for social research than quantitative data research, which is more focused on dealing with numbers and measures (Yates, 2004, p. 139). Qualitative data research results in a far more extensive range of material, that gives a deeper and richer insight into finer detail (Yates, 2004, p. 140). Qualitative research is “concerned with understanding behaviour from actors’ own frames of reference” (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006 p65). This is more relevant to the study concerning teaching and learning strategies that are used to promote confidence in learners with disabilities, because the facts, details and specific descriptions are more applicable than numbers.

Quantitative data collection was not chosen, because it calls for the utilisation of a larger number of participants and the focus of inquiry is kept narrow (Kumar, 2005). The purposes and considerations for this study would not allow for that. It was more reasonable to use a smaller number of participants, to obtain richer information. Quantitative data collection also “assumes a stable reality” (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006 p65). This would not be directly applicable to this area of study. This research seeks to find subjective outcomes, rather than objective outcomes (Kumar, 2005). The quantitative approach to inquiry is structured, rigid and predetermined. The main purpose of quantitative investigation is to “quantify extent of variation in phenomenon, situation, issue etc.” (Bernard, 1994 cited in Kumar, 2005 p.17). These qualities are not applicable to this study.

# 3.5 Research strategies

The research strategy concerns what method, or methods, will be used to collect the data that is necessary for the research. Various methods of data collection were considered. Different strategies produce different kinds of knowledge (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006) The researcher must choose the most suitable research strategy, based on the chosen philosophy and approach (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006). Data can be collected through a variety of ways that includes “observation, measurement, asking questions, or a combination of these, or other strategies” (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006 p153). An interpretive philosophy and an inductive, qualitative approach will underpin the chosen strategy. Qualitative research strategies can consist of case studies, interviews, focus groups and participant observation (Hafner, 2012).

A case study is defined as “comprehensive description of an individual case and its analysis” (Starman, 2013 p.31). A case study characterises events, and describes features, by analysing an individual matter or case (Starman, 2013). Case studies have been known to be ambiguous and inconsistent, regarding definition and subject of investigation (Starman, 2003). For this reason, case studies were not chosen by the researcher as a research strategy.

“A focus group is an informal discussion among a group of selected individuals about a particular topic” (Liamputtong, 2011 p.3). They can be used to capture responses from a small group of people at one time (Wisker, 2008). The outcome of a focus group is, that the researcher gains an understanding of attitudes, behaviour, opinions and perceptions of individuals taking part in the research (Liamputtong, 2011). Although this would suitably meet the research objectives of this study, hosting a focus group would present as a limitation, as it would require all participants to be present in one place, at one time, and this would be unrealistic at this current time.

Participant observations would consist of the researcher sitting in on participants classes and recording events that take place. “Participant observation is appropriate for collecting data on naturally occurring behaviours (sic) in their usual contexts” (Hafner, 2012 p.3). This would be a suitable way to collect data that would meet the research objectives, but would be too time consuming to conduct for this research study.

## 3.5.1 Research choice: In-depth Interviews

The researcher has chosen monomethod, qualitative data collection in the form of in-depth interviews, with six teachers in FE. The use of interviews will achieve the aims and objectives of the research, as they will provide the researcher with opportunities to obtain rich, detailed data, directly from teachers, based on their insider experience, insights, and expertise in the area (Wisker, 2008).

The kind of interview that the researcher will conduct, is a semi-structured interview. This kind of interview will provide the researcher with comparable responses from all six research participants, as the same questions will be asked of each interviewee (Wisker, 2008). The interviews will be open discussions to explore the opinions and views of each individual teacher. The researcher will initiate a conversation, for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, focusing on specific objectives (Cohen and Manion, 1994). The interviewer can then return to a set of structured questions if the conversation goes off topic (Wisker, 2008). The information that the researcher will be looking for will be informed by the literature review. The purpose of obtaining this information will be to answer the research question and meet the research objectives. There will be a set of open questions to be asked and this will give the participants the opportunity to openly express their thoughts, through detailed and quality responses, without restriction or leading (Bell, 2005). Questions must be worded in a clear and unambiguous manner. This will be ensured by creating questions that are not leading and open to varying interpretation (Research Observatory, 2017). The interviews will be recorded, transcribed then coded and analysed.

# 3.6 Time horizons

The primary research, in the form of in-depth interviews, will take place over the duration of one month. Each participant will be interviewed on one occasion. This will be relevant to cross-sectional research. “Cross-sectional research is best suited to studies aimed at finding out the prevalence of a phenomenon, situation, problem, attitude or issue” (Kumar, 2005 p. 93). The above statement can be applied to the research objectives of this study. Using cross-sectional study design, the researcher will be able to obtain an overall picture of the situation as it stands at the time of the study (Kumar, 2005). Longitudinal studies are appropriate for measuring a before-and-after situation (Kumar, 2005). The researcher is not attempting to record sequences of social change over time by interviewing participants on more than one occasion, therefore longitudinal research is not applicable (Payne and Payne, 2004).

# 3.7 Data collection methods

The chosen method of data collection is in-depth interviews. Data collection methods concern the research design, pilot phase, sampling, data collection, limitations, ethics and Data analysis and findings.

## 3.7.1 Research design

The researcher will design an interview format that will be used to collect necessary data for the research. The questions that will be asked in the interview will be inspired by information that was discussed in the literature review. Questions will be phrased open-endedly, as this will enable interviewees to expand and give detailed information (Wisker, 2008). The researcher will design a set of questions and prompts that will be used to stay on topic and avoid misunderstandings and ambiguity. The prompts will also aim to promote interaction and creative exploration (Wisker, 2008). Questions will not be leading, suggest bias or prejudice, use unnecessary jargon or be excessively long (Wisker, 2008). See appendix 1 for research questions and rationale for their inclusion.

## 3.7.2 Pilot phase

The researcher will conduct a pilot interview prior to commencing the research interviews. The pilot process involves trying out the research techniques and methods to see how well they will work (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006). This is undertaken to allow the researcher to test and judge the feasibility of the research plans. Undertaking a pilot is highly valuable to the research process as it can “give advance warning about where the main research project could fail” (van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2002 p. 1). The results of a pilot interview will inform the researcher if any questions are ambiguous or unnecessary. (van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2002) The pilot will be followed by a modification of plans if necessary (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006).

## 3.7.3 Sampling

A sample is the group of participants that are used to attain the information that is needed to meet the research objectives. The knowledge gained from the sample that is chosen is representative of the wider population under the study (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). The sampling strategy is crucial to the research process. The researcher must consider factors when deciding what sample to use. These factors include: time, accessibility to participants, what will yield a true picture of the current situation and what kind of research is being undertaken e.g. qualitative/quantitative/mixed methods (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

Upon consideration of the above factors the researcher has chosen probability sampling. The sample of participants that will take part in the research are randomly drawn from the wider population (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011), with the aim of yielding a true picture of the current situation. Probability sampling will have less risk of bias than non-probability sampling. The reason non-probability sampling was not chosen was because it carries a risk of subjective judgement (Lund Research, 2012).

## 3.7.4 Limitations

Limitations are constraints beyond the control of the researcher. All studies have limitations as they result of from methodological choices that have been made. Researchers must be aware and considerate of limitations as they can affect results and conclusions (Simon and Goes, 2013).

“A limitation associated with qualitative study is related to validity and reliability” (Simon and Goes, 2013 p. 2). Validity refers to accuracy and authenticity of findings, and reliability means that the research is consistent and high quality. (Scott and Morrison, 2007). In order to ensure the findings of this research are both reliable and valid, the information will be gathered using sound methods and approaches and the participants will be teachers who are suitably qualified and experienced in their roles.

The limitations of using interviews as a data collection method, is that transcribing can be a time-consuming process and there is a limited sample size. The quality of the data that will be received will depend on the interviewing ability of the interviewer (Wyse, 2014).

## 3.7.5 Ethics

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) state that research is to be conducted in an ethically defensible manner, as research has the potential to damage the rights and values of individuals. Ethics must be reflected throughout the research process for the protection of participants (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Ethical issues are more common in research designs that use qualitative methods, as researchers are working more closely with participants (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006). Ethical issues are of primary consideration throughout this qualitative study.

The researcher has applied for and obtained ethical approval from the faculty ethics committee at Griffith College Dublin. Please see appendix 3. The amendments that were recommend by the committee have been attended to by the researcher.

Punch (2006) outlined that voluntary and informed consent was one of the main ethical issues. Informed consent concerns whether people taking part in the research have the full information regarding the study (Punch, 2006). The people taking part in the study must choose to do so, after being informed of any facts that may or may not influence their decision to partake (Cohen and Manion, 1994). “The principle of informed consent arises from the subject’s right to freedom and self-determination” (Cohen and Manion, 1994 p. 350). Self-determination extends to the participants right to refuse to take part, or withdraw at any time, throughout the interview process (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Voluntary and informed consent will be ensured in this research, by providing the participants with information about the research prior to the date of the interview and commencement of the interview. The information will be in the form of an information sheet. See appendix 4. The participants will be made aware that they can withdraw from the study at any time. The participants will also be asked to complete a consent form (see appendix 5), tick a box stating that they voluntarily agree to take part in the study, and that they are fully aware of all facts and information regarding the study.

Confidentiality and anonymity is another ethical issue (Punch, 2006) that must be considered by the researcher. Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity ensures that the information provided by participants is secure and protected. Information must be protected to guarantee that people remain anonymous, and names and/or places and not disclosed (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006). “The essence of anonymity is that information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity” (Cohen and Manion, 1994 p. 366). Confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured throughout this research and the participants will be informed of this in the information sheet.

Kumar (2005) discussed how ethical issues can also be related to the researcher, for example, bias, incorrect reporting and inappropriate use of information.

The use of deception is also not permitted when working within an ethical framework. This can include not telling participants that they are taking part in research, or not telling the whole truth (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011 p. 103) summarised this by adding “do not tell lies, falsify data, avoid being unfairly selective, do not misrepresent data”.

## 3.7.6 Data analysis and findings

Data will be collected through six interviews. It will be recorded and later transcribed. The transcripts will be examined by the researcher and significant statements will be drawn out (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006). Content analysis will take place to develop themes. “Content analysis means analysis of the contents of an interview in order to identify the main themes that emerge from the responses given by your respondents” (Kumar, 2005 p. 240). The main themes will then be assigned a code in the form of a colour. The researcher will then go through the transcripts of the interviews and classify the responses under the identified themes (Kumar, 2005). The researcher will compare answers given by different interviewees (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2006). The themes and responses will then be discussed in relation to relevant literature through summarising and generalising. Recurring responses and patterns will be discussed using examples that illustrate findings (Wisker, 2008)

# 3.8 Summary

In this chapter the researcher has described the chosen methodology. The methodology was based on the most suitable way to achieve the research objectives. The research study will consist of an interpretive research philosophy, inductive approach, using in-depth interviews as a form of qualitative data collection. The study will be conducted over a cross sectional time horizon using probability sampling. Six teachers in FE will attend interviews with the researcher, interviews will be recorded and later transcribed. The data will be then coded and analysed followed by a discussion an analysis of the main themes. The researcher is aware of any limitations that are associated with this chosen methodology. Ethics are of consideration throughout the entire process.

### Chapter 4: Analysis

# 4.1 Introduction

As stated in the introduction, the aim of this research was to conduct a literature review and make recommendations that could contribute to building capacity and awareness, among educators, in FE, that specific teaching and learning strategies can positively impact on the confidence of learners with learning disabilities.

In chapter one, the researcher outlined a research question and set of sub objectives. These objectives inspired the choice of six semi-structured interviews, with teachers from FE, as the chosen methodology for data collection. Each teacher was asked a series of twenty-two questions. The questions asked in the interviews were chosen to collect credible evidence to answer the research questions, based on information that was collated in the literature review (Kennedy, 2006). See appendix 1 for research questions and rationale for their inclusion.

The researcher later transcribed and analysed the interviews. See appendix 6 for example transcription.

To analyse the data that was collected throughout the interviews, the researcher input the main findings from each question into a separate document. All the main findings related to each question were put together for comparison. See appendix 7 for example.

A further analysis took place by drawing main themes from the transcripts and number coding them. See appendix 8 for sample of number coding. The researcher compiled the main themes, how frequently they arose and ranked them on this basis. This information has been presented in the form of a table, see appendix 9. These themes will be discussed throughout this chapter in relation to research objectives, and the findings and information that was established in the literature review.

Question one and two were asked to establish a background. The teachers were asked:

* How long have you been teaching?
* What discipline do you mostly teach in?

The teachers who took part in the study all had substantial teaching experience ranging from 5 – 37 years. There was a variety of disciplines and teachers had experience teaching more than one subject including: Music, woodwork, drawing, building technology, soft skills, IT, employment support, care disciplines, social care, fashion, manual pattern making, health and pre-nursing.

# 4.2 Situational Context

This section addresses sub-objective one. This sub objective aims to establish a situational context of learning disability in FE.

Question three asked teachers if they ever encountered students with a learning disability in their classroom. All six of the participants in this study answered yes to this question. Students with learning disabilities are present in classrooms across all disciplines. Participant four added “we are encountering it more, implying that the prevalence of learning disabilities in FE is much higher now than it was previously in his/her 27 years of teaching experience. This finding reinforces the point made by the researcher in the rationale for this study that, in recent years, there are increasing numbers of students with learning disabilities enrolling into education (Heiman and Precel, 2003). As outlined in the literature review, that there is an increase of students within FE (41.2% between 2012 and 2014), with learning disabilities students supported by the financial fund for students with disabilities. (Higher Education Authority, 2017 p. 27). This increase in funding has a correlation with an increase of students within FE who have a disability.

Question four asked participants to expand on types of learning disabilities that they have encountered. The responses are illustrated in the graph below.

*Figure 4.1: Types of Learning Disabilities Encountered by Participants*

The most prevalent finding was that five out of six participants mentioned that they encountered a student or students with dyslexia in their teaching experience.

It is evident that the teachers interviewed had a scope of experience with various disabilities, as there were eleven different disabilities mentioned and discussed throughout six interviews. Although down syndrome was mentioned and encountered by three teachers, it is not outlined in the literature as a disability that is most prevalent within education. Disabilities that came up in the literature review that teachers did not report to have experience teaching, were ADD/ADHD, neurological/ speech and language conditions, significant ongoing illness, visual motor deficit and dyscalculia. This finding could mean that a) teachers did not have an awareness of these disabilities present in their classrooms or b) the possibility of non-disclosure from students.

Non-disclosure of disabilities was a common theme throughout the interviews and came up seven times throughout the interview process. Participant six added “Some will do their best to tell you they never had anything wrong” and participant three spoke about how “they will hide it so cleverly”. “Disclosure is frequently cited as one of the most challenging aspects of having a disability” (Hayes 2013). Disclosure is informing the college “about a disability, specific learning difficulty or mental health difficulty” (Ahead, 2018). If a student does not disclose a disability, then the college is not legally obliged to provide supports or reasonable accommodations (Ahead, 2018). If a teacher is not told about a disability it can be difficult for them to ensure inclusivity. Issues with disclosure can be overcome through policy. Students can be encouraged to disclose their disability by making them aware of the benefits of disclosure, informing students when they should disclose and who they should disclose to (Ahead, 2018).

Participant two spoke about how he/she found it “hard to classify” different disabilities and made references to “slow learners”, instead of using correct terminology. He/she could tell that individual students had additional learning needs, but was unable to associate these difficulties with a specific disability.

As discussed in the literature review, teachers who lacked awareness and understanding of learning disabilities could have a significant impact on a student’s learning experience (Pino and Mortari, 2014). As you can see in appendix 9, teacher competencies were the number one re-occurring theme throughout all the interviews. Participant four added that a student with a learning disability could be disadvantaged if they encountered a “staff member who is unfamiliar with working with people who have additional needs”. Stranovská, Lalinská and Boboňová (2017) discussed that teacher competencies should be enhanced through continuous professional development and opportunities to enhance awareness. The Higher Education Authority (2017) recommend “awareness training for lecturers/teaching staff so they are better equipped to support students with a disability from outset “(p. 11). Having an awareness of disabilities that are prevalent in the current context of FE, is a competency that is essential for teachers.

Question five asked the participants to expand on the effect that the specified learning disabilities had on a student’s experience in college. Points that arose were comparing themselves to others, exclusion, being accepted by peers, not interacting with peers, being ostracised by peers, finding aspects of the course difficult, teachers not fully understanding their needs and how to support them, not engaging in classes or assessments, having a learned expectation of failure, avoiding classes, poor attendance and/or dropping out. Interestingly, the theme of dropping out was brought up and discussed by four out of six participants, on five occasions throughout the interviews. Participant five discussed how “without confidence in themselves, and what they are doing, you have lost them straight away. They will drop out. They won’t keep going” and participant three added “a lot of people with disabilities will not get through the semester”. This further illustrates a point that was outlined in the literature by the National Centre for learning disabilities (2014), that there is a higher rate of drop out amongst students with learning disabilities, than there is amongst their peers without a learning disability. This point leads the way in thinking that supports must be put in place for the promotion of confidence amongst students with learning disabilities to prevent drop out and remain in FE. To reinforce this point, Cox (2009 p. 77 cited in: Bickerstaff, Barragan and Rucks-Ahidiana, 2017 p.502) argued that “Lack of confidence is connected to self-protective avoidance strategies that “prevent full commitment to the role of college student””.

To futher explore the situational context of learning disability, in questions six and seven, the participants were asked about their awareness of policies that exist in their institution that support students with learning disabilities, and how they benefit the students. In the literature review, the researcher noted a gap in national policy, regarding supports and services, available to students with learning disabilities within FE. However, each college should have their own policies and appointed staff member “to take specific responsibility for access transfer and progression of students with SEN (special education needs)” (O’Sullivan, 2012 cited in Mc Guckin et al., 2013 p.28). The findings of this research demonstrate that this is not always the case. This was established, as there was a varied response from participants in relation to this. Five out of six participants reported that, yes, there are policies in place, within the college to support students with learning disabilities. Participant two, however, discussed that he/she has never been made aware of any policies, within his/her place of work that are relating to the support of students with learning disabilities “No – never provided with any documentation of policies. Supporting people with disabilities has never been discussed within my role”. This statement is in contrast with what is outlined in the literature.

The remaining five participants spoke about the individual policies that are prevalent in their work place. Two teachers spoke about a “special education needs (SEN) programme”. Two teachers spoke about the roles of a learning support officer and a disability officer employed within their institutions. One teacher conveyed that students with learning disabilities, and any additional needs they may have, would be under the umbrella and the responsibility of the course director. Two teachers spoke about policy that ensures support is provided to the teacher. Participant four and participant six discussed learning assessments, and recommendations based on the outcomes of the learning assessment. A learning assessment would involve the collection of information, description of strengths, identification of students’ needs in relation to the course demands and outline type of resources and accommodations needed (Gallagher and McKernan, 2011). The Higher Education Authority (2017) recommends a needs assessment, carried out by a disability officer, to establish “modifications or adjustments within an academic programme” (p. 19).

Many other benefits of policy were mentioned such as: non-judgemental atmosphere, help with literacy, monitoring and reassurance, supports such as laptops, software programmes, class adjustments, interpreters, scribes, planning and emotional support. Participant five added that implementing policy to support students with learning disabilities within his/her college “is very, very, very much a priority with us”.

The literature review outlines that, within Ireland, there is currently no comprehensive overview of supports and services available to students with learning disabilities within FE (O’Sullivan, 2012 cited in Mc Guckin et al., 2013). This point was prevalent within the research findings. Whilst some of these supports and policies sound very positive, there was no coherence or consistency between any of the responses. Each college has their own way of going about the same issues and some can be seen to be better at that than others.

Legislation (Disability Act 2005, Equality Act 2004, Universities Act 1997) and policy regarding the provision of supports for students with specific learning disabilities, was outlined in the literature review (Charter for inclusive teaching and learning, 2009) ,i.e., appropriate adjustments, provision of support services, teaching and learning strategies, assessment methods and administrative policies to ensure an inclusive learning environment. Mc Guckin et al (2013) outlines that national policy guides institutions of FE to “take specific responsibility” (p. 28) in implementing local policies. What was found in the interviews, is a case of policy not matching practice. Some of the teachers discussed definite policy regarding the support of students with learning disabilities, and others did not, i.e., participant three.

Coffield et al (2007) conducted an interesting study in the UK regarding policy and practice. The authors of this report looked at how policy impacts on the interests of learners and “how policy percolates down through the various levels in the system” (p.735). They found that policy shaped the behaviour of institutions, but did not find “evidence of the direct or simple transmission of policy into teaching practices” (p.736). The researchers also found that senior management within educational institutions “felt they could exercise more freedom in translating external policy into internal plans and practices”. This approach can result in incoherence and inconsistency amongst education providers. This study (Coffield et al., 2007) appears to echo the findings of this report.

# 4.3 Confidence in Further Education

This section is in relation to sub-objective two. This sub objective aims to explore the area of confidence in FE.

For the purposes of this research, confidence is defined as belief in one’s ability, belief that others believe in you and feeling sure about what you are doing (Norman and Hyland, 2003). In questions eight and nine, participants were asked to describe a confident learner and discuss the benefits of confidence for students in FE. All six participants gave various responses and forty-eight positive characteristics/qualities of a confident learner were mentioned, with some repetition. In the literature review, the researcher made the point that higher levels of confidence can be advantageous for a student in a variety of ways. “They adapt to new situations quicker, take on more responsibility, engage more fully in the learning process, enjoy learning, they are more relaxed, more motivated, and interact more easily with others” (Norman and Hyland, 2003 p 9). Based on qualities outlined in the literature, the researcher compiled a table to illustrate a breakdown of the responses given by participants. See appendix 10.

Participants three and six agreed that confident students are more engaging in classes. There were various points made regarding the enjoyment of learning, for example, “happy”, “love being a student”, “uplifting” and “enthusiastic”.

The most common characteristic/qualities mentioned were:

* Positive thinking from the beginning
* Engaging in the learning process
* Happiness
* Not fearful
* No problem asking questions

All of the above were brought up on three separate occasions by teachers.

Some points made by participants that could add to Norman and Hyland’s (2003) above characteristics of a confident learner include:

* Appreciates time that teachers put into their job
* Do not have a defeatist attitude
* More likely to succeed
* Promotes development
* Reflecting positively on their ability
* Finding their strengths

In question ten, the researcher asked the participants what can cause low levels of confidence in students. The literature review outlined a range of potential triggers of poor confidence, which included; new experiences or tasks, a student being unable to see themselves in their future profession, overestimating task requirements, self-doubt, feeling of inferiority and perceived knowledge deficit, negative thinking, feeling scared, being judged, and uncertainty of being successful (Norman and Hyland, 2003). When asked, the participants collectively revealed a total 49 causes of low levels of confidence in students. The table in appendix 11 illustrates the causes of low confidence, defined by the teachers, and compared to what was outlined by Norman and Hyland in the literature.

The most popular response to what can cause low levels of confidence was concerned with being judged (O'Moore and Kirkham, 2001); for example, “feeling different”, “being bullied” and “students can put down others, who they feel are less able then them”. Self-doubt also came up with three teachers citing low self-esteem as a cause for low confidence (Domino and Conway, 2001). Four teachers believed that low confidence can be caused by a difficult or unsuccessful learning experience in the past (Bickerstaff, Barragan and Rucks-Ahidiana, 2017).

There were a number of points mentioned by teachers that were outside Norman and Hyland’s (2003) description of causes of low confidence that add to this conversation. They are as follows:

* Teacher competencies
* Family situation
* Mental health
* Interpersonal
* Other

Interestingly, teacher competencies, again, was a recurring theme here and it was mentioned seven times throughout the scope of this question. Participant four spoke about how confidence can be affected if a student encountered “a difficult teacher or staff member to deal with”. Forlin and Chambers (2011) discuss teacher competencies and outline how it is a requirement of teachers to cater for diverse learning styles, learning needs and promote an environment of inclusivity. Teacher training, awareness, and long-term development and support is recommended by Forlin and Chambers (2011) to enhance teacher competencies. In a study conducted by Stranovská, Lalinská and Boboňová (2017), teachers highlighted awareness of disabilities and adapting the teaching process to the specific needs of students, as a key competency.

# 4.4 The Relationship Between Learning Disability and Confidence

This section is also in relation to sub-objective two. This sub objective aims to explore the relationship between learning disability and confidence

When asked (in question eleven) “do students with learning disabilities present with lower levels of confidence than their peers without learning disabilities?”, five out of six teachers answered with a definite “yes”. Participant five did not give a definite answer to the question, he/she added that it “depends on the person, depends on the situation” and that “it depends on whether they feel like they can cope with being able to get through it”. This finding is in line with a statement outlined by Heiman and Precel (2003) “studies show that students with learning disabilities have a distinct lack of confidence”.

To investigate this statement further, teachers were asked their opinion (in question twelve) about the negative impact low confidence would have on a student with a learning disability. The most popular responses were in relation to not wanting to speak up and ask questions in class. This was mentioned five times. Dropping out of college was mentioned three times. Emotions, such as frustration, anger and embarrassment were mentioned as an impact of low confidence. These emotions can lead to negative thinking and self-defeating behaviour (Leith and Baumeister, 1996)

Gilroy (2005 cited in Green 2014, p 5) observed a distinct lack of confidence in adults with dyslexia, often using words to describe themselves such as “useless” and “hopeless”. “An individual who expressed negative attitudes towards himself thereby indicates that he has little confidence in his abilities” (Norman and Hyland, 2003 p 7). Negative thinking was the second most popular theme, in joint positioning with learning styles and multiple intelligences, throughout the six interviews. Examples of negative thinking were brought up throughout the interview process by teachers and coded fourteen times by the researcher.

Examples of negative thinking given by participant five and participant three, respectively, were students exclaiming, “there is no way I can do this”, and “I wouldn’t send you the piece of shit that represents my CV because it is rubbish”. Participant five gave an example of a student who destroyed the work that he did on an assignment, based on a misinterpretation of a comment made by a teacher. Participant one gave an example of a student not attempting a task because he/she felt that he was not able to do it. The theme of negative thinking was summed up by participant six as he/she added “many carry a history of not succeeding, nearly having a learned expectation of failure, and I find they can be stuck in that circle, their own personal expectation can be quite low”. Cadinu et al., (2005) demonstrated through research, “a link between negative thinking and performance deficits” (p. 573). Schmader and Johns (2003: cited in Cadinu et al., 2005), also concluded that “disruptive thoughts that have a detrimental effect on performance” (p. 576).

# 4.5 Teaching and learning Strategies that Promote Confidence in Students with Learning Disabilities

This section is in relation to sub-objective three. This sub objective aims to ascertain teaching and learning strategies that promote confidence in students with learning disabilities.

It has been previously established by the literature and the research findings, that confidence is an integral part of the learning process and that confidence is linked to academic achievement (Pino and Mortari, 2014). It has also been determined that students with learning disabilities are at risk of enduring a negative impact due to lack of confidence. Holgate (2015) believes that teachers should be actively promoting confidence amongst students with learning disabilities, to support them to reach their true potential. This can be achieved through implementing a range of teaching and learning strategies within the classroom. The following paragraphs will outline how this can be done.

When asked, in question fourteen, if the participants felt that they promoted inclusion in the class room, all the participants responded with a yes and adding comments such as “I try to as much as possible” and “it is something I am always conscious of”. This is a positive result, as the literature outlines that inclusive teaching and learning strategies benefit students with learning disabilities, but in addition they will have positive outcomes for all learners (AHEAD, 2009). To validate this, the researcher followed this question by asking teachers about inclusive teaching strategies that they commonly use, see below.

Many teaching and learning strategies have been mentioned in the literature review that are said to appeal to promote inclusivity and the confidence of students. Based on these, the participants were asked a serious of questions (thirteen and fifteen) regarding teaching and learning strategies they use to promote inclusivity and confidence, respectively. As discussed in the literature review, Mc Guckin et al., (2013), affirmed that teachers must adapt to be inclusive of a range of teaching and learning strategies that empower confidence. The researcher has chosen to discuss questions 13 and 15 together collectively as, if inclusivity is promoted, confidence is in turn fostered. Throughout the six interviews, the participants collectively came up with sixty-one teaching and learning strategies. The sixty-one responses were compiled into a table and compared to discussions in the literature review (see appendix 12). The table is summarised below:

1. Providing opportunities for achievement (Norman and Hyland, 2003) and providing students with opportunities for success (Schunk, 2014) were the most popular themes, with twenty-one relevant points made by participants. One interesting point, made by participant four, was to “make a learning contract at the beginning of the term this gives the student ownership over their learning goals and commitment”
2. Student centred teaching (Pino and Mortari, 2014) was discussed in many ways, inclusive of ten points including “asking students what the best way is or how would you go about doing that rather than telling them what to do” and “look at individual needs, do a needs analysis”
3. Showing appreciation, interest, concern, empathy, encouragement and understanding (Malik, 2014 and Rogers, 1967: cited in Smith, 2014), arose seven times with responses, such as, “Reassure students, highlight progress, praise students, encouragement, give sufficient attention to each person”.
4. Appealing to all learning styles and multiple intelligences (Mumford and Honey, 1992 and David L, 2014) were discussed six times. Participant four spoke about how teachers should “use different strategies to meet different student’s needs, depending on multiple intelligences” and” handouts would have a feature for each learning style”.
5. Providing appropriate adjustments for those who need it (Pino and Mortari, 2014) and ensuring equitable assessment strategies (Miller, Collings and Kneale, 2015), was brought up six times by participants. Participant four added that he/she strives to “help students with additional learning needs to perform at the same level as others, by giving them support”. He/she then went on give examples of how that can be done, e.g., “different colour paper, use of dyslexie font, interpreters and scribes”.
6. Four points were made with regard to fostering positive relationships built on potential for success (Collinson and Penketh, 2010). Participant three gave the following example: “Get to know students, tailor lesson plan to their likes and interests”.
7. Teachers discussed monitoring environmental factors (Sander and Sanders, 2003). This was evidenced on four separate occasions. Participant four made a comment about “shape the environment, i.e., putting chairs into a horseshoe shape as opposed to rows of desks” and participant six added “manage the group dynamic, ensure that everyone in the class is working respectfully and there is no disrespectful behaviour”.
8. Three comments were made that fell under highlighting potential for academic achievement (Collinson and Penketh 2010). Participant five spoke about how she would consistently reassure student by telling them “Once you get through this I know you will thrive”.

From the sixty-one teaching and learning strategies that promote inclusion and confidence in students, there was one response that can tie together many of the above themes. Participant six expressed “At the end of the session I get them to give me one point that has made a difference to you today. E.g., something that you have been surprised by, something you think was funny, something you never heard before, anything. I go around the group and ask everyone, by the fourth or fifth week they are gagging to get their point out. I might say ‘I haven’t even thought of that myself, that’s amazing’”. This strategy can have many positive benefits, such as, showing interest in students’ opinions, building up a rapport with the student, it is student-centred, it is providing an opportunity for development and achievement, it highlights the potential of students.

Appealing to diverse learning styles and different multiple intelligences was previously mentioned as a strategy that can promote inclusion and confidence. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can help educators appeal to all intelligences and learning styles. Questions sixteen, seventeen and eighteen, were designed to explore the theories and principles of UDL and how they can be used functionally within the classroom to promote confidence of students with learning disabilities. UDL is a teaching strategy used so that students with different learning abilities, intelligences and learning styles can access the information through “multiple means of representation, expression and engagement” (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015 p.2). With this in consideration, participants were asked how they provide students with multiple means of: representation (question sixteen) expression, (question seventeen) and engagement (question eighteen).

Collectively, the six participants compiled a bank of twenty-one means of representation, seventeen means of expression and sixteen means of engagement. See appendix 13.

The underlying principles of UDL, i.e., multiple methods for representation, expression and engagement, complement Honey and Mumford’s theory of learning styles (Mobbs, 2003). The learning styles of activists, theorists, pragmatists, and reflectors that is outlined in the literature review. Providing multiple means of representation, expression and engagement, ensures that a teacher is appealing to all learning styles within a classroom. The following images are a breakdown of the responses made by teachers, categorised into the various learning styles.

*Figure 4.2: Multiple Means of Representation*



Representation is ways in which teachers present material (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015). The figure above illustrates how multiple means of representation can be applied to diverse learning styles. Participant one outlined that he/she provided “multiple forms of representation that coincide and link in with the learning styles of every individual student for example overhead projector and video clips for visual learners”. There were many other forms of representation discussed from traditional lecturing to one-to-one feedback. The most common response was visual handout, mentioned four times, and video clip, mentioned three times. See appendix 13 for complete list.

*Figure 4.3: Multiple Means of Expression* 

Expression is the way in which students demonstrate what they have learned, i.e., assessment, projects etc. (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015). Multiple means of expression were discussed, such as; written/typed report, work experience, presentation, exam, reflective learning diary. For the complete list see appendix 13. Participant two spoke about how he/she would “provide the brief and requirements in a means that the student will be able to understand, i.e., clear description, simple information, step by step”. Participant four spoke about an exam situation for a student who would need appropriate adjustments, “you can give a student extra time, a scribe, provide a quiet space”. Participant five added that teachers should “provide alternatives, have a flexible approach that suits the student”.

*Figure 4.4: Multiple Means of Engagement*

Engagement includes a variety of means for student involvement and interaction, i.e., interactive activities, discussions etc. (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015). Methods of engagement that were discussed included: asking questions, get students to engage with other students work, Kahoot quiz, discussion, mind dump activity, online student forum. Participant one spoke about how a class plan should include a mixture of activities, avoid doing the same things all the time. Participant one continued with the point that teachers should make sure students are comfortable to engage by creating a positive atmosphere i.e. “respect, relaxed, light heartedness, non-judgemental, encouragement.”

It was noted in the literature review, that students value teaching approaches that consider learners' differences and individual learning styles (Pino and Mortari, 2014). Teachers using principles of UDL, and implementing multiple means of representation, expression and engagement and appealing to all learning styles, will have a knock-on benefit of the promotion of confidence in learners with learning disabilities.

Participant four highlighted that students with literacy related learning disabilities, should not “lose marks for spelling and grammar” and that alternative assessment methods should be provided when possible. Literacy was common throughout the interview process, emerging six times (see appendix 9). The literature review outlined that some learning disabilities are associated with literacy and related issues. Traditional assessment methods, such as, report writing, and exams will not highlight the true potential of these students (Holgate, 2015). Collinson and Penketh (2010) suggest that learners with learning disabilities have on occasions been “excluded” from formal education because of a cultural framework within educational practices, that prioritises literacy as a dominant discourse which is used to define academic ability. This point makes providing appropriate accommodations and alternative assessment methods, more important. Participant two added “when we have designs or systems where it is all about how you can put it on paper, the written word. How can you put people against that? This is how we are measuring people a lot these days. So, it is not a level world.” The exclusion of students with learning disabilities, is a consequence of a cultural framework that prioritises literacy, and does not value diversity of learning styles and multiple intelligences. “Institutions should demonstrate in their programmes of education and training, a commitment to combat discrimination, make adjustments for diversity and promote equality of opportunity” (Gallagher and McKernan, 2011 p.23). Students with learning disabilities must be included on an equitable basis as all other students. To do this, appropriate accommodations and alternative assessment methods must be provided.

To sum up all of the above, teachers were asked to consider a student with a learning disability that they have worked with in the past, and how they addressed that student’s distinct learning needs through teaching and learning strategies. It was discussed in the literature review that teachers should adapt a student-centred teaching and learning style, to promote confidence. This style of teaching refers to “a variety of educational programmes, learning experiences, instructional approaches and academic strategies, that are intended to address distinct learning needs” (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014).

The following are the main points that arose from the responses:

1. Assess learning needs from the start: take on board what an individual learning assessment says, if they have one
2. Get to know the student, find a common connection, and build up rapport
3. Discover how that student learns best and their preferential learning styles
4. Tailor make materials and activities that will suit that person and their learning style
5. Be inclusive and use inclusive learning strategies, i.e., provide materials in multiple forms
6. Provide alternative assessment methods
7. Award and encourage student for their strengths and merits

The above seven points, made collectively by six teachers, throughout the interview process are reflective of the student-centred teaching style that was outlined in the literature. If these are implemented successfully, research (Mc Guckin et al (2013), Black, Weinberg and Brodwin (2015), David L (2014), Smith (2014), Pino and Mortari (2014), Sander and Sanders (2003) and Miller, Collings and Kneale (2015)) tells us that this can have a positive effect on the level of confidence of students with learning disabilities. If confidence is increased then students will benefit from, what was found by this research, the positive effects of increased confidence, such as: positive thinking from the beginning, engaging in the learning process, happiness, not fearful and no problem asking questions.

In question twenty, teachers were asked about the positive outcomes for students based on the above interventions/strategies. Participant one added that he/she believed that confidence and self-belief of the student was increased, the student was able to focus on his/her individual strengths, rather than their deficits, the student felt included and equal. All of the above had a knock-on benefit with the student’s overall progress within the module. Participant four articulated that, as a result of inclusive and confidence building teaching and learning strategies, “the student with the learning disability has the same opportunities to succeed as any other student in the classroom. The outcome was, that that student had similar outcomes to students who did not have the barriers associated with a learning disability”. This is a very positive finding, as research shows that students with learning disabilities are more likely to suffer from a variety of confidence issues within the educational environment (Heiman and Precel (2003), Goldfinch and Hughes (2007), Schunk (2014), Gilroy (2005)). This statement is in line with what UDL seeks to achieve, as it is a means to ensure that “students with disabilities have learning opportunities and experiences comparable to that of other students” (AHEAD, 2009 p. 2). The examples that were used by the teachers showed that chosen strategies can empower and enable students, resulting in satisfaction and successful learning experiences.

# 4.6 Closing points

In question twenty-one, the six participants unanimously answered “yes” when they were asked their opinion on whether more emphasis should be put on promoting confidence in students with learning disabilities in FE. Participant four “there is a huge need for it”. Links between this finding can be made with literature, including Heiman and Precel (2003) and Norman and Hyland (2003).

The above was followed by asking teachers what they feel would support teachers to improve confidence in students with learning disabilities (question twenty-two). Forlin and Chambers (2011) outlined that training should be implemented to provide teachers with skills and strategies that will enable them to teach inclusively.

 The following are the main responses based on the collective responses made by all participants:

* Teacher training and support was mentioned five times
* More time was mentioned three times
* Awareness was mentioned twice
* Ensuring disabilities are disclosed as far as possible
* Support for teachers: someone to talk to if they are finding something challenging or daunting
* Peer learning and collaboration amongst staff
* More learner feedback: ask the student what they think

Some of the responses above support Black, Weinberg and Brodwin (2015) point about the community of learners within universal design for instruction, that was discussed in the literature review. Community of learners promotes interaction and communication between peers and teachers.

### Chapter 5: Conclusion

# 5.1 Key findings

This dissertation investigated specific teaching and learning strategies, used by teachers in FE, to promote the confidence of students with learning disabilities.

This research set out to explore the situational context of learning disabilities in FE. This was in relation to sub-objective one: To establish a situational context of learning disability in FE. As a result, a number of key findings came to light. Disclosure of a disability is important. If a teacher is not told about a disability, it can be difficult for them to insure inclusivity (Hayes 2013), (Ahead, 2018). This report offers an insight into how this can be overcome, and disclosure can be encouraged. In addition to this, there is currently no comprehensive overview of supports and services available to students with learning disabilities within FE (O’Sullivan, 2012 cited in Mc Guckin et al., 2013). There is inconsistency and incoherence in how policy is put into practice within FE in Ireland. Similar to what was discovered through research in the UK (Coffield et al., 2007).

The research then progressed into the second sub-objective, which was to explore the area of confidence in FE, and the relationship between learning disability and confidence. The findings of this report support Pino and Mortari’s (2014) assertion that confidence is an integral part of the learning process. The researcher compiled a comprehensive overview of qualities of a confident learner and causes of low confidence. The research found that students with learning disabilities are more likely to have lower confidence than those without learning disabilities (Heiman and Precel, 2003). It was shown that a negative impact occurs when students have low confidence e.g. negative thinking, self-defeating behaviour and dropping out of college.

The third sub-objective, was to ascertain teaching and learning strategies that promote confidence in students with learning disabilities. This was done by establishing teaching and learning strategies that promote inclusion and confidence in students with learning disabilities. This research highlighted sixty-one teaching and learning strategies that promote inclusion and confidence amongst students with learning disabilities. These strategies were broken down into categories of student-centred teaching, showing interest/concern/empathy in the student, appealing to all learning styles, providing appropriate adjustments and equitable assessment strategies, fostering positive relationships, monitoring environmental factors and highlighting potential for academic success. The research found that, not only do these strategies promote confidence amongst students with learning disabilities, they also have knock on benefit to all learners. Following this, the researcher was able to compile an extensive list of how the principles of universal design, i.e., providing multiple means of expression, representation and engagement (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015) can be achieved in a classroom, and linked to Honey and Mumford learning styles, reflector, pragmatist, activist and theorist (Mobbs, 2003).

Based on the research, the researcher found that if the strategies that are discussed in this report are implemented, the outcome for students with learning disabilities could potentially include increased self-confidence and having equal opportunities and outcomes as students without learning disabilities. This research finds that, if confidence is increased, students will benefit from the positive effects of increased confidence, such as: positive thinking from the beginning, engaging in the learning process, happiness, not fearful and no problem asking questions.

The research finds that more emphasis should be put on the area of promoting confidence in students with learning disabilities in FE. This can be done by following the recommendations that will be outlined later in this chapter.

# 5.2 Why this research is important

There is a correlation between learning disability and low confidence. Confidence is an integral part of the learning process. This research is important because it brings to light new and innovative contribution to the area of teaching students with learning disabilities in FE, as it informs the reader of processes that can be undertaken to promote confidence amongst students with learning disabilities.

The findings and recommendations of this research can be used as a tool to promote awareness. “Research can raise awareness about issues and, in best circumstances, influence change” (Kellett, 2010 p.116). The literature review outlined the detrimental effect that a teachers’ lack of awareness of learning disabilities could have on a student. The Higher Education Authority (2017) recommend that awareness is raised amongst teaching staff, so they are better equipped to support students with disabilities. This research meets this recommendation, as it raises awareness of disabilities that are prevalent in the current context of FE, confidence in relation to learning disability, and teaching and learning strategies that can promote confidence in students with learning disabilities.

This research highlights the importance of teacher competency and key competencies necessary to promote the confidence of students with learning disabilities. While highlighting competencies was not an original aim of this research, this theme emerged as the organic process of this research evolved.

Arising from this research, a set of teaching and learning strategies are proven to have a positive effect on learner confidence. This research shows a definite and explicit need for these teaching and learning strategies, as outcomes for students with disabilities are comparable to outcomes of students without learning disabilities, when they are implemented. This demonstrates the active promotion of equity, equality, and inclusion.

# 5.3 Recommendations for Policy Makers

It is recommended by this research that there are more coherent and comprehensive policies put in place regarding the support of students with learning disabilities, within FE, in Ireland. This is necessary because this research brought to light a gap in national policy relating to students with learning disabilities in FE, and inconsistencies between the policy that is in place, and what is carried out in practice. National policy could focus on implementing a national infrastructure of support that can be put in place to deal with many issues, such as, disclosure. Policy could ensure that the principles of equity, equality and inclusion form the basis of and are enshrined in the development and support for students with learning disabilities. The implementation of national policy is necessary also to provide a framework of support for teachers and to develop resources for teachers of students with learning disabilities, within the FE sector.

# 5.4 Recommendations for future research

It is recommended by the researcher that further research is carried out to examine practice meeting policy within the FE sector in Ireland, specifically regarding the support of students with learning disabilities. This can be approached by doing an in-depth analysis of current policy, followed by a qualitative and quantitative study of current practices within institutions of FE.

It is also recommended by the researcher that an initial longitudinal research study is done to measure confidence levels of students with learning disabilities, followed by the implementation of the teaching strategies that are outlined in this research, and then a further study, to measure the confidence levels of students is carried out, to see if there has been a resultant increase in the confidence levels of students with learning disabilities.

# 5.5 Recommendations for practitioners

It is a key recommendation of this research that FE teachers, implement the confidence improving strategies that are outlined in this report. It is also recommended that teachers continue to grow and develop their competencies and capacity through, on-going training and awareness, peer collaboration and peer learning amongst staff, take time to plan and implement inclusive and confidence promoting strategies, and request learner feedback.

Based on interview responses, and supported by relevant literature, the researcher was able to compile a seven-step process for teachers to follow, that is reflective of best practice when teaching students with learning disabilities. These practical interventions will also have a positive effect on learners’ confidence.

1. Assess learning needs from the start: take on board what an individual learning assessment says, if they have one
2. Get to know the student, find a common connection, and build up rapport
3. Discover how that student learns best and their preferential learning styles
4. Tailor make materials and activities that will suit that person and their learning style
5. Be inclusive and use inclusive learning strategies, i.e., provide materials in multiple forms
6. Provide appropriate accommodations and alternative assessment methods
7. Award and encourage student for their strengths and merits

# 5.6 Recommendations for students

This research found that if a disability is not disclosed, and a teacher is unaware of disabilities within the classroom, it can be difficult for them to insure inclusivity. It is recommended that students disclose their disability as early as possible so that supports can be put in place by teachers and colleges.

# 5.7 Closing Statement

Confidence is an integral part of the learning process. The findings of this research could be used to raise awareness among educators of confidence building teaching and learning strategies. Cardinal Newman once said, “to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.” This research is a means to raise awareness amongst educators and in doing so, influence change that can positively impact on the confidence of learners with learning disabilities.

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# Appendix 1: Interview Questions and Rationale for their Inclusion

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Literature**  | **Rationale** | **Question** |
| Data that will be gathered from interviews with teachers, working in FE, from different institutions and areas of study. | **These questions will be asked to establish background information about the interviewee and to ease the conversation into the following questions.** | *How long have you been teaching?**What discipline do you mostly teach in?* |
| **Situational Context** |
| Specific disabilities that fall into this category are dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyslexia, language processing disorder, visual motor deficit and ADHD (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2017). | **This question will be asked to participants so that the researcher can establish a demographic of disability the interviewee has experience working within.** | *Have you, in your teaching experience, encountered students with learning disabilities in your classroom?If yes… can you tell me a bit about the type of learning disabilities you have encountered?* |
| Learning disabilities are associated with neurological based processing problems. These problems can interfere with skills such as reading, writing, arithmetic, organisation, time planning, abstract reasoning, long or short-term memory and attention (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2017). Each student with a learning disability is unique. Students with learning disabilities learn through an array of diverse learning styles (Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario - LDAO, 2017).  | **This question will be asked to participants so that the researcher can establish difficulties that students with learning disabilities might encounter.** | *Based on your experience, what effect do these learning disabilities have on the students college experience?* |
| An institution of further education can promote equal opportunities and anti-discrimination through internal policies**Institutions of further education are required by legislation (Disability Act 2005, Equality Act 2004, Universities Act 1997) to ensure that “appropriate adjustments to the learning environment are made to enable a student with a disability to participate in education on the same basis as a student without a disability” (Charter for inclusive teaching and learning, 2009 p.1)** | **Literature and legislation state that institutions of FE must insure that considerations are made for students with learning disabilities. This can be done through internal policies in place within colleges. Colleges also state that they have policies in place on their websites. The researcher wants to gain an insight into teacher’s awareness and understanding of these policies**.  | A*re you aware of any policies that your institution have to support students with learning disabilities?**…can tell me a bit about them and how do they support the student?* |
| **Confidence in Further Education** |
| For the purposes of this research, confidence is defined as belief in one’s ability, belief that others believe in you and feeling sure about you are doing (Norman and Hyland, 2003). Norman and Hyland (2003, p 8) discuss five categories of confidence in a learning environment. These are divided into the following; “Belief in one’s knowledge and ability”“The belief that others believe in you” “Certainty”“Feeling sure about what you are doing and why and thinking that it is the correct thing to do”“Knowing that you are doing the best you possibly can”  | **This question is being asked to teachers to compare responses to definitions available in the literature review.** | *If you were to describe a confident learner what would they be?* |
| 111Higher levels of confidence can be advantageous for a student in a variety of ways. “They adapt to new situations quicker, take on more responsibility, engage more fully in the learning process, enjoy learning, they are more relaxed, more motivated, and interact more easily with others” (Norman and Hyland, 2003 p 9) | **As there are a lot of positive effects of confidence that are outlined in literature the researcher would like to see if teachers can list any other positive effects that can add do the conversation.** | *In your opinion, what are the positive effects that confidence has for students?*  |
| Norman and Hyland (2003) believe that educators need to direct more attention towards barriers that are linked to student confidence and what causes low levels of confidence in students. A range of potential triggers of poor confidence can include: new experiences or tasks, a student being unable to see themselves in their future profession, overestimating task requirements, self-doubt, feeling of inferiority and perceived knowledge deficit, negative thinking, feeling scared, being judged, and uncertainty of being successful (Norman and Hyland, 2003). | **This question is being asked to establish what causes low confidence in students.** | *What can cause low levels of confidence in students?* |
| **The Relationship between Learning Disability and Confidence** |
| Studies show that students with learning disabilities have a distinct lack of confidence (Heiman and Precel, 2003) | **The researcher would like to establish if teachers agree with this statement.** | *In your opinion, do students with learning disabilities present with lower levels of confidence than their peers without learning disabilities?* |
| Research shows that students with learning disabilities are more likely to suffer from a variety of confidence issues within the educational environment. It has been reported that these issues include persistent feelings of lower self-efficacy, lack of self-confidence, self-doubt, and extreme self-criticism. This results in “lower perceptions of academic and intellectual abilities compared to students without learning disabilities” (Heiman and Precel, 2003 p249). Gilroy (2005 cited in Green 2014, p 5) observed a distinct lack of confidence in adults with dyslexia, often using words to describe themselves such as “useless” and “hopeless”. “An individual who expressed negative attitudes towards himself thereby indicates that he has little confidence in his abilities” (Norman and Hyland, 2003 p 7). | **This question is being asked to highlight the importance of the area of confidence for students with learning disabilities in FE.** | *In your opinion, what is the negative impact low confidence would have on a student with a learning disability?* |
| **Teaching and Learning Strategies that Promote Confidence in Students with Learning Disabilities** |
| Teachers can promote self-determination in students with learning disabilities using confidence building strategies. Examples of confidence improving strategies can include highlighting potential for academic achievement (Collinson and Penketh 2010), positive reinforcement, providing students with opportunities for success (Schunk, 2014), appreciation, showing an interest and concern in the student, showing empathy, and providing encouragement at challenging times (Malik, 2014). | **This question is being asked so that the researcher can compile a bank of confidence improving strategies that can be used within the educational environment. Some responses may back up the literature and others may add to the conversation.** | *In your role as teacher, what teaching strategies, that you use in classes, can promote confidence in your learners?* |
| Universal design for learning (UDL) can help educators appeal to all intelligences and learning styles. Pino and Mortari (2014 p 361) argue that obstacles to the inclusion of students with learning disabilities “can be prevented by adopting a universal design for learning”. | **This question is being asked to further explore confidence improving strategies that can be used within the educational environment. Some responses may back up the literature and others may add to the conversation.** | *Do you feel you promote inclusion in the classroom?…. can you tell me a bit about how you do this?* |
| Pino and Mortari (2014 p 361) argue that obstacles to the inclusion of students with learning disabilities “can be prevented by adopting a universal design for learning”. The Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning was developed by AHEAD to promote inclusive teaching and learning with the aim to “enhance the richness and quality of learning experienced by students and to support and guide teachers in their work” (AHEAD, 2009 p.1). There are seven original principles of UDL. The principles guide instruction using various approaches and multiple formats so that students with different learning abilities, intelligences and learning styles can access the information through “multiple means of representation, expression and engagement” (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015 p.2) Representation is with regard to presenting material in a way in which diverse learners can understand and perceive the information. Expression is the way in which students demonstrate what they have learned i.e. assessment, projects etc. Engagement includes a variety of means for student involvement and interaction i.e. interactive activities, discussions etc. (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin, 2015). | **These questions break down important principles of UDL. The researcher included it to explore how information is made accessible to all students.** | *How do you provide students with multiple means of representation, expression and engagement?**(This question will be broken down into 3 parts)**Representation: presenting material**Expression: students demonstrate what they have learned* *Engagement: variety of means for student involvement and interaction.*  |
| In a teaching and learning environment there are strategies that can be used to eliminate obstacles and promote confidence. Teachers should adapt a student-centred teaching and learning style to promote confidence. This style of teaching refers to “a variety of educational programmes, learning experiences, instructional approaches and academic strategies that are intended to address distinct learning needs” (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014).  | **This question is asked so that the researcher can explore teaching and learning strategies that are used by teachers and the effect that these strategies had on a student’s outcomes.** | *Consider a student with a learning disability who you worked with in the past. How did you address that students distinct learning needs through teaching and learning strategies that you used in the classroom?* *Can you talk about the outcomes of that student, within your module, based on your interventions / strategies?*  |
| **Closing** |
|  | **The researcher is asking this question to establish the importance of this as an area of development for colleges** | *In your opinion, is there a need for more emphasis to be put on this area in colleges?* |
|  | **This question is being asked to support any recommendations that will come out of this research** | *Is there anything you feel that would support teachers to improve confidence in students with learning disabilities?* |

# Appendix 2: Summary of Interview Questions

|  |
| --- |
| **Warm up** |
| 12 | 1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What discipline do you mostly teach in?
 |
| **Situational Context** |
| 34 | 1. Have you, in your teaching experience, encountered students with learning disabilities in your classroom?
2. If yes… can you tell me a bit about the type of learning disabilities, you have encountered?If no… what kind of learning disabilities do you have an awareness of?
 |
| 5 | 1. Based on your experience, what effect do these learning disabilities have on the student’s college experience?
 |
| 67 | 1. Are you aware of any policies that your institution have to support students with learning disabilities?
2. Can tell me a bit about them and how do they benefit the student?
 |
| **Confidence in Further Education** |
| 8 | 1. If you were to describe a confident learner what would they be?
 |
| 9 | 1. In your opinion, what are the positive effects that confidence has for students?
 |
| 10 | 1. What can cause low levels of confidence in students?
 |
| **The Relationship between Learning Disability and Confidence** |
| 11 | 1. In your opinion, do students with learning disabilities present with lower levels of confidence than their peers without learning disabilities?
 |
| 12 | 1. In your opinion, what is the negative impact low confidence would have on a student with a learning disability?
 |
| **Teaching and Learning Strategies that Promote Confidence in Students with Learning Disabilities** |
| 13 | 1. In your role as teacher what teaching strategies, that you use in classes, that can promote confidence in your learners?
 |
| 1415 | 1. Do you feel you promote inclusion in the classroom?
2. …can you tell me a bit about how you do this?
 |
| 161718 | How do you provide students with multiple means of representation, expression and engagement?(This question will be broken down into 3 parts)1. How do you provide students with multiple means of representation? (presenting material)
2. How do you provide students with multiple means of expression? (students demonstrate what they have learned)
3. How do you provide students with multiple means of engagement? (variety of means for student involvement and interaction)
 |
| 1920 | 1. Consider a student with a learning disability who you worked with in the past. How did you address that students distinct learning needs through teaching and learning strategies that you used in the classroom?
2. Can you talk about the outcomes of that student, within your module, based on your interventions / strategies?
 |
| **Closing** |
| 2122 | The aim of this dissertation is to build awareness among educators, in further education, that specific teaching and learning strategies can positively impact on the confidence of learners with learning disabilities, resulting in more successful achievements. 1. In your opinion, is there a need for more emphasis to be put on this area in colleges?
2. Is there anything you feel that would support teachers to improve confidence in students with learning disabilities?
 |

# Appendix 3: Ethical Approval

**Ethical Amendment Memorandum**

**To: Orla Butler**

**Re: Orna Fynes**

**From: \*Faculty Ethics Committee**

**Date: 14/11/17**

**Dissertation Title: Promotion of confidence in students with learning disabilities in FE**

The Master of Arts in Training and Education (MATE) Faculty Ethics Committee (FEC) has approved this proposed study subject to the student addressing the advice for minor amendments. These suggestions should be discussed in full between both you the supervisor, and the student.

|  |
| --- |
| ***Amendments*** |
| **The committee suggest the following:**1. **On the information letter and consent form in the section regarding destroying information, please insert ‘data will be destroyed following the exam board or after two years, whichever is soon’ – rather than after submission of dissertation.**
2. **Include a piece regarding the possible publication of the dissertation on the College repository, and additional publications.**
3. **Interview questions are an early draft and need to be revisited.**
 |

**\*Faculty Ethics Committee**

Dr. Fiona O’Riordan; Alice Childs; Rob McKenna; Dr. Fiona Broughton (Chair)

# Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet

Dear Participant,
My name is ­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­Orna Fynes and I am a student in ­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­Griffith College Dublin. I am studying a MA in Education and Training. I am conducting a study that concerns teaching and learning strategies that promote confidence in students with learning disabilities in further education.

The purpose of this study is for the completion of my dissertation. There is possible publication of the dissertation on the college repository and additional possible publications.

You have been invited to take part in the study as I would be interested to draw from your views and experience as a teacher in the area of further education. If you decide to take part in the study the following will happen:

I will arrange with you a suitable time to meet and to interview you.

All interviews will be audio recorded. The interview will last approx. 45 minutes.

I will ask you questions about the situational context of learning disability in further education, confidence in further education, issues that students with learning disabilities face and confidence improving teaching and learning strategies used in your classes.

I will then transcribe the recorded interviews. There will be no identifiable material written in the transcripts. Data will be destroyed following the exam board or after two years, whichever is sooner. The interview process and the report will remain anonymous. The identity of the participant will never be disclosed in the report or any associated documents. All details such as name, place of work etc. will be treated with strict confidentiality.

You do not have to take part in this study. You can decline to take part or withdraw from the research, at any time, prior to the analysis phase. The analysis phase will commence 7 days after the interview takes place.

The plan for this study has been reviewed by a research ethics board at Griffith College Dublin and has received approval. This office is independent form the researcher.

Following the interview, if you have any questions or concerns about the study you can contact me on ornafynes@gmail.com or 0851622262.

Many thanks.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Orna Fynes

# Appendix 5: Participant Consent Form

Research Title: An Investigation into Teaching and Learning Strategies that Promote Confidence in Students with Learning Disabilities

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Read | Initial |
| I\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. |  |
| I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind. |  |
| I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview up to one week after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted. |  |
| I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.  |  |
| I have read the participant information sheet and I understand what participation involves.  |  |
| I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.  |  |
| I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.  |  |
| I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.  |  |
| I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about. |  |
| I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the dissertation |  |

Signature of research participant Date

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher Date

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix 6: Sample Transcription

|  |
| --- |
| **Warm up** |
| 12 | How long have you been teaching?For 27 yearsWhat discipline do you mostly teach in?Care disciplines, caring education, and social care |
| **Situational Context** |
| 34 | Have you, in your teaching experience, encountered students with learning disabilities in your classroom?yesIf yes… can you tell me a bit about the type of learning disabilities, you have encountered?If no… what kind of learning disabilities do you have an awareness of?Dyspraxia, dyslexia, dysgraphia, mild intellectual disabilities, mental health issues which framed themselves and affected them in their learning, psychotic, depression. Not a learning disability but effected their learning. I see we are encountering it more weather it is a case that they weren’t coming to us in FE and they were going elsewhere or weather now we have a better access and inclusion policy, or weather people are more aware of it. I don’t know I suppose it is a mix of both |
| 5 | Based on your experience, what effect do these learning disabilities have on the student’s college experience?I suppose a lot of them: it depended on what their previous learning experience was. Sometimes they felt inhibited coming into the college. Sometimes the enormity and size of the college affected them. It effected their confidence. Confidence is coming into the college, but it very much depended on where they had come from.  |
| 67 | Are you aware of any policies that your institution have to support students with learning disabilities?oh yea we have a policy. I work for CDETP. Access and inclusion policy that embraces learners. Staff would be very much aware of that policy.Can tell me a bit about them and how do they benefit the student?Well it benefits the student as it gives them access and equality of opportunity. Equal opportunity to participate in learning environment and the learning organisation. Equal opportunities. Also, in the policy, in our college we have learning support, so we would have a learning support officer and a disability officer. Our college has a policy so depending on if a learner presents to us and if they have an educational assessment depending on the educational assessments recommendations are then our disability officer works with the student and works with the tutors to meet those student’s needs. That is very very very much a priority with us.  |
| **Confidence in Further Education** |
| 8 | If you were to describe a confident learner what would they be?A confident learner would be someone who is happy to come into the college, easy to make friends, popular person. Not afraid to ask questions, not afraid to hand up work, not afraid to take feedback, confident learner has those traits. Sometimes they can have different personalities, quite or extroverts. They embrace learning, not afraid of it.  |
| 9 | In your opinion, what are the positive effects that confidence has for students?Because they are confident they are not afraid, fearful of new things, fearful of the learning. Of course, learning is not easy. Learning is a challenge, it is a change in behaviour, so it isn’t easy. Sometimes they can be challenged but if they have the confidence to persevere that is something I think is really important. |
| 10 | What can cause low levels of confidence in students?I think if they are not supported, I think if other learners don’t actually mix or blend with other students, if they are not included, that really effects confidence. They might have had a bad experience, they could be bullied. We have anti bullying policy and zero tolerance for bullying. Other things that could affect: they might have a difficult teacher to deal with or difficult staff member to deal with. They may have a staff member who is unfamiliar with working with people who have additional needs and that can really really affect their confidence.  |
| **The Relationship between Learning Disability and Confidence** |
| 11 | In your opinion, do students with learning disabilities present with lower levels of confidence than their peers without learning disabilities?Yes definitely. In my experience when they presented to the college they. First, they are very nervous from the beginning even coming for interview. They might not have confidence to do things by themselves. Then when they come in to the class they, depending on additional need, they might not sit with other people, they find it difficult to mix, what we have in our college, we have a few students at the moment with learning difficulties, some of them are autonomous but some of them have an SNA, who acts as a scribe and generally they want to sit with them so we have to try and make sure that the SNA comes with us when we are leaving the room so that the others will integrate and encourage them to be confident with their peers. In my experience they do present with lower levels of confidence yes.  |
| 12 | In your opinion, what is the negative impact low confidence would have on a student with a learning disability?I think they miss out on nice part of learning because they are engaged on learning because you use different methodologies, but they are engaged in learning and taking in information, but they miss other things. The curriculum isn’t just the curriculum that is written, they miss the bit of fun, the nuances with their friends, going for lunch. Unless you can support them to integrate and have confidence to mix with peers. Education is many things, I believe, learning is many things. It isn’t just learning academic. It is about life skills and lifelong learning. It is not just about learning the actual skill i.e. nutrition, infection it is about learning, having fun, nice part, friendships, converse and talk to peers. If they don’t have confidence to do that, they look out and that effect because they are not getting an enjoyable experience they might only see the hard-academic experience that might put them off coming to college the next day, the next week. If you are not confident and happy in your space I think it affects you hugely.say for example one of the modules I teach. 60 percent of module is practical skills. In a way its excellent doe someone with a learning difficulty, tis great because we look at all the different multiple intelligences, so they can be very good at practical skills so we meet the needs and the different assessments in that module would be practical skills, learning journal and a project and an exam so it looks at all the different intelligences so that module is really really suitable so when they are trying to meet the learning outcomes sometimes for the practical skills they are hesitant and nervous, and then you say to them you do your work experience every week his is just showing me what you do in work experience so it depends on how you work with that learner. They can be a little bit reluctant to start at the beginning, but it depends on how you manage the learning and work with them. really as to whether as you can instil in them the confidence to do it.  |
| **Teaching and Learning Strategies that Promote Confidence in Students with Learning Disabilities** |
| 13 | In your role as lecturer what teaching strategies, that you use in classes, that can promote confidence in your learners?When I am teaching I don’t do chalk and talk. Obviously, you have to do a certain amount of it. I use loads of different methodologies when I am teaching. I would use group work, I would use small group work, I would use feedback, I would break down the assignments, I would do quizzes, I do a thing for revision, it was a TV programme, I change it to who wants to be a “studentaire”. I get them to write the exam questions that they think will come up in the exam, so they are totally included in it. You have to be really really creative to do it. Obviously depending on multiple intelligences, different strategies suit and meet different people’s needs. When our learners start in college with us. What I do is do a learning contract with the students. I ask them: what do you expect of yourself on this course, what do you expect of others on this course, what do you expect of the teaching staff on this course. So we write all the different thigs down and we look at all the commonalities, we draw from that and we say: this year I am going to learn and these things are going to help me learn and they have written he learning contract themselves and they have ownership of this themselves and then throughout the year you can say to them that you said that you made a contract here, you were going to come every week, you were going to try your hardest, you were going to have fun. Why are you sitting over there on your own? You bring them back “you wrote this learning contract” that is a very good thing to do at the start of the year. That’s what I do. I think it becomes more inclusive. It gives them control of their learning and that inspires confidence for them.Methodologies have changed, and teaching strategies have change so much from when I did my degree. When I came into college first. You are working with adults, they learn differently. I didn’t want to have desks in rows. I want them in horse shoe shape to be included in learning. I never sit behind the desk. One of my strategies is, I teach by wandering around. I want them to be part of the learning, I want me to be part of the learning, I don’t sit behind the desk, you constantly keeping student into learning space. I would have a basket with a load of different things – I am big into experiential learning. I think if you actually let someone be engaged in the learning it is better than reading from a book. They retain it better, enhances retention, they feel happy, confident, not afraid to ask questions. Questioning very important and feedback. To inspire confidence in them to learn we give them reviews so they get work throughout the year. Its formative learning. Not just summative. Inspires confidence because they can see they are doing well and confident to continue. By just having a summative thing at the end, that isn’t good. Even within assignments I would take sections at a time and give them feedback: tell them how they can enhance their work “your work would be enhanced by…” “perhaps you could include….” Comment Feedback is really important. Checking in with the student, not always in front of peers. Grab them on a corridor and ask them how they are getting on, so you are not putting them on the spot. Gives them confidence to be one of everybody else. It is all about inclusion. You have to make a difference in their life and differentiate your methodologies to meet their needs, but the end result should be that they are the same as everybody else. |
| 1415 | Do you feel you promote inclusion in the classroom?I do. I feel I promote inclusion. It isn’t always easy. Sometimes you are challenged with curriculum, challenged to get things covered. I think it is one of the basic roles as a teacher to be inclusive. If I didn’t promote inclusivity it would be very wrong.…can you tell me a bit about how you do this?I think I try and look at individual’s needs. SO. It would be really lovely if we had the time to do a needs analysis on every individual learner, you try and do it with your learning contract. I ask them: what are you afraid of, what’s your fears in starting this course. They realise what they are afraid of i.e. I am afraid of writing thigs down, spellings, I am afraid I won’t understand what you are asking me to do. Particularly with adults returning to learning: out of formal learning for many years. Inclusivity has to go across all spectrums. Ascertain what their needs are. When interviewing asks them to do you have and additional needs. From the beginning we are trying to make a support mechanism. In a class room we have a learning support teacher, we leave classrooms available in the evening, so students have a quite space if they need extra time to do things f the library is finished. But this helped them to perform at the same level as others. Its giving them additional support but it makes them feel at one/the same as their peers. |
| 161718 | How do you provide students with multiple means of representation, expression and engagement?(This question will be broken down into 3 parts)How do you provide students with multiple means of representation? (presenting material)So, when I present me. I use photograph, diagrams, I use practical things i.e. Nature vs. nurture I bring in a dead plant and I bring in an alive one. I bring in real things. I look at experiential learning. I like to give them experience in the learning. I use experiential learning techniques. Sometimes students need to have different coloured paper, I would present handouts, I need blue, some need green, one student used to have purple paper, I downloaded a specific font on my computer called dyslexie font. I actually type my handouts and I convert it for some of my students into this font. This particular student loves it. Obviously, students with disabilities we have interpreters, we have scribes in the room. Out college is very much inclusive for many different types of learners. I hate reading from a book. I would never read from a book. I do talking and give practical examples. I learn their names as quickly as I can. If you can call someone by name (if you see them drifting off) you can call them by name and ask them what they think. And if you have a student with low confidence, and obviously you don’t want to put the on the spot, but you get to know – thy might know this – and they can actually answer you it can really inspire confidence. IT is not about putting a student on the spot it is trying to be inclusive. How do you provide students with multiple means of expression? (students demonstrate what they have learned)What we do is we have a variety of assessment methods. I don’t ever put any student where they have to type their work, I would take their work on tape, by video. Sometimes I get them to do poster work, they might have to do a group presentation, you have to make sure each person contributes, some people are really good at doing the talking bit, others are good at organising. I look at group strengths. We give them additional time if they need it to submit assignments. If sometimes we are constrained by the curriculum and assessment methods i.e. if you have an exam that student will have a quite peace, they might have a scribe, an interpreter, they have longer to do stuff.How do you provide students with multiple means of engagement? (variety of means for student involvement and interaction)when you are working with students obviously your body language, the way you communicate with them, if you see someone who is disengaged with the learning you bring them back into learning space, you call them by name. or you might move people around. I don’t have rows and seats in rows. I prefer a horseshoe shape. I move people around to give them different opportunities to learn and get to know other people. Linked with different methodologies. Say you are getting them to do small group work. Some people might be reluctant to write on the flip chart. You might say well you look up the stuff. For next week this is what I want you to do. Give them different tasks to meet their needs. |
| 1920 | Consider a student with a learning disability who you worked with in the past. How did you address that students distinct learning needs through teaching and learning strategies that you used in the classroom? Say you take a student with dyslexia. Obviously how I assess learning needs come straight from interview. You would have methodologies i.e. dyslexie font, when they are doing assessment and writing stuff down, they wouldn’t lose any marks for spelling and grammar, we would take into consideration what their educational assessment says. A big thing is linking with guidance, we link with guidance department and learning support because we link with that the education assessment has said and very often the is recommendations. Very often the person needs things to be broken down into sections, it might be that they need to be given their assessments in sections, it might mean that they need you to give them the work beforehand, tell them what you are going to do in the classroom before you actually do it. You are going to say tomorrow we are going to talk about nutrition and this is what we hope to cover in class. We are giving them the opportunity that they can have a look at the stuff beforehand, so they are not as challenged in the learning. You certainly you would never put someone on the spot to write or read out of spell, that would upset their self-esteem, you would never do that.We would have other learners as well who would have dyspraxia. Taking down notes, her hands are tired, so we would allow them to tape in the classroom. Another methodology that I use with student with learning disabilities they can take a photo of what is on the board. So, they are not under pressure to take stuff down and write stuff down. They have it and look at in their own time. How we use technology, whiteboards, interactive whiteboards.Can you talk about the outcomes of that student, within your module, based on your interventions / strategies?I feel my job and my task is not to differentiate with any student. They should have the same opportunities to succeed as any other learner. Once you work with the student and work with learning disability, there is no difference between that student and any other student. Very often you forget about it because that is just want you do, you just bring extra handouts, and you check in with them, that becomes the new norm in the classroom. The outcome was that this student had similar outcomes to students who did not have the barriers associated with a learning disability. That student they blend in, they have adapted. There is a bell curve you have a certain range of passes, merits and distinctions and that student fits into the norm of your bell curve. All you want is for your students to have equal opportunities, to be on the same level footing as their peers in the class. The difficulty is the planning and management at the beginning and having the resources, to be honest it takes more time. I suppose the big thing is to have training in acknowledge it. When I did my degree, we learned about this. Where I see some other staff in the college and they don’t have the same training they find it much more difficult to integrate and it is difficult for them. It’s just the way I learned, and it is the way it is for me.One of our students, a student who showed me the dyslexie font, she barely passed her LC because she found it very difficult in school. She went working and came back to FE. She had a positive outcome and she is now doing her degree. This is because we employed different methodologies. It wasn’t just all read from the book. It was all the different types of methodologies we used in the college, the variety. Even the different staff and their methodologies. I think she felt in control of her learning. She felt part of the learning. It gave her the confidence to go on. She will do well. She will do very very well. |
| **Closing** |
| 2122 | The aim of this dissertation is to build awareness among educators, in further education, that specific teaching and learning strategies can positively impact on the confidence of learners with learning disabilities, resulting in more successful achievements. In your opinion, is there a need for more emphasis to be put on this area in colleges?Most definitely. I think there is a huge need for it and I mean I did my teacher training 22 years ago. It was very much acknowledged, it was new at the time. It was new for our degree. I think it should be part of every teachers. It is something that the teaching council should adapt. They should put in for CPD (continuous professional development) I think it is something that can be done definitely. A suggestion would be obligatory Croke Park hours that is something we need to be trained and re trainer in, learn new methodologies, learn new things that are coming on stream. As my knowledge could become outdated and I need to know new strategies that people are trying and I think it is really important that we should be kept up to date with what is current and what is new in the future. Is there anything you feel that would support teachers to improve confidence in students with learning disabilities? I think giving staff/teachers time for communities of practice so that you can have the time to discuss. If you have a student with a learning disabilities and they have 7 or 8 different teachers you could discuss with each other this is what I do with my group and thins works with me I think peer learning among the staff can be very good and it is down to resources and time, down to commitment of teacher, I think constant training. The other thing we should do more is reflective practice. Very important to engage in reflective practice and think what went well, what didn’t work with particular learner. Another thing is engage the learner. Ask them. What do you think? How do you think this is going? Feedback from the learner? Is this working for you? If it’s not working for you let me know. Ask them how do you want to learn this. Collaboration with the learner and the other staff. That inspirers that the learner has confidence in you, in themselves, self-esteem has risen. With confidence it increases competence. Very often if you can support a student to feel confident in their space and their learning space that is one of the basic requirements. Really that is what we are about and what we should be about. |

# Appendix 7: Main Findings Related to Each Question

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | Q | How long have you been teaching? |
| 1 | 5 years |
| 2 | 37 years |
| 3 | 15 years  |
| 4 | 27 years |
| 5 | 9 years |
| 6 | 27 years |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 2 | Q | What discipline do you mostly teach in? |
| 1 | Music  |
| 2 | woodwork, drawing and building technology |
| 3 | Soft skills, Microsoft office, servers and gaming, employment support for unemployed  |
| 4 | Care disciplines, caring education, and social care |
| 5 | CAD, computers, fashion, manual pattern making (practical) |
| 6 | Health, pre- nursing  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 3 | Q | Have you, in your teaching experience, encountered students with learning disabilities in your classroom? |
| 1 | Yes |
| 2 | Yes |
| 3 | Yes |
| 4 | Yes |
| 5 | Yes – diagnosed and undiagnosed. Art and design attracts a high percentage of dyslexic students due to its practical nature.  |
| 6 | Yes  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 4 | Q | If yes… can you tell me a bit about the type of learning disabilities, you have encountered?If no… what kind of learning disabilities do you have an awareness of? |
| 1 | Dyslexia, Visual impairment  |
| 2 | Down Syndrome and had difficulty classifying  |
| 3 | Down syndrome, deafness, acquired brain injuries, autism, Asperger’s, Dyslexia, Blindness, depression, drug, and alcohol addiction |
| 4 | Dyspraxia, dyslexia, dysgraphia, mild intellectual disabilities, mental health issues i.e. depression,  |
| 5 | Dyslexia, dyspraxia |
| 6 | Down syndrome, Asperger’s, spina bifida with some learning disabilities, students who are deaf with challenges in learning because of their hearing. General learning difficulties who have been previously assessed, many students with dyslexia of different degrees |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 5 | Q | Based on your experience, what effect do these learning disabilities have on the student’s college experience? |
| 1 | Comparing themselves to others, exclusion  |
| 2 | Issues with acceptance of other students, finding aspects of the course difficult, the teachers not fully understanding them and how to support them but on a positive side: student felt happy to be included in programmes. |
| 3 | People can be shy and reclusive, not interact with teacher or others. Sometimes they will not engage with you. Can be ostracised by the rest of the group. Teachers can give up on them or not interact with them. Students with learning disabilities can have poor attendance. Withdrawn or zoned out. Can interrupt classes. Can hide their disability. may exclude themselves from a group. |
| 4 | Inhibited coming into the college, effected their confidence |
| 5 | Those who are diagnosed have more of an awareness over what they need and are more confident to speak up about their needs. Undiagnosed students might not want to ask for help or let you know, they are afraid to look for more time. It can be difficult without the confidence to speak up. |
| 6 | Some students who have experiences academic achievement have an acceptance of their disability. some carry a history of not succeeding nearly having a learned expectation of failure. Poor attendance, not attending, drop out, not engaging in assessment work. Might not be an expectation at home for students to do well. Students may have been over assisted in the past and may not have experience having to think for themselves |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 6 | Q | Are you aware of any policies that your institution has to support students with learning disabilities? |
| 1 | Yes |
| 2 | Yes |
| 3 | No – never provided with any documentation or policies. Supporting people with disabilities never discussed within my role |
| 4 | Yes |
| 5 | Yes |
| 6 | Yes  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 7 | Q | Can tell me a bit about them and how do they benefit the student? |
| 1 | SEN programme: benefit to students: gives students chance to ask questions, ensure that students feel that they are being listened too, ensure that needs are met on ongoing basis. Students can ask question in a non-judgemental atmosphere, students can feel supportedAlso students benefit as it provides support to teachers: they can provide different resources that help teachers, they can help teachers with ways to encourage students. Supports teachers to incorporate different learning methodologies into classroom |
| 2 | SEN programme: Students who need help would go to meet specifically equipped teachers who would help them with literacy and written projects. The sessions benefited the student. |
| 3 | n/a |
| 4 | Access, equality of opportunity, participating in the learning environment. Policy provides learning support through support officer and disability officer. A student would have a learning assessment coming in and recommendations are put in place. The disability officer who works with the student and his/her teachers to meet the needs of that student. That is very very very much a priority with us. |
| 5 | The course director is there to support them because just any tutor might not have specific teaching abilities. The course director is there to help if they are getting stressed. The policy provides students with learning disabilities with Constant monitoring and reassurance. The course director and tutors are always available by email. Can avoid students feeling the need to drop out.  |
| 6 | Early identification of students with mild to severe support needs. Establish things like language, literacy, comprehension etc. by asking them to complete a questionnaire while waiting to be interviewed. Students asked about educational issued they have experienced. Extra support is put in place by principle and learning support officer before college starts. A copy of an individual’s educational assessment would be requested, and recommendations followed through. Students can benefit from supports such as: laptops, software programmes, voice to text recognition, get class notes in advance, different colour paper, specific font, interpreter and scribe, private room for assessments, link in with guidance counsellor and learning support officer for planning support and emotional support. There are assignment support groups provided by tutors where students can get 1:1 support. |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 8 | Q | If you were to describe a confident learner what would they be? |
| 1 | Confidence in themselves, confidence in the topic, confidence in the subject, believe at the beginning that they are capable of preforming well at the end. |
| 2 | A confident learner would be that from day one. They would come through and be more visible to the teacher as they have a good work rate, naturally motivated, ability to complete tasks on time. |
| 3 | Make effort, always show up for class, happy, smiling, enthusiastic, engaging, interacting, bring up the atmosphere, love being a student, willing to learn, completes assignments on time, studies for exams, attempts exams with high hopes. Teacher very happy to work with them because teacher puts a lot of work and effort into class plans etc and a confident learner appreciates this. |
| 4 | Happy to come into college, easy to make friends, popular person, not afraid to ask questions, hand up work, take feedback. Embrace learning. Not afraid of learning. |
| 5 | Irrespective of their abilities, understands what they are doing. Happy with what is expected of them. Happy to ask questions. Happy to do the work. Happy to move forward and progress.  |
| 6 | Eye contact, lifting head to look at you, happy to ask a question |

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| 9 | Q | In your opinion, what are the positive effects that confidence has for students? |
| 1 | Important aspect of the learning process, and other aspects of life. Students with confidence do not have defeatist attitude. Give things a go straight away and are more likely to succeed. |
| 2 | Confidence extends from education to real life. Promotes development and has many additional benefits |
| 3 | Uplifting, body confidence / language, assertive in learning, proactive and engaging behaviour. |
| 4 | Not afraid, not fearful of new things, not fearful of learning, not afraid to take on a challenge. |
| 5 | Confident in what they need to do and what they are being asked to do. |
| 6 | Engaging in the process, reflecting positively on their ability, enjoying their studies, finding their strengths, |

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| 10 | Q | What can cause low levels of confidence in students |
| 1 | Low self-esteem – feeling they are not able to achieve goals because they are not good enough. Experiences in the past i.e. hardship, lower expectations for themselves, family circumstances, support from family, no support in college from teachers and SEN department, Teachers and SEN department not having adequate training or knowledge of disability, feeling alone, feeling different – that they are the only one who struggles. |
| 2 | Poor motivation, problems with personal lives, what’s going on at home, |
| 3 | Disturbance, distractions, an upsetting occurrence, group dynamics, peer pressure, an issue such as substance misuse, personality disorder. Lack of self-esteem, depression, home situations, money worries, teacher’s egos and lack of empathy, exam worries, age differences, working conflicts.  |
| 4 | If they are not supported, don’t mix with other students, if they are not included, if they had a bad experience in the past, if they were bullied, have a difficult teacher to deal with, if they have a teacher who is unfamiliar with working with students with additional needs. |
| 5 | Previous learning experiences, not believing that they can achieve something.  |
| 6 | Being interrupted by other students in the class, a traumatic experience, not being successful in previous education, isolate themselves, terrified of being in college, they feel “I can’t do that, learned helplessness, might not have pressure or high expectations from home to do well, might not have self-fulfilment, lacking self-esteem, experiences of social prejudice, difficulty thinking independently, being bullied, feeling that they had a teacher who did not like the, poor group dynamic and students can put down others who they feel are less able then them, students voices might not be heard over others who are very strong in the class group. |

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| 11 | Q | In your opinion, do students with learning disabilities present with lower levels of confidence than their peers without learning disabilities? |
| 1 | Yes – example of how a student did not feel good enough to answer exam question.  |
| 2 | Yes - disadvantaged from the word go, behind the rest of their peers, lower marks |
| 3 | Yes – you would notice a difference |
| 4 | Yes – definitely, from the beginning  |
| 5 | Depends on the person, depends on the situation. In FE students have chosen to do this course, it is possibly something that they are passionate about it is up to weather they feel like they can cope with being able to get through it. |
| 6 | Yes – lower expectations from families |

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| 12 | Q | In your opinion, what is the negative impact low confidence would have on a student with a learning disability? |
| 1 | Every individual is different, but some find it difficult learning definitions, taking notes from the board, reading an extract from literature, |
| 2 | Possible regression, dislike education, want to leave education, hard to motivate |
| 3 | They wouldn’t interact as much, engage as much, do as much, they wouldn’t look at you, interact with others, they get annoyed. You would probably hear them giving out a lot more.  |
| 4 | They can miss out on a whole college experience like fun and new friends as they can be excluded from peers. They might have a hard-academic experience that could put them off coming to college the next day/next week.  |
| 5 | They won’t engage in the work, they won’t make a start, they might drop out, they can be frustrated, they can find it difficult to move forward. Wouldn’t want to ask questions, wouldn’t want to stand out |
| 6 | Not being able to speak up about issues that they are having, not understanding assignments, and not speaking up about it. They can become angry and feel it is the teachers fault that they did not understand. Students might not feel comfortable asking questions in front of the group. The biggest contribution towards non-success would be time management. They can get embarrassed. |

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| 13 | Q | In your role as lecturer what teaching strategies do you use that promote confidence in your learners? |
| 1 | There is a place for teachers to stand up in front of the class to give information. Promote students to take responsibility for their own learning: asking students what the best way is or how would you go about doing that rather than telling them what to do. Peer learning: work alongside each other, share information and strengths, teach each other.Formative assessment: form their own opinion of how they are getting on, graph their learning, Comment basted feedback: encourage them to reflect e.g. “have I reached my potential” Compare them against themselves in previous tasks opposed to being compared to rest of class with summative feedback. |
| 2 | Represent things visually/graphically. Reassure students, highlight progress, praise students, encouragement, give sufficient attention to each person. |
| 3 | Have a lesson plan, go through lesson plan at start of class, include all learning strategies into lesson plan. Give students some new material and they have to work on it as a group. Use humour,  |
| 4 | Don’t just do chalk and talk. You must think creatively. Use different strategies to meet different students needs, depending on multiple intelligences. Group work, small group work, feedback, breakdown assignments, quizzes, get the students to come up with questions for quizzes about what they think will come up in the exam so that they are included. Make a learning contract at the beginning of the term this gives them ownership over their learning goals and commitment. Shape the environment i.e. putting chairs into a horseshoe shape opposed to rows of desks. Experiential learning: engages learner, enhances retention, promotes happiness and confidence. Questioning, formative feedback, comment based feedback, checking in with a student in private,  |
| 5 | Practical based work, complete practical activities within the classroom rather than at home as they could achieve more this way. Encourage development, encourage independent working, work with students at their own pace as some are very quick, some take longer you have to get the balance. Live demonstrations, one to one work, breaking the work down into bite sized chunks, supervise all students, get around to them all: support those who are hesitating or stopping and let people work independently who are doing so. “Once you get through this I know you will thrive.” Its constant reassurance, constant. Discovery based learning through asking questions about things that they need to research and find out new things. The more repetition the more it sinks in. everything I do now has a video so that students can slow it down, pause, re watch it, this is more effective than live tutorials |
| 6 | Inspiring a good group dynamic, develop inclusion and group cohesion. Get student to identify their own learning style and appeal to all learning styles. Teacher must be patient, restful and a good listener, bond of trust. Handouts would have a feature for each learning style. Raise a topic, work in groups, have a storm session, achieve outcomes through a questionnaire and feedback from class, online learning group where students can ask questions privately. At the end of the session I get them to give me one point that has made a difference to you today e.g. something that has surprised by, something you think was funny, something you never heard before, anything. I go around the group and ask everyone. By the 4th or 5th week they are gagging to get their point out. I might say “I haven’t even thought of that myself, that’s amazing”. |

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| 14 | Q | Do you feel you promote inclusion in the classroom? |
| 1 | I try to as much as possible |
| 2 | Certainly yes, something I was always conscious of and I believe I did |
| 3 | Yes, that is the whole point |
| 4 | I do. I feel I promote inclusion  |
| 5 | Yes. You are not allowed to escape |
| 6 | Yes  |

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| 15 | Q | can you tell me a bit about how you do this? |
| 1 | Ensure that questions are being asked to everybody by using a system that is inclusive of everyone i.e. picking names out of a box. Peer learning, group work, group discussion. Encourage students to write questions down (this works well for students who are uncomfortable to ask questions in front of the group). Use of Mini white boards – each student writes down answer to question. This gives each student opportunity to answer and teacher can see who is struggling and give more attention to that student. Students can also reflect on their own ability and progress.  |
| 2 | Get to know each student, take an interest in each student, have realistic goals, have an awareness of any external uneven ground, consider diversity |
| 3 | Get to know students, tailor lesson plan to their likes and interests. Make people feel important and listened too. Make sure everybody understands what is going on and that they feel positive and that they are doing a worthwhile exercise.  |
| 4 | Look at an individual need, needs analysis, ask them their fears i.e. writing things down, spelling, understanding material. Ask people to do they have additional needs at interview stages. Make a support mechanism from the start. Utilise learning support department in the college. provide students with extra time if necessary. Help students with additional learning needs to perform at the same level as others by giving them support. different colour paper, use of dyslexie font, interpreters, scribes, learn students names |
| 5 | At the end of the day, if a student doesn’t grasp a concept, it is down to me to explain it differently. You have to ensure that 100 percent of students in the class is appealed to by providing material in multiple different ways.  |
| 6 | Study buddy: inspire peer support, pick up notes, share notes, discuss content, divide tasks, share information. Manage the group dynamic, insure that everyone in the class is working respectfully and there is no disrespectful behaviour.  |

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| 16 | Q | How do you provide students with multiple means of representation? (presenting material) |
| 1 | multiple forms of representation that coincide that link in with the learning styles of every individual student e.g. Visual learners: Projector, video clips, Kinaesthetic learner: learn more by doing, promote active learning, planning activities,  |
| 2 | Make handouts visual, provide practical examples, explain how knowledge can be applied, photos and models, |
| 3 | Presentations, PowerPoint, projections, screens, overhead projectors, handouts, colourful handouts, visual demonstration, interactive whiteboard |
| 4 | Photographs, diagrams, visual practical example, handouts,  |
| 5 | I present work in every single shape and form. Use Edgar Dale learning pyramid to influence lesson plans and course development i.e. 10% of what we read etc. So, I would use videos and the same information would be in note form, same information would be in visual form with annotation and little text. For some learners would you have complex readings. Use story’s and case studies to make topics interesting and engaging rather than factual, boring sheets. Learning outcome based. |
| 6 | Stand up talk and explain, use whiteboard, illustration, PowerPoint, learning videos, refer to text book, work experience practice skills, feedback session, practical training, demonstration, one to one feedback online, apply theory to personal experiences, makes learning more real. |

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| 17 | Q | How do you provide students with multiple means of expression? (students demonstrate what they have learned) |
| 1 | Let students express through their strengths e.g. orally: presentation, written, visually through pictures/colours (depending on subject) |
| 2 | Clearly explain what you want in assignments i.e. give them headings/sub headings. Provide the brief and requirements in a means that the student will be able to understand i.e. clear description, simple information, step by step. Utilise drawings and illustration |
| 3 | Game called crayon physics, involves interactive whiteboard, incorporates their personality likes.  |
| 4 | Variety of assessment methods, students can type their work, audio record or video tape. Complete a poster, do a group presentation. Sometimes the curriculum assessments constrain you i.e. exam but you can give a student extra time, a scribe, provide a quite space |
| 5 | Each assignment is documented through photographs. We ask them to photo the process. Students are given choices in what way they want to engage with the assignment brief. Assignments are written so that if you don’t have one ability you can still express what you are trying to explain in another way. Students can use annotations and bite sized information rather than huge essays. Video presentations/live online presentations, provide alternatives, have a flexible approach that suits the student  |
| 6 | Interview feedback process, reflective learning diary,  |

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| 18 | Q | How do you provide students with multiple means of engagement? (variety of means for student involvement and interaction) |
| 1 | Mixture of activities, avoid doing the same things all the time. Promote enjoyment of activities. Team based learning games i.e. App called Kahoot which is competitive fun game you can play individually or in groups. Placemat/Mind dump activity: put all current knowledge down to see what students know already. Make sure students are comfortable to engage in a positive atmosphere i.e. respect, relaxed, teacher’s personality, light heartedness, non-judgemental, encouragement. |
| 2 | Asking relevant questions, praise answers |
| 3 | Multimedia games, ask them questions, ask them to come up and use interactive whiteboard, flash games, designing, get students to engage with other students work |
| 4 | Body language, good communication, move people around, move people into specific groups that will give them opportunities to work with other people and use their strengths. Give them tasks that will meet their needs. |
| 5 | Different environment as it is blended learning and a lot of the content is online. Interaction and direct contact with tutors via email. Online student forum, closed group on Facebook, WhatsApp groups. Upload work to the forum and ask for opinions. The only thing that they can’t do is video chat online, but we are working on that. |
| 6 | Ask students applying theory to practice, draw on learning from work experience and apply it to theory, discussion |

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| 19 | Q | Consider a student with a learning disability who you worked with in the past. How did you address that students distinct learning needs through teaching and learning strategies that you used in the classroom?  |
| 1 | A found it difficult remembering definitions for an exam. Her exam was not reflective of her knowledge and abilities. She was awarded and encouraged for her merits. Do not need to use exams to assess all the time. You can give alternative assessment methods for students who learn at different speeds and have different learning styles.  |
| 2 | Inclusivity, include him in all things, make a great effort with explanations. Tailor make materials that will suit that person and their learning style. Measure progress.  |
| 3 | Asperger’s, Autism, level 5 computer networking security course. I would include him, talk to him, look at him, ask questions, get to know him, find a common connection, make a connection |
| 4 | Dyslexia: assess learning needs at the start. Take on board what that persons learning assessment says. Use dyslexie font for notes and handouts, in assessments they don’t lose marks for spelling or grammar. |
| 5 | Dyslexia: established what worked with her and what did not work with her. Her preference was step by step bullet points in text format. From research I discovered that dyslexia have so many different forms, ways, aspects. Meeting them all is a challenge. Videos are beneficial so that the student can slow it down, pause, re watch, repeat. The more it is repeated the more it sinks in. everything is supported in multiple forms i.e. video and notes. You can’t presume what the student knows, you have to start from the bottom and work your way up. |
| 6 | I asked a student with a learning disability how would you like to learn this in a private session. This particular student said that she would prefer if she wasn’t asked questions in a group setting, she would prefer to send me the answer later because it takes her longer to form the words and everyone has to wait in the class for me to form the words. Scribe writes question and she answers it later. Student can be assessed through interview and this can be tape recorded. She would need extra time and a scribe. |

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| 20 | Q | Can you talk about the outcomes of that student, within your module, based on your interventions / strategies? |
| 1 | The student’s self-belief increased, confidence increased, the student began for focus on their individual strengths, the student felt included in the wider group and equal. This had a knock-on benefit with her overall progress in the class. |
| 2 | Higher level in education, go into world of work, some people can only go so far |
| 3 | He interacted, came out of his shell, personal growth, feeling good about himself, feeling good about making a connection, he felt comfortable with the teacher, he made a major step forward. |
| 4 | The student with a learning disability had the same opportunities to succeed as any other student in the classroom. The outcome was that this student had similar outcomes to students who did not have the barriers associated with a learning disability. The student blended in, adapted, the student had equal opportunities, on the same level footing as peers, student felt in control of learning, felt part of the learning, gave her confidence to proceed with education.  |
| 5 | This particular student did not like this particular subject because it was computer based and she preferred practical based design. There was no enjoyment and you can’t make a student enjoy a subject. She did enough to pass, she did learn, she will probably never touch it again. But it was getting her through. She thought negatively of herself, but I gave her positive reassurance.  |
| 6 | Generally successful. If they are interested in the programme they will succeed. |

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| 21 | Q | In your opinion, is there a need for more emphasis to be put on this area in colleges? |
| 1 | Yes. It depends on the college and the teacher. Some colleges and teachers are full aware of the importance of promoting the confidence of students with learning disabilities and incorporating different learning styles and different learning strategies to be inclusive of everyone in the class, but some teachers and colleges are not aware of this and do not promote this and I am not sure if SEN support is available. Teachers need to be trained and educated in this area to be able to be inclusive of students with learning disabilities. |
| 2 | Yes, without question. Sometimes the school will think that way and be proactive. Sometimes the school will not tackle every case seriously.  |
| 3 | Yes. Teachers overloaded with work and not enough time. Colleges should have staff specifically dedicated to this area and give students moral support |
| 4 | Yes. Most definitely. There is a huge need for it. It is always developing. Some knowledge can become outdated. It should be part of continuous professional development and it is something the teaching council should adapt. Teachers should be trained and retrained. Learn new methodologies, learn new things coming on stream.  |
| 5 | Yes. You forget. Some people teach how they have been thought and this is not right. We have to update with new ways of learning, different research coming through, reflection and professional development is necessary. If not, you will lose students, they will drop out. More awareness amongst teachers in necessary.  |
| 6 | Yes. Specifically, around dyslexia |

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| 22 | Q | Is there anything you feel that would support teachers to improve confidence in students with learning disabilities? |
| 1 | Raising awareness, having awareness of students that are in a class and their needs, ensuring disabilities are disclosed, the teacher must have strategies that incorporate all learning styles.To support a teacher there should be talks, training, workshops to provide teacher with ideas and resources. Teachers should be able to talk to somebody if they are having difficulty or finding something challenging or daunting, never came across a particular disability before. |
| 2 | Courses for staff, qualified and experienced people providing the courses. |
| 3 | More time, teachers are frustrated at educational system and couldn’t be bothered at times. Teachers need more confidence to be able to put that energy and effort in.  |
| 4 | More time, peer learning and collaboration amongst teachers, constant training, reflective practice. Involve and engage the learner, ask for feedback from the learner i.e. what do you think? How do you think this is going? If this is not working for you let me know. Ask them how do you want to learn this. |
| 5 | There is an overwhelming amount of different disabilities and different learning types. Support teachers to implement change and help students. Being awareness.  |
| 6 | Group support for teachers at the beginning of the year, explaining how a particular student learns, how they have succeeded before, with supports. Time given to the team. |

# Appendix 8: Sample number Coding of Main Themes



# Appendix 9: Table of Main Themes



# Appendix 10: Characteristics of a Confident Learner

|  |  |
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| Literature(Norman and Hyland, 2003 p 9).  | Interview responses |
| Adapt to new situations quicker | 1. A confident learner would be that from day one
2. Believe at the beginning that they are capable of preforming well at the end
3. Give things a go straight away
4. Confidence in the topic/subject
5. Understands what they are doing
 |
| Take on more responsibility | 1. Happy with what is expected of them
2. Ability to complete tasks on time
3. Confident in what they are being asked to do
 |
| Engage more fully in the learning process | 1. Engaging
2. Engaging
3. Engaging
4. Hand up work
5. Happy to move forward and progress
6. Take feedback
7. Always show up for class
8. Have a good work rate
9. Willing to learn
10. Completes assignments on time
11. Studies for exams
12. Attempts exams with high hopes
 |
| Enjoy learning | 1. Happy
2. Happy to do the work
3. Happy to come into college
4. Love being a student
5. Embrace learning
6. Enthusiastic
7. Bring up the atmosphere
8. Enjoying their studies
9. Uplifting
 |
| More relaxed | 1. Not afraid of learning
2. Not afraid or fearful of new things
3. Not afraid to take on a challenge
 |
| More motivated | 1. Naturally motivated
2. Make effort
3. Assertive in learning
4. Proactive
 |
| Interact more easily with others | 1. Eye contact, lifting head to look at you
2. Interacting
3. Easy to make friends, popular person,
4. Happy to ask questions
5. Happy to ask a question
6. Not afraid to ask questions
 |
| Miscellaneous/other responses  | 1. Appreciates time that teachers put into their job
2. Do not have a defeatist attitude
3. more likely to succeed
4. Promotes development
5. Reflecting positively on their ability
6. Finding their strengths
 |

# Appendix 11: Causes of Low Confidence

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| Literature | Interview responses |
| New experiences or tasks | 1. Previous learning experiences
2. Experiences in the past i.e. hardship
3. If they had a bad experience in the past
4. Not being successful in previous education
 |
| A student being unable to see themselves in their future profession | 1. Lower expectations for themselves
2. Poor motivation
 |
| Overestimating task requirements | n/a |
| Self-doubt | 1. Low self-esteem
2. Lack of self-esteem
3. Lacking self-esteem
 |
| Feeling of inferiority and perceived knowledge deficit | 1. Feeling they are not able to achieve goals because they are not good enough
2. Exam worries
 |
| Negative thinking  | 1. They feel “I can’t do that”
 |
| Feeling scared | 1. Terrified of being in college
 |
| Being judged | 1. Feeling different
2. Group dynamics
3. Peer pressure
4. Poor group dynamic and students can put down others who they feel are less able then them
5. Experiences of social prejudice
6. Being interrupted by other students in the class
7. Being bullied
8. If they were bullied
9. If they are not included
 |
| Uncertainty of being successful | 1. Not believing that they can achieve something
2. Might not have self-fulfilment
 |
| Miscellaneous/other responses | 1. Teachers and SEN department not having adequate training or knowledge of disability
2. No support in college from teachers and SEN department
3. Teacher’s egos and lack of empathy
4. Have a difficult teacher to deal with
5. If they have a teacher who is unfamiliar with working with students with additional needs.
6. Feeling that they had a teacher who did not like them
7. If they are not supported
 | Staff competencies |
| 1. Family circumstances/support from family,
2. Problems with personal lives
3. Might not have pressure or high expectations from home to do well
4. Home situations
 | Family support |
| 1. Feeling alone - that they are the only one who struggles
2. Depression
3. An upsetting occurrence
4. Personality disorder
5. A traumatic experience
6. An issue such as substance misuse
 | Mental health and related |
| 1. Students voices might not be heard over others who are very strong in the class group.
2. Don’t mix with other students
3. Working conflicts
4. Isolate themselves
 | Interpersonal issues |
| 1. Distractions
2. Money worries
3. Age differences
4. learned helplessness
 | Other |

# Appendix 12: Teaching and Learning Strategies that Promote Confidence and Inclusion

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| Red: Question 13 responses (teaching and learning strategies promoting confidence)Green: Question 15 responses (teaching and learning strategies promoting inclusion) |
|  | Literature | Interview responses |
| 1 | Providing opportunities for achievement (Norman and Hyland, 2003), providing students with opportunities for success (Schunk, 2014),  | 1. Experimental learning: engages learner, enhances retention, promotes happiness and confidence
2. Make a learning contract at the beginning of the term this gives the student ownership over their learning goals and commitment
3. breakdown assignments
4. Formative assessment: form their own opinion of how they are getting on, graph their learning
5. Discovery based learning through asking questions about things that they need to research and find out new things
6. Practical based work, complete practical activities within the classroom
7. Peer learning: work alongside each other, share information and strengths, teach each other
8. Group work
9. Give students some new material and they must work on it as a group
10. Raise a topic, work in groups, have a storm session
11. Questioning, formative feedback, comment based feedback,
12. Repetition
13. achieve outcomes through a questionnaire and feedback from class
14. Have a lesson plan, go through lesson plan at start of class, include all learning strategies into lesson plan
15. Think creatively
16. Get the students to come up with questions for quizzes
17. Peer learning, group work, group discussion
18. Study buddy: inspire peer support, pick up notes, share notes, discuss content, divide tasks, share information
19. have realistic goals
20. Make sure everybody understands what is going on and that they feel positive and that they are doing a worthwhile exercise
21. Ensure that questions are being asked to everybody by using a system that is inclusive of everyone i.e. picking names out of a box
 |
| 2 | Student centred teaching (Pino and Mortari, 2014) | 1. One to one work
2. Breaking the work down into bite sized chunks
3. Supervise all students, get around to them all
4. Get student to identify their own learning style and appeal to all learning styles
5. Support those who are hesitating or stopping and let people work independently who are doing so
6. Promote students to take responsibility for their own learning: asking students what the best way is or how would you go about doing that rather than telling them what to do
7. Ask people to do they have additional needs at interview stages
8. Look at an individual need, needs analysis
9. explain things differently if a student doesn’t understand
10. Use of Mini white boards – each student writes down answer to question This gives each student opportunity to answer and teacher can see who is struggling and give more attention to that student Students can also reflect on their own ability and progress
 |
| 3 | Appreciation, showing an interest and concern in the student, showing empathy, providing encouragement at challenging times (Malik, 2014) showing empathy and understanding (Rogers, 1967: cited in Smith, 2014)  | 1. Reassure students, highlight progress, praise students, encouragement, give sufficient attention to each person
2. Encourage development, encourage independent working, work with students at their own pace
3. Teacher must be patient, restful and a good listener, bond of trust
4. checking in with a student in private
5. I might say “I haven’t even thought of that myself, that’s amazing”
6. take an interest in each student
7. Make people feel important and listened too
 |
| 4 | Appeal to all learning styles and multiple intelligences (Mumford and Honey, 1992 and David L, 2014) | 1. Represent things visually/graphically
2. Use different strategies to meet different student’s needs, depending on multiple intelligences
3. everything I do now has a video so that students can slow it down, pause, re watch it, this is more effective than live tutorials
4. Handouts would have a feature for each learning style
5. Live demonstrations
6. You must ensure that 100 percent of students in the class is appealed to by providing material in multiple different way
 |
| 5 | providing appropriate adjustments for those who need it (Pino and Mortari, 2014) Ensuring equitable assessment strategies (Miller, Collings and Kneale, 2015)  | 1. have an awareness of any external uneven ground
2. Encourage students to write questions down (this works well for students who are uncomfortable to ask questions in front of the group)
3. different colour paper, use of dyslexie font, interpreters, scribes,
4. Make a support mechanism from the start Utilise learning support department in the college provide students with extra time if necessary
5. consider diversity
6. Help students with additional learning needs to perform at the same level as others by giving them support
 |
| 6 | fostering positive relationships built on potential for success (Collinson and Penketh, 2010)  | 1. Get to know each student
2. learn student’s names
3. Get to know students, tailor lesson plan to their likes and interests
4. ask them their fears i.e. writing things down, spelling, understanding material
 |
| 7 | Monitoring environmental factors (Sander and Sanders, 2003)  | 1. Shape the environment i.e. putting chairs into a horseshoe shape opposed to rows of desks
2. Inspiring a good group dynamic, develop inclusion and group cohesion
3. Use humour
4. Manage the group dynamic, insure that everyone in the class is working respectfully and there is no disrespectful behaviour
 |
| 8 | Highlighting potential for academic achievement (Collinson and Penketh 2010)  | 1. Compare them against themselves in previous tasks opposed to being compared to rest of class with summative feedback
2. Comment based feedback: encourage them to reflect e.g. “have I reached my potential”
3. “Once you get through this I know you will thrive” Its constant reassurance
 |

# Appendix 13: Multiple Means of Representation, Expression and Engagement

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| Representation i.e. presenting material | Expression i.e. students to demonstrate what they have learned | Engagement i.e. variety of means for student involvement and interaction |
| 1. Visual handouts (4)
2. Video clips (3)
3. Projector (2)
4. Practical examples (2)
5. PowerPoint (2)
6. Demonstration (2)
7. Textual literature extracts (2)
8. Photos (2)
9. Bullet point notes
10. Explain application of knowledge
11. Models i.e. 3d models
12. Interactive whiteboard
13. Whiteboard
14. Diagrams
15. Case studies
16. Traditional lecture: stand up, talk, explain
17. Illustration
18. Feedback session
19. Practical training
20. One to one feedback online
21. Apply theory to personal experiences
 | 1. written/typed report (3)
2. drawings/ poster illustration/ (3)
3. Video (2)
4. work experience
5. orally
6. presentation
7. group presentation
8. Computer games
9. incorporates their personality likes into activities
10. interactive whiteboard
11. Audio
12. Exam
13. Photographs
14. Live online presentation
15. Interview
16. Reflective learning diary
17. Ask students applying theory to practice, draw on learning from work experience and apply it to theory
 | 1. Questions (2)
2. get students to engage with other students work (2)
3. Active learning: learn by doing activities
4. Team based learning games
5. App called Kahoot which is competitive quiz you can play individually or in groups.
6. Discussion
7. Placemat/Mind dump activity: put all current knowledge down to see what students know already.
8. Multimedia games
9. interactive whiteboard
10. flash games
11. designing
12. move people around
13. move people into specific groups that will give them opportunities to work with other people and use their strengths
14. Interaction and direct contact with tutors via email.
15. Online student forum
16. Closed group on Facebook/WhatsApp groups.
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|  \*Note: if the point is followed by a number in brackets i.e. (2) this represents the number of participants who mentioned this point. If the point is not followed by a number in brackets only 1 participant mentioned it. |