

## **Inclusive Assessment & Standards: Case Study**

### **Belonging, Mattering and Becoming The First Year Experience**

Margaret Kinsella and Richeal Fox, TU Dublin

[Margaret.kinsella@tudublin.ie](mailto:Margaret.kinsella@tudublin.ie)

## **Background:**

### **The nature of the education and training context**

Higher Education Technological University of Dublin.  
Creative Digital Media Year One.

Margaret has a background in Computer Science, worked in Software Industry and Roslyn Park College, Further Ed and Higher Ed. Research Area Universal Design and Inclusion, First Year Experience and Makerspaces.

Richeal is a Graphic Designer working for over 25 years in Visual Communication. She has a passion for education, activism and creating positive change through design.

### **Who the learners are**

Creative Digital Media Year One Students.  
75 students divided into 4 groups.

### **Challenges**

- Student diversity and variability and student retention.
- Meeting the needs of all learners, 60% progression from Leaving Certificate, 35% from Further Ed and 5% repeat students.

## **Aims: Rationale and Aims for the initiative:**

Using the principles of Universal Design, create Assessments that encourages a course culture of belonging and connection. A culture that allows students to experience learning in a variety of diverse ways and introduces students to projects aimed at personal connection, self-reflection, confidence building and group engagement. The aims are to:

- Build strong learning communities for all.
- Using Universal Design principles to design assessments supporting EDI.

## **Implementation:**

### **Steps taken:**

#### **1. Profile Pics:**

*Who the learner is and what their interests are?*

**Looking inward**

#### **2. Learning Journey Postage Stamps:**

*The learner puts 'their stamp' on their educational/life journey to date*

**Looking back**

#### **3. The 'Normals' Student Personas:**

*The learner builds understanding and empathy with others*

**Looking outward**

#### **4. Student Led Exhibition on Campus**

*Learners curate and exhibit their individual Identity and collaborative work*

**Deeper reflection and representation**

**5. The remaining Assessment** centres around learner engagement at peer mentoring events, digital media field trips, attending guest lectures and student led makerspace events with local secondary schools.

**Who are the People in Your Neighborhood**

**6. This semester all students** took part in a workshop with a local visual arts theatre. A selection worked with a scriptwriter to create NEST; a theatrical piece which was performed last week x3 times on campus.

**The Power of Memorable Moments**

## Profile Pics:

### Who the learner is and what their interests are?



Students are asked to create self-portraits using a combination of photography and illustration to describe themselves and their interests, talents, and aspirations. Individual tiles are created by students which are also used collectively for groups and the overall class. Students enjoyed the Gamification where the object of the game was to identify (and subsequently get to know) peer names within the group/year.

Student cards within groups are now shared with Semester 2 lecturers (new to the group), the learning community is solid and makes for easier transition to new modules and new lecturing staff.

Every learner gets to know everybody more efficiently, effectively, and more personally. Personal and learning communities commence with a face, a name, a pronunciation and background, preferences, likes, dislikes, aspirations, barriers and challenges.

As Jonathan Mooney outlines in "Normal Sucks" difference is humanity and we need to design for humanity. Design assessments to assist in forming groups and getting to know one another. Not an optional extra but core assessments building on creating community in Higher Education as memorable first year experiences.

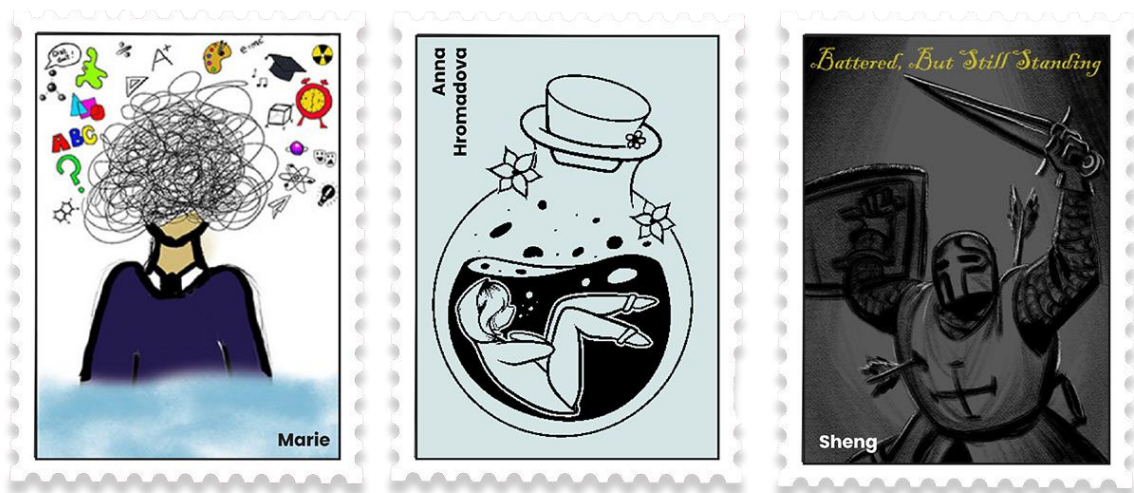
## Learning Journey Postage Stamps:

**The learner puts 'their stamp' on their educational/life journey to date**



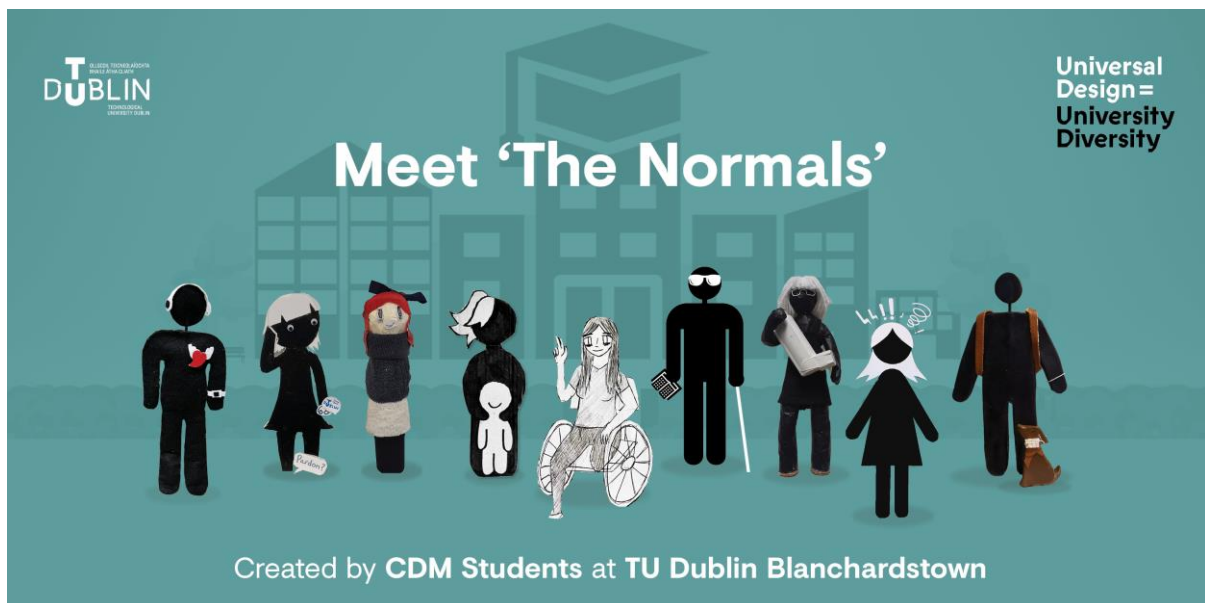
Students are asked to reflect on their personal learning journey and create an illustration that describes their experience visually. This is also accompanied by a 500-word synopsis of their piece which enables us to get a deeper understanding of the students learning abilities and challenges.

In some cases, students divulged learning challenges and neurodivergent conditions previously unknown to the university. It also allows the student to acknowledge their own learning strengths and weaknesses and find ways to help themselves. Students also reflect on their future aspirations and goals during this exercise. The entire groups stamps are also arranged collectively in a poster.



## **The 'Normals' Student Personas:**

**The learner builds understanding and empathy with others**



Students watch the animation video of [The Normals](#) made in collaboration with *The Center of Excellence in Universal Design CEUD*. They are then tasked with creating a student persona or 'Normal' with a real-world challenge, physical, learning, or marginalised person.

Students are tasked with creating a 3D physical model of their 'Normal' which they photograph and create digital assets with. They then consider how their 'Normal' accesses and experiences life in the context of third level education. Many students create autobiographical 'Normals' allowing them to describe their lives and challenges, as well as reflecting on ways to overcome barriers to learning. The students can then bring their learning to a new level creating digital graphics aimed at creating awareness of Universal Design and student diversity.



## **Student Led Exhibition on Campus**

**Learners curate and exhibit their Identity individual and collaborative work**



Exhibition consisting of Assessment Pieces: Profile Pictures, Learning Journey Postages Stamps, and Normals and laptop presentation of key universal design themes

**The remaining assessment** centres around learner engagement at peer mentoring events, meeting other students from yr2, 3 and yr4, participating on digital media field trips, attending guest lectures, facilitating student led makerspace events with local secondary schools.

### **NEST Journey**

This semester all students took part in workshop with local visual arts theatre and a selection worked with scriptwriter to create NEST which was performed last week x3 times on campus.

## **Who was involved/consulted**

### **Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD)**

'The Normals' Animation and creation of 'Normal' personas was as part of the Universal Design Higher Education Module. This idea was adapted for this assessment.

### **Association for Higher Education for Adults with Disabilities (AHEAD)**

The learning journey postage stamps original pilot was designed in collaboration with AHEAD and became part of a Connected Voices exhibition in the HELIX.

### **UDL IRN Makerspaces Conference in conjunction with CAST (UDL)**

The Makerspaces MakeSpace concept was first presented at the UDL IRN Conference with student and student union collaboration and later at the UDL Symposium in Maynooth University.

### **Advance HE**

Best Practise contribution to concepts of belonging, mattering and becoming are instrumental in fostering self-actualisation and self-efficacy in learners and shed light upon the transformative power of this trio of ideas.

### **The Power of Moments by Heath Brothers**

Where assessments are designed to create memories and experiences, alongside developing knowledge and skills.

### **Key Support Staff across the University** Exhibition

Learner Support Staff, Nurse, Counselling Staff, Student Information Desk, Chaplaincy, Librarians, Admissions and Examinations, among others

## **Timeline**

This assessment approach is for first year students,  
Commenced in Sem 1 and recommenced / built upon in Sem 2



## **Outcomes:**

### **Key outcomes**

- Connecting and belonging and developing self-actualisation and self-efficacy in learning and the treasured transformative power of assessment
- Assessment Template for building inclusive connections and developing learner's expert at learning
- Quickly reduces apprehension as assessments are accessible and step by step
- A series of memorable moments connecting learners with each other and teaching staff and University staff, culminating with a physical exhibition with digital assets

### **The Impact**

The impact is multifaceted and significant. Students get to know and understand their group and the entire year. Lecturers get to know their students; Learner's names, how they like their name to be pronounced, their full name and where they live, how long they have lived in Ireland, how long their commute takes to college and the impact this has on their student lives. Their part time job and how many hours they work. Whether they live at home or in rented accommodation. If they are content to share barriers, challenges, and adversities; what has worked to assist them in the journey. Their hopes, dreams, and aspirations.

Some students indicated the process was a pointer towards hope.

Other modules are busy with skills and information and this Assessment by design carves a space to connect and reflect.

## **Future plans for the initiative**

- Extend exhibition to Grangegorman, Tallaght Campus and Aungier Street
- Plan to exhibit at the AHEAD Conference in Croke Park
- Contribute to Path4 Phase 1 Universal Design Toolkit
  
- Currently in the process of writing up new assessment approaches for first year experience and meaningful engagement and connections for Programmatic Review.

## **Reflections:**

### **What worked well**

- Building strong engagement & course culture
- Exhibition on Blanchardstown campus
- Feelings of belonging, mattering & becoming
- Stronger working relationship between lecturer & students

### **What were the biggest challenges?**

- Shifting in mindset away from traditional assessments testing knowledge and skills to beginning to understand individuals and the entire group/year
  
- Timetable restrictions, getting away from two-hour lecture, two-hour lab expectations

### **What could be improved**

- Quicker sharing with semester two lecturers new to first year cohort

## **What we learned from it**

- As designers of assessments, we need to co-create opportunities to get to know our learners in a timely fashion and build course culture and connections to enable building solid learning teams where individual and group needs are met
- Elevate individual student strengths
- Celebrate multiculturalism and multilingualism
- Invest in the 'getting to know you' part of the core assessment work. This is 'not a nice to have,' but an essential core commitment which needs design.
- Embed as part of programmatic review summer 2024
- This focus on meaningful, active participation by students, as curriculum assessment and in wider activities across the institution and within their community that will enhance their student experience and increase student success.