Aligning Teacher Competencies and Professional Standards to the UDL Framework Across Two Initial Teacher Training Contexts on the Island of Ireland

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Teacher training programs take many forms and vary in duration if it is an undergraduate or postgraduate option. In addition, there is variation in terms of the cost involved and the placement opportunities within a school setting and type. There is also an increase in the debate around inclusion globally, which has long been included as a core part of the lexicon of educational establishments and policy-

makers. A more intentional UDL approach is discussed to a lesser degree, which does not divert away from a strategy of inclusion, but more intentionally provides a shared language across providers. In this chapter, the potential of UDL in initial teacher education is explored across the island of Ireland, which consists of both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, by mapping the UDL to both professional standards and teacher competency frameworks. It highlights how pre-service teacher training providers can embed UDL into their programs and practice and support student teachers in an ever-changing learning environment.

INTRODUCTION

Initial teacher education (ITE) curricula across the island of Ireland are closely linked to teaching competencies and professional standards, for quality assurance purposes within teacher education colleges. The island of Ireland is made up of two distinct regions: Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (RoI). The two regions share an island and a long history; however, they differ from one another in terms of politics, policies, societal values, and education systems (Roulston et al., 2023). There has been a significant increase in learner diversity through immigration and the shift of inclusive education over the past ten years (Flood and Banks 2021). This new landscape has led to an increase in drawing from the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework across all educational sectors but especially in further (FE) and higher education (HE). Traditionally, UDL is more established in the formal school years (K-12) and within the American context where it originated over forty-five years ago and focused on tackling disability. UDL has become a key pedagogical framework which seeks to address the traditional 'one size fits all' curriculum that exists in many countries, as well as support inclusive education (Meyer et al., 2014), as well as support non-traditional students (Fovet, 2020). However, there remains a gap in the literature comparing teacher competencies and professional standards to the UDL framework, especially across the island of Ireland.

According to Smyth (et al., 2022, p. 5), NI's school system is fragmented based on "school type and religious denomination." There are a range of school categories in NI including Controlled (many of which were initially Protestant schools), Catholic Maintained, Voluntary Grammar, Integrated, Irish-Medium, and independent schools. In NI, secondary education is provided by secondary schools or grammar schools. Entry to grammar schools is through academic selection, and the results of transfer tests are used to determine places. In RoI, there are three types of schools (voluntary secondary, Education and Training Board (ETB), and community/comprehensive), and all schools follow the same curriculum and qualifications framework. Following recent statutory changes, secondary schools cannot assess students for

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