From reflection to action:

THE INTERHED TOOLKIT FOR INTRODUCING INTERSECTIONALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING

InterHEd
INTERSECTIONALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

InterHEd. Intersectionality in Higher Education

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Introduction: context, purpose and use of the InterHEd Toolkit

In recent decades, access to higher education has expanded significantly across Europe as part of broader efforts to democratise knowledge and promote inclusion. **Universities have become more diverse** in terms of the backgrounds, experiences and aspirations of their students. However, this growing diversification **has not resulted in equal experiences or outcomes.** Despite appearing neutral and being framed within a discourse of academic excellence, higher education institutions continue to reproduce and legitimise forms of inequality that subtly yet powerfully shape students' trajectories.

In response to these persistent inequalities, **intersectionality** has emerged as a powerful framework for understanding how multiple axes of oppression, such as race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability and migration status among others, intersect to shape experiences of inclusion and exclusion. While intersectionality is increasingly present in academic research, discourse and policy, **its application to teaching and learning practices remains limited,** inconsistent and often superficial (Mergner et al., 2025; Rehman et al., 2023; Nichols and Stahl, 2019).

Against this backdrop, the *InterHEd Toolkit* has been developed to bridge theoretical discussions and practical approaches, and to support those interested in exploring intersectionality as a useful and transformative perspective in higher education.

Purpose of the Toolkit

The *InterHEd Toolkit* has been developed to support the **mainstreaming of an intersectional perspective** into teaching and learning practices within higher education institutions. Its main purpose is to integrate critical theory and pedagogical practice by offering educators and institutions tools and strategies to help them engage meaningfully with the complexity of inequalities in academic spaces.

Rather than prescribing a single model, the Toolkit offers a flexible, adaptable resource for use across different disciplines, national contexts and institutional cultures. It is intended to support those involved in curriculum development, teaching practices, student support and educational policy in reconsidering their roles, practices and structures through an intersectional lens, and it is complemented by the other results of the InterHEd project (see García-Romeral et al., 2025; Warat et al. 2025).

Drawing on the collective work of the InterHEd partnership, the Toolkit builds upon these outcomes to further develop and apply their insights in practice:

- **Participatory workshops** with students and teaching staff,

- a mapping and collection of **innovative pedagogical tools** and **promising practices**,

- and **collaborative reflection** between partners from diverse geographical and disciplinary contexts.

It aims to generate institutional and pedagogical change by addressing **four key dimensions** of higher education where inequalities are reproduced: *curriculum, learning environments, pedagogy and teaching methodologies, and assessment.*

Ultimately, the Toolkit seeks to contribute to the creation of more just, inclusive, and critically engaged university spaces, where difference is not simply accommodated, but actively valued as a starting point for structural transformation.

Target audience

The *InterHEd Toolkit* is primarily intended for **university teaching staff** interested in addressing inequalities and transforming higher education through critical pedagogies. It is also intended for **educators-in-training,** including **early-career academics and doctoral candidates** who are developing their teaching practice.

Additionally, the Toolkit is intended as a resource for **staff working in university diversity, inclusion and equality bodies,** including those responsible for implementing Gender Equality Plans, curriculum developers and academic coordinators, as well as those involved in **pedagogical innovation or educational policy** at the institutional level. Beyond academia, the *InterHEd Toolkit* may be of interest to **student unions, educational researchers and policymakers** seeking to promote more inclusive and equitable learning environments across the European Higher Education Area.

Structure of the Toolkit

The *InterHEd Toolkit* is composed of eight chapters that together offer both a conceptual and practical framework for addressing inequalities in higher education through an intersectional lens. While each chapter can be read independently, the Toolkit is designed as a coherent whole that moves from analysis to action, from theoretical grounding to applied strategies.

It opens, in **Chapter 2**, with a contextual overview of how **inequalities manifest in higher education** across the European Union and selected member states. This chapter provides the foundation for understanding the structural dynamics that underpin access, participation, and recognition.

Chapter 3 introduces **intersectionality as a framework for tackling these inequalitie**s. It draws on critical, feminist and intersectional pedagogical traditions to analyse how multiple axes of power intersect in academic spaces and why addressing them requires more than additive or diversity-based approaches.

The core of the Toolkit's practical orientation is developed across Chapters 4, 5, and 6, each dedicated to a key area of teaching and learning: learning environments, curriculum, and teaching practice. These chapters share a common structure: they begin by asking key questions that guide the content of the chapter: *What is at stake in this dimension?*; *How is intersectionality relevant here?*; and *What strategies, tools, or approaches can help us apply intersectionality in this higher education dimension?*.

The first of these, **Chapter 4** explores **learning environments**, encompassing not only physical classrooms and online settings, but also out-of-class spaces such as internships and placements. It examines how these settings are shaped by power relations and how they can become sites of transformation.

Building on this, **Chapter 5**, explores **curriculum design**. This chapter offers strategies for integrating intersectionality into teaching guides, course planning, and content selection, while challenging dominant epistemological assumptions.

In **Chapter 6**, the focus turns to **teaching practice** itself. Organised around three interrelated aspects, *methodologies*, *participation*, and *assessment*, it presents tools and reflections designed to support educators in fostering inclusive, critically engaged pedagogical approaches.

Chapter 7 examines the **key axes of structural inequalities** identified through participatory workshops with students and teaching staff from partner institutions. Based on the lived experiences of students and faculty members, it highlights recurring challenges, critical incidents, and opportunities for institutional change as well as professional and intellectual development within academia.

To close, **Chapter 8** proposes a series of practical **case studies** drawn from the InterHEd partners' experiences, demonstrating how intersectionality can be applied in real teaching and learning contexts.

Complementing the chapters, there are two types of content provided by standalone boxes throughout the Toolkit: '**Resource boxes**'

present selected handbooks, toolkits, and practical activities, developed within Inter-HEd or drawn from external sources; and '**Discipline-in-Focus Boxes**', which explore specific challenges and strategies identified within particular academic fields.

About the InterHEd project

The *InterHEd. Intersectionality in Higher Education* project (Erasmus+ 2023-1-ES01-KA220-HED-000160620) is a European project funded by the Erasmus+ programme (2023–2026) that aims to promote more inclusive and socially just higher education institutions by embedding an intersectional perspective into teaching and learning practices. Coordinated by the **Universitat de Vic – Universitat Central de Catalunya** (Spain), the project involves partners from the **Uniwersytet Jagielloński** (Poland) and the **Technische Universität Dortmund** (Germany), all with strong expertise in educational innovation, gender equality, and intersectionality.

InterHEd seeks to strengthen the capacity of higher education institutions and academic staff to recognise and address intersecting inequalities that affect students' experiences and outcomes. It promotes the development of institutional and pedagogical strategies that move beyond symbolic inclusion and contribute to structural transformation.

The project's methodology combines several strategies:

- **Design and implementation of participatory workshops** with students and teaching staff to examine how intersecting inequalities shape learning environments and to collectively identify and test strategies for change.

- **Collection and analysis of promising practices** across European universities, that provide concrete examples of how intersectional approaches can be implemented in higher education contexts.

- **Co-creation of training models** for academic staff and students, conceived to be flexible and adaptable to diverse cultural settings and institutional teaching and learning structures.

- **Development of reflective and practical resources and policy recommendations**, aimed at supporting educational stakeholders across Europe in embedding intersectionality into their practices and fostering sustainable transformation within higher education.

This Toolkit is one of the main results of the InterHEd project and it is based on the collective knowledge generated through these activities.

How to use the Toolkit

The *InterHEd Toolkit* has been designed as a **flexible and modular resource**. Each chapter can be read independently, allowing readers to focus on the areas most relevant to their interests, disciplines, or institutional contexts. However, the chapters are interconnected and achieve greater coherence when considered collectively, as they together provide a comprehensive understanding of how to apply an intersectional perspective to higher education teaching.

In particular, Chapter 3 plays a foundational role. It introduces the **conceptual and theoretical framework** of intersectionality as it applies to higher education and offers critical insights that underpin the practical strategies presented in the following chapters. Readers unfamiliar with the concept or seeking a deeper theoretical grounding are strongly encouraged to begin with this chapter before progressing to the applied sections of the Toolkit.

While the Toolkit highlights examples of application in specific disciplines, it is **not limited to any academic field**. On the contrary, it is designed to generate reflection that can support the integration of intersectionality across all disciplinary and institutional contexts. Given the situated and relational nature of intersectional analysis, each context requires thoughtful engagement to identify the most appropriate and meaningful strategies.

Throughout the chapters, readers will also find links to **external and complementary resources**, including teaching materials, handbooks, and promising practices. These resources offer additional inspiration and allow for further exploration and development.

Importantly, this is not a manual of strict recommendations or a checklist to follow. Rather, the Toolkit offers **guiding questions and provocations** that invite educators and institutions to reflect critically on their own practices, to identify where inequalities are reproduced, and to imagine alternative, more equitable ways of teaching and organising higher education.
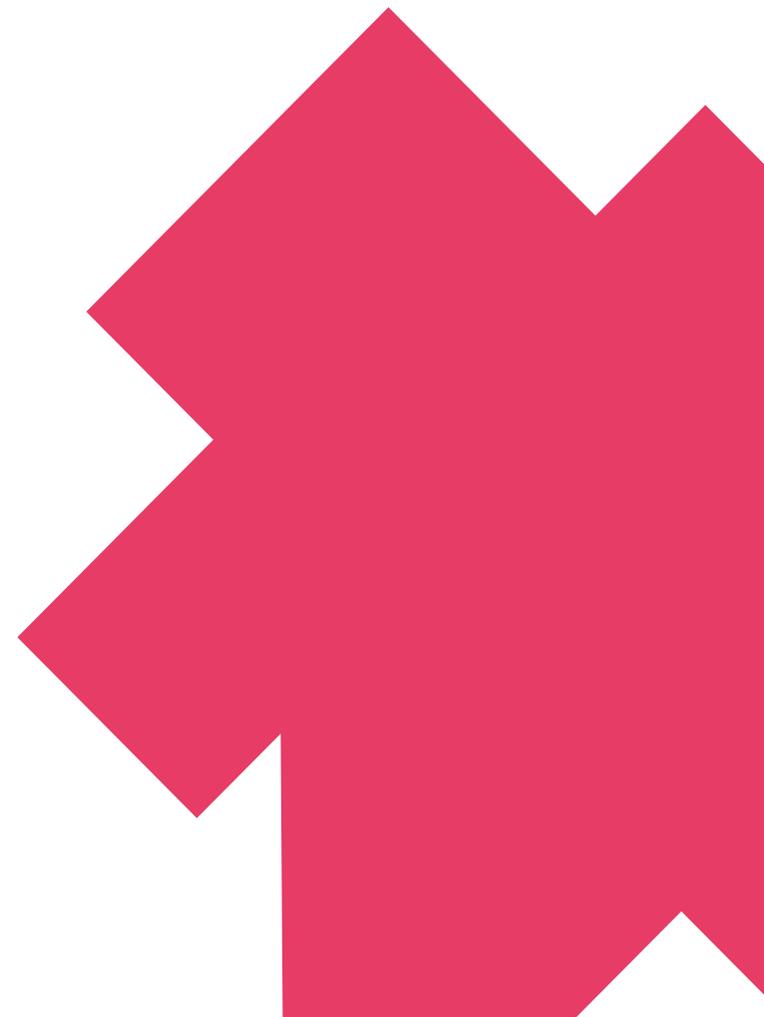
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2.

Layers of inequality: European Union and country-specific contexts

Across Europe, higher education systems reflect structural social inequalities that persist despite growing commitments to diversity and inclusion. The European Union and Member States often articulate equality as a shared value, yet implementation varies widely across countries. Understanding these differences requires examining how policy, law, and institutional culture interact to produce both opportunities and barriers.

This chapter situates higher education inequalities across three levels: the European Union, where equality frameworks are developed; the state level, where they are adapted and implemented; and the institutional level, where they are experienced within individual countries. It provides an overview of these dynamics in the EU and in three contexts: Germany, Poland, and Spain, to reveal how structural disparities and intersectional exclusions are reproduced and challenged within European higher education.

2.1.

Diversity and equality in higher education institutions - the EU perspective

The European Union (EU) has developed comprehensive policy frameworks to address equality and diversity within the *European Research Area* (ERA), gradually moving towards more intersectional approaches in recent years.

Gender equality has emerged as a central priority through successive Framework Programmes (FP6, FP7, Horizon 2020), which introduced measures such as monitoring women's participation, mainstreaming gender in research, and institutionalising change through *Gender Equality Plans* (GEPs). Under *Horizon Europe* (2021–2027), GEPs became a formal eligibility criterion for funding, requiring public research organisations and higher education institutions to demonstrate long-term commitment through integrated strategies addressing recruitment, retention, career progression, work-life balance, gender-based violence, and gender representation in decision-making bodies (European Commission, 2020b).

The ERA Policy Agenda further strengthens this commitment by **explicitly recognising intersectionality**, acknowledging that gender inequalities intersect with other forms of disadvantage based on ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, and socio-economic background. Beyond gender, the EU promotes broader diversity dimensions through initiatives such as the *European Charter for Researchers* (2005) and the *Code of Conduct for their Recruitment* (2005), promoting inclusive recruitment practices and non-discrimination, and the *HR Excellence in Research Award,* which incentivises institutional improvements in working conditions and career development.

The European Commission's ERA *Action 4* focuses specifically on fostering access to excellence by ensuring gender equality, inclusiveness, and the eradication of gender-based violence, while *Action 5* promotes the circulation of researchers and addresses brain drain through improved working conditions that accommodate diverse needs. This evolving policy landscape reflects a growing recognition that **research excellence requires dismantling structural barriers** and creating inclusive environments in which talent from all

backgrounds can thrive, positioning equality and diversity not as peripheral concerns but as fundamental conditions for scientific advancement and innovation.

Following this point, the EU's primary focus remains on researchers and academic staff, with **student-focused intersectional measures remaining largely absent** from current frameworks (European Commission, 2020a; 2021b). Although programmes such as *Erasmus+* incorporates provisions for increasing access among **disadvantaged groups**, including those from migrant backgrounds, lower socio-economic status, and with disabilities, through enhanced financial support and tailored preparatory measures, these interventions typically address barriers **sequentially rather than intersectionally**.

At the broader policy level, the *Bologna Process* and its Social Dimension agenda aim to ensure that higher education reflects the diversity of society. Yet, because implementation is delegated to individual Member States, the extent to which **intersectional inequalities are recognised and addressed varies**

significantly. A key challenge for the EU lies in developing assessment tools and accountability mechanisms capable of capturing how multiple dimensions, such as ethnicity, class, gender, disability and sexuality, interact to shape access, participation, persistence and outcomes in higher education.

2.2.

Inequalities in German higher education institutions

▶ In Germany, inequalities in higher education arise from the interplay between European regulations, national legislation, and institutional practices. Comparative studies have shown that Germany lags behind other EU countries in advancing **gender equality** pathways in science and technology (European Commission, 2021b; Oliveira & Carvalho, 2009), pointing to **persistent structural barriers** to women's progression in these fields.

To understand these dynamics, it is necessary to examine how European equality principles are translated into the German higher education system. The *General Act on Equal Treatment* (AGG), which implements EU anti-discrimination principles in Germany, ap-

plies to university staff but not to students. This creates an **asymmetry in protection**, as student-related issues such as admissions, assessment, and services fall under institutional policy rather than national law (Heitzmann & Klein, 2012).

One prominent initiative is the *Charta der Vielfalt* (Diversity Charter, 2005), which symbolically commits organisations, including universities and research centres, to recognising diversity and fostering a discrimination-free environment. While its adoption has increased institutional visibility around diversity, **implementation remains voluntary** and non-binding (von Hardenberg & Tote, 2017). In contrast, the *Research-Oriented Equity and Diversity Standards of the German Research Foundation* (DFG) requires higher education institutions to submit **periodic equality strategies** and progress reports (DFG, 2022; 2025).

At the federal level, the Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) supports women's advancement in academia through the *Professorinnenprogramm*, which funds professorships and tenure-track positions for women (BMFTR, 2025). Additional measures include **gender monitoring and auditing**, embedded in formal agreements between state ministries and universities, which require regular reporting on gender indicators in staffing and leadership positions (HRK, 2025).

Diversity management in German higher education remains at an early and uneven stage. Its conceptual flexibility allows institutions to adapt their strategies, often combining targeted initiatives such as mentoring for women or students with a migration background with broader organisational goals. However, the persistent image of the "normal student" (young, full-time, Abitur-qualified - i.e. holding the university entrance diploma -, and without a migration background) continues to shape institutional expectations and programme design. Research suggests that diversity efforts are more sustainable when embedded into institutional identity and supported by senior leadership (Langholz, 2014; Kezar, 2008).

The rationale underpinning diversity management strongly influences its impact. A pragmatic approach treats diversity as an extension of earlier gender equality policies. Yet, when detached from its original political context, diversity management may risk being instrumentalised to serve economic narratives, particularly the "business case" argument that diversity enhances performance and competitiveness. This logic, often dominant in human resource management, can dilute social justice goals and shift focus away from structural inequalities. In practice, initiatives may benefit those already closest to dominant norms (Meuser, 2010; Cornelius et al., 2001), reducing social justice aims to managerial rhetoric.

Yet, examples from institutions such as the University of Hamburg and TU Dortmund University illustrate more integrated approaches. At the **University of Hamburg**, diversity initiatives include all-gender restrooms, alternative admission pathways, a code of conduct for religious practices, and international programmes that explicitly address gender and diversity concerns (University of Hamburg, 2025a; 2025b). At **TU Dortmund University**, diversity is systematically integrated into strategic planning through diversity mainstreaming and anti-discrimination policies, with the aim

2.3.

of fostering lasting cultural change (TU Dortmund University, n.d.).

Taken together, these examples show **how different levels shape inequalities** in German higher education. National legislation like the *General Act on Equal Treatment* (AGG) provides protection for staff but leaves students subject to institutional regulation. Organisational approaches to diversity are shaped by competing logics, social justice, student experience, and performance metrics. In this context, **university leadership plays a decisive role** in translating equality frameworks into meaningful campus practices (European Commission, 2020b; 2021a; Heitzmann & Klein, 2012; Langholz, 2014).

Inequalities in Polish higher education institutions

▶ In Poland, inequalities in higher education are shaped by broader **political, social and economic transformations** since 1989. Three phases frame this evolution: the post-communist transition of the 1990s, the Europeanisation process following EU accession in 2004, and the current era of market-driven reform (Dobbins & Kwiek, 2017). The early emphasis on democratisation and privatisation led to the underfunding of public universities and a strong focus on academic excellence over equity. EU integration introduced legal protections and incentive structures for equality, such as Horizon funding and the *HR Excellence in Research* award.

The massification of higher education expanded participation, particularly among students from working-class backgrounds. However, **this expansion also reinforced stratification**, with elite public institutions increasingly attended by privileged students, while lower-status private universities attracted those from disadvantaged groups (Domański, 2004).

Research by Krzysztof Czarnecki (2015) shows that Poland's higher education system reproduces **horizontal inequalities** through ostensibly meritocratic processes. Although matriculation exam scores formally determine admission, socio-economic factors create invisible barriers that distort this ideal. Students from privileged backgrounds dominate elite capital-city universities, not only because of academic preparation but through **intergenerational advantages**: parental education remains the strongest predictor of enrolment in prestigious institutions. This operates through multiple forms of capital, financial security, familiarity with admission norms, access to extracurricular enrichment, and the confidence to navigate academic environments.

These structural dynamics are further reinforced through everyday practices and expectations embedded in family life and school trajectories. **Cultural and social capital play a central role:** peer networks and parental expectations nurture educational ambitions from an early age, while students from lower social classes rely more heavily on emotional or "navigational" capital to persist in higher education (Mikiewicz, 2008; Łuczaj, 2022). Degree completion is more likely when family routines, such as reading and structured study, mirror those common in middle-class households. At the same time, working-class students bring valuable forms of knowledge, such as resilience, reflexivity, and what Łuczaj (2022) calls a "working-class pedagogy".

A related pattern of "undermatching" has been identified: academically qualified students from working-class or rural backgrounds often choose less prestigious institutions despite strong academic potential (Czarnecki, 2015). Economic constraints, the need to work, and perceived cultural distance from elite settings often drive these choices. Those who access top universities tend to adopt studying patterns marked by self-discipline and reduced leisure, reflecting efforts to prove belonging in spaces historically shaped by privilege.

These studies reveal how formally neutral selection mechanisms function as a "**hidden curriculum of inequality,**" reproducing social hierarchies under the guise of meritocracy (Łuczaj, 2022). They expose the tension between formal equality of opportunity and substantive equity in Polish higher education, where inequalities persist not despite, but through, mechanisms designed to ensure fairness.

Beyond class, additional axes of inequality, linked to gender, migration background, disability, and sexual orientation, also shape access, participation, and academic experiences.

Gender inequality remains a key concern, including access (Zawistowska, 2011) but not only. Although women make up 58.5% of students and reach near parity among staff (GUS, 2024), they remain underrepresented in STEMM fields and face a persistent glass ceiling in academic careers. Female academics are disproportionately affected by structural obstacles related to caregiving responsibilities, mobility and lack of role models in senior positions (Ploszaj, 2025).

Ethnic and migration-related inequalities are becoming more visible as the number of international students increases. Despite the creation of support offices, foreign students face linguistic, cultural, legal and financial barriers, often intensified after the 2022 influx of Ukrainian students (Rębisz &Grygiel, 2018). Many institutions have responded, but efforts remain fragmented and often temporary (Subocz & Sternicka-Kowalska, 2025).

Students with disabilities continue to encounter structural barriers, despite Poland's ratification of the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* in 2012. Challenges include physical inaccessibility, lack of adapted materials and inclusive pedagogy, and persistent stigma. Invisible disabilities, particularly related to mental health, are often neglected due to fear of disclosure (Giermanowska et al., 2023).

2.4.

Inequalities in Spanish higher education

LGBTQI+ students also face marginalisation. Poland ranks among the lowest in Europe for LGBTQI inclusion in education (IGLYO, 2021), and many students avoid disclosing their identities. While some universities have implemented support initiatives, such as the *PrEcIOUS project* (see Report on Invisible Homophobia, 2023) at Jagiellonian University, there is no systemic national framework, and most measures rely on local leadership and isolated efforts.

In sum, inequalities in Polish higher education stem from the interplay of historical legacies, market reforms, and fragmented policy responses. While some progress has been made in areas such as gender and disability, **implementation remains uneven**. Class, regional, and institutional divides intersect with other forms of exclusion, such as migration status, health, and sexuality, underscoring the **need for more coherent and intersectional approaches to equality.**

▸ In Spain, research on inequalities in higher education has evolved from classical analyses to more critical and intersectional approaches. A key concept in this debate is the *Social Dimension of Higher Education* (SDHE), which, within the European framework, aims to ensure that the **student population reflects the diversity of society** by removing barriers linked to socio-economic background, gender, or origin (Herrera Cuesta, 2019; Ariño & Llopis, 2011).

Despite the expansion of the university system, **inequalities persist in both access and academic success** (Langa Rosado & Río Ruiz, 2013). Family background, both socio-economic and educational, remains a strong predictor of university participation, choice of studies, and future employment expectations

(Ariño & Llopis, 2011; Herrera Cuesta, 2019, 2021).

Two main forms of stratification have been identified. Firstly, **vertical stratification,** referring to unequal access to higher education in general. OECD data show that 77% of people in Spain aged 25–64 whose parents have tertiary education also attain it, compared to just 31% among those whose parents lack upper-secondary education (OECD, 2024). Particularly low participation rates are observed among Roma students (García-Andreu et al., 2020).

Secondly, **horizontal stratification,** referring to how inequality persists within the system through differentiated study choices and academic trajectories. Women are disproportionately concentrated in Humanities, Social Sciences, Law, and Health, while men more often choose technical degrees, perpetuating horizontal gender segregation (Navarro Guzmán & Casero Martínez, 2012; Troiano & Sánchez-Gelabert, 2025). These patterns intersect with class, as working-class students tend to enrol in shorter or less prestigious programmes (Langa Rosado & Río Ruiz, 2013).

These structural dynamics interact with other axes of inequality, such as gender, migration background, regional disparities, and ability status, that further shape the conditions of access, participation, and academic success (Gallego-Noche, 2021). The following examples illustrate how these interlocking factors operate within the Spanish university context, producing distinct patterns of exclusion and differentiation.

Gender remains a key axis of inequality. Although women represent most university students in Spain, they are more likely to **enrol in degrees that are less valued in the labour market** (Jiménez-García & Fachelli, 2025), such as those related to care and education. These patterns are shaped by persistent gender stereotypes and social expectations that channel women into roles associated with care and service (Navarro Guzmán & Casero Martínez, 2012). This segregation has long-term consequences for employment opportunities and contributes to persistent wage gaps.

Migratory origin also shapes educational inequalities. While some studies suggest a growing orientation towards higher education among young people with a migrant background born or raised in Spain, linked to processes of selective acculturation, **access rates remain lower** among students of Latin American and African descent. These students are underrepresented in prestigious academic programmes and often anticipate more limited employment prospects (Herrera Cuesta, 2021; Ariño et al., 2014). Nevertheless, for many migrant students, particularly women, higher education represents a path to empowerment and upward mobility (Pérez Serrano, 2013).

Regional inequalities also shape access and inclusion across Spain. As education is a devolved competence, the university system reflects significant variation between autonomous communities in terms of tuition fees, funding, and equity policies (European Commission, 2024). This has contributed to uneven institutional responses to inequality.

Recent legislative developments reflect a growing awareness of structural exclusion. The *Ley de convivencia universitaria* (2022) introduced the **concept of intersectionality** for fostering equality and preventing multiple forms of discrimination within academic communities. The *Ley Orgánica del Sistema Universitario* (2023) builds on this by requiring universities to promote equality across various grounds, including gender, origin, socio-economic status, disability, and sexual orientation, and encourages the **creation of Equality and Diversity Units**.

Despite recent legal advances, intersectional approaches remain limited in Spanish higher education institutions. **Diversity policies tend to focus primarily on disability or gender**, often framed through a managerial lens that prioritises legal compliance and institutional reputation over structural transformation (García-Cano et al., 2021). As a result, equity measures are frequently fragmented and lack critical engagement with power relations.

This fragmented approach is also reflected in teaching and curriculum design. A study by García-Cano et al. (2022), analysing innovation projects across 82 Spanish universities, found that diversity initiatives typically address gen-

der, disability, and inclusion as distinct areas, rather than through an integrated intersectional lens. Faculty often equate diversity with demographic representation, **rarely addressing underlying structures of inequality**. Only a small number explicitly adopt feminist or intersectional perspectives in their teaching.

The *UNIGUAL project* (Lombardo et al., 2021) highlights similar challenges. Most university syllabi exclude the work of women and racialised scholars, and **gender or intersectional content is rarely integrated into course materials**, despite legal requirements. Subtle dynamics in classroom interactions also reinforce inequalities: male students are more frequently addressed, while others, particularly women and racialised students, participate less. The project calls for institutional accountability through mandatory training, quality assurance, and incentives to promote inclusive teaching.

While Spanish universities have made important progress in widening participation, **inequalities persist in access, academic experience, and outcomes,** particularly in terms

of labour market trajectories and post-graduation opportunities. Legal frameworks increasingly acknowledge intersectionality, but implementation remains uneven. Advancing towards substantive inclusion and social justice will require structural reforms, investment in faculty development (Márquez & Melero Aguilar, 2023), and a shift from compliance-driven models to transformative, intersectional practices.

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3.

Intersectionality as a way of addressing inequalities in higher education

Intersectionality offers a powerful lens for understanding how multiple systems of power interact within universities. This chapter provides the conceptual grounding for the approach adopted in the InterHEd Toolkit. First, it presents intersectionality as a framework for understanding and addressing social inequalities in higher education. Then, it explores how this perspective can inform teaching practices, introducing the core principles of intersectional pedagogy.

3.1.

Definition and conceptual grounding

The concept of intersectionality was initially coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and further developed by Black feminist scholars and activists (Hill Collins, 2000; Combahee River Collective, 1977; hooks, 1994) to capture how the experiences of Black women could not be understood by examining gender, race, or social class in isolation. Intersectionality examines **how different forms of social inequality**, such as racism, sexism, classism, and ableism, **intersect and interact** to produce unique experiences of oppression and privilege. As Patrick R. Grzanka (2014) asserts, intersectionality has become not only a descriptive tool but also an indispensable paradigm across disciplines to investigate social injustice. It allows for structural critique by questioning the categories, institutions, and systems that generate and uphold inequality.

Thus, intersectionality enables us to move beyond a one-dimensional or additive logic of oppression, towards a systemic and relational analysis. It highlights the **importance of context** and social positioning and asks us to consider how inequalities are constructed through and embedded in institutional arrangements, policies, cultural norms, and dominant epistemologies.

From this standpoint, intersectionality is grounded in the idea that individuals' social positions are shaped not by single axes of identity, but by **complex and historically situated power relations**. Social categories such as gender, race, class, sexuality, or (dis)ability are not fixed attributes but shifting positions in a broader matrix.

POWER AND STRUCTURE

As Patricia Hill Collins (2000) articulates through the concept of the *"matrix of domination,"* different systems of oppression are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. People do not experience power or inequality through isolated structures; rather, they occupy multiple, shifting positions of power and subordination across various contexts. This framework reveals that individuals can be **simultaneously privileged and oppressed** depending on the particular intersection of identities and institutional arrangements.

Intersectionality, therefore, compels us to understand the complexity of oppression, not as a linear or hierarchical process, but as a **multidimensional and contingent reality**. In higher education, this might manifest in how academic merit is assessed, which forms of knowledge are recognised and legitimised, or how institutional procedures (such as admission, assessment, or disciplinary policies) impact different groups of students and staff.

Recognising power as embedded in structure rather than located solely in individuals is crucial. Universities are **not neutral spaces**: despite their self-presentation as meritocratic and inclusive, they often reproduce forms of inequality (Bourdieu & Passeron,

1990) through institutional norms, pedagogical practices, and knowledge hierarchies that privilege certain identities, experiences, and epistemologies over others.

Drawing on Mari Matsuda's (1991) concept of *"asking the other question,"* educators are encouraged to go further. For instance, when analysing sexism, one should also ask: *where is the racism here? where is the class bias?* The aim is not only to notice who is excluded from learning spaces, but also to critically examine how and why such exclusions occur. This shift invites a **move beyond monofocal analyses** of inequality towards a more relational understanding of how race, gender, class, disability, and other axes of power interlock and operate across the material, digital, and interpersonal dimensions of teaching and learning.

RELATIONAL AND DYNAMIC NATURE OF SOCIAL POSITIONS

An intersectional lens also emphasises the relational and dynamic nature of social positioning. Social identities and their associated meanings are produced through interactions and **shaped by time and place**. For instance, the experience of being a racialised Muslim woman studying in Spain is influenced by the country's particular historical relationship with Islam and Muslimness, ranging from the centuries-long Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula to the enduring cultural narratives shaped by the Reconquista and colonial histories. Such dynamics may differ markedly from those in other European countries, such as Germany or Poland, where distinct institutional arrangements, historical trajectories and social imaginaries have generated different forms of inclusion and exclusion.

Adopting this contextual approach is crucial for understanding inequality in higher education, as it **avoids essentialist interpretations of identity** and underscores the context-specific nature of social experiences. By making these interconnections visible, intersectionality not only diagnoses how inequalities are produced, but also points towards the need to dismantle the structures that sustain them.

3.2.

Teaching from an intersectional perspective

Intersectional pedagogy emerges from the legacy of **critical pedagogy,** particularly the work of Paulo Freire (1970), who envisioned education as a practice of freedom grounded in dialogue, critical consciousness, and social transformation. Building on this foundation, feminist and anti-racist scholars such as bell hooks (1994), Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), and Patricia Hill Collins (2000) have advanced intersectional approaches. Rather than viewing intersectionality as a topic to be added to existing curricula, this pedagogical perspective invites a **rethinking of how knowledge is produced**, whose experiences are centred, and how teaching practices can contribute to dismantling structures of oppression within and beyond the classroom. These ideas are further devel-

oped in contemporary pedagogical hand-books that articulate intersectionality not just as content but as a methodological and ethical stance in teaching (Case, 2017; Harmat, 2019).

Resources

Pedagogical roots: feminist, queer, antiracist, and decolonial legacies

Intersectional pedagogy draws on a rich legacy of critical pedagogical traditions that question dominant narratives and advocate for transformative education:

· **Feminist pedagogy**, with foundational contributions such as those of Carolyn M. Shrewsbury (1987), considered a classic in the field, emphasises participatory and non-hierarchical learning environments. It validates students lived experiences and links them to broader struggles for social change. See: Shrewsbury, Carolyn. M. (1987). What Is Feminist Pedagogy? *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *15*(3/4), 6–14.

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· **Queer pedagogy**, exemplified by Deborah Britzman (1995), challenges normative assumptions in education, unsettles fixed identities, and embraces ambiguity and discomfort as productive spaces for learning. See: Britzman, Deborah P. (1995). Is There a Queer Pedagogy? Or, Stop Reading Straight. *Educational Theory*, *45*(2), 151–165.

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· **Antiracist pedagogy,** developed by authors such as Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), centres the analysis of systemic racism and promotes culturally relevant teaching practices that directly confront racial hierarchies in educational contexts. See: Ladson-Billings, Gloria. (1995). Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, *32*(3), 465–491.

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- **Decolonial pedagogy,** articulated by Indigenous scholar Marie Battiste (2013) among others, critiques the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems and calls for integrating Indigenous epistemologies and narratives into education. See: Battiste, Marie. (2013). *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit.* Purich Publishing. *https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/distributed/D/bo70014990.html*

Together, these traditions underpin intersectional pedagogy's commitment to interrogating power, centring nonhegemonic voices, and linking teaching to broader struggles for social justice.

Conventional approaches to university teaching are often based on the **principle of neutrality**, both in terms of content and method. However, this neutrality can mask dominant norms and reinforce existing systems of privilege. Standard curricula, assessment practices and pedagogical models tend to reflect the experiences, values and worldviews of dominant social groups, thereby marginalising or erasing alternative perspectives.

Intersectional pedagogy challenges this premise. It advocates for an **explicit critical stance** that opposes racism, sexism, ableism, classism and colonialism. Recognising that education is not separate from broader social structures, intersectional pedagogy asserts that education must be intentionally shaped to confront inequality.

The following section is organised into three parts. It first outlines the **core principles of intersectional pedagogy** and its transformative approach to higher education, then examines **key strategies and methodologies** for applying these principles in teaching practice, and finally addresses the **main challenges and tensions** involved in implementing intersectionality within higher education.

▶ **BASIS OF INTERSECTIONAL PEDAGOGY**

Intersectional pedagogy is grounded in a set of core principles that seek to transform how teaching is conceived and practiced in higher education. These principles are not prescriptive but provide a **critical orientation** for educators committed to equity and social justice. At its core, this approach emphasises attention to multiple and interlocking structures of power, the need to move from inclusion to transformation, the centring of non-hegemonic voices, the understanding of education as a space for critical engagement and social justice, and a pedagogy rooted in care, solidarity, and mutual support:

- **Attention to multiple and interlocking structures of power**. Intersectional pedagogy recognises that power operates through the simultaneous interaction of systems such as white supremacy, colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, ableism, or heteronor-

mativity. Teaching must therefore address how these intersecting structures shape students' experiences and knowledge production within the university setting in a given local context.

- **From inclusion to transformation**. Intersectional pedagogy moves beyond a logic of inclusion that simply seeks to accommodate individual differences, such as adapting to students with specific learning needs, within existing institutional frameworks. Rather than treating difference as something to be managed or integrated, it seeks to challenge and transform the dominant structures themselves, interrogating curricula, institutional norms, and classroom dynamics that reproduce privilege.

- **Centring non-hegemonic voices**. A key commitment of intersectional pedagogy is to make space for the perspectives, experiences, and knowledges of those historically excluded from academic spaces. This involves decentring dominant narratives and recognising alternative epistemologies, including embodied, communal, and situated knowledge.

- **Education as a space for critical engagement and social justice**. Teaching from an intersectional perspective means recognising education as both a site of struggle and a space of possibility. Classrooms are contested spaces where students can be encouraged to critically examine social inequalities and imagine emancipatory alternatives. Intersectional pedagogy fosters critical consciousness by connecting theoretical frameworks with their own lived experiences. Learners are empowered to understand and transform the social structures that shape their lives, rather than being seen as passive recipients of knowledge. Teaching becomes a political and ethical act, rooted in activism, responsibility, and social justice.

- **Pedagogy of care, solidarity, and mutual support**. Finally, intersectional teaching is grounded in a pedagogy of care, recognising the emotional and political dimensions of learning. It seeks to cultivate relationships based on trust, empathy, and shared responsibility. Teaching becomes an act of solidarity, where vulnerability, discomfort, and critical awareness are acknowledged and held collectively, rather than avoided.

Together, these commitments offer a framework for creating learning experiences that are not only more inclusive, but also fundamentally **more equitable and transformative**. Studies indicate that such approaches foster student engagement, cognitive flexibility, and a deeper understanding of social complexity (Antonio et al., 2004; Museus et al., 2017). Moreover, intersectional pedagogies are positively associated with students' intentions to pursue social justice, higher academic persistence, and the development of transferable skills for inclusive professional practice (Case & Rios, 2016; Ong et al., 2020). These findings reinforce the value of embedding intersectional principles into higher education teaching as a way to effectively support both individual learning and broader institutional change.

PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES AND METHODOLOGIES

To enact intersectional pedagogy, teaching staff must move beyond conventional teaching models and critically interrogate the assumptions inherent in traditional curricula and classroom practices. This involves **three interrelated dimensions**: curriculum transformation, reflective teaching, and participatory methodologies.

· **Deconstructing dominant knowledge**. Intersectional pedagogy calls for the deconstruction of canonical knowledge and the critical interrogation of what is deemed legitimate, objective, or universal. This process involves incorporating alternative epistemologies, particularly those rooted in the experiences of marginalised communities, and questioning whose voices are absent or silenced in the curriculum.

· **Positionality and shared reflective practice**. A core element of intersectional pedagogy is the ongoing reflection by educators and students on their own positionality. They are encouraged to critically examine how their social locations (in terms of race, gender, class, ability, and other dimensions) shape their perspectives, interactions, authority and power relations within the classroom. This reflective stance should not be regarded as an optional exercise, but rather as a fundamental pedagogical commitment.

· **Participatory, creative, and experiential methods**. Intersectional pedagogy values methods that engage students as active contributors to knowledge production. These may include dialogic learning, storytelling, arts-based approaches, collective mapping, and problem-posing techniques. Such practices enable students to connect academic content with their lived experiences, fostering critical engagement, and promoting co-learning.

Resource

Identity Web: Exploring intersectional identities in the classroom

The **Identity Web** (Ahmed, 2018) is a reflective visual activity that helps students explore how different aspects of their identity, such as gender, class, language, race, and ability, intersect to shape their learning experiences. By mapping these dimensions and sharing them in small groups, students and teachers can reflect on how privilege and marginalisation influence participation and belonging.

This exercise can be used at the start of a course to build trust and awareness or later to deepen reflection on diversity and inclusion. It requires only paper, pens, and guided discussion time, and can be adapted across disciplines to make intersectionality tangible and personally meaningful.

Based on Ahmed, Sara. K. (2018). *Being the Change: Lessons and Strategies to Teach Social Comprehension*. Heinemann. For more detail on its application in higher education, see García-Romeral, Gloria; Garcia-Castillo, Marina; & González-Ruiz, Lorena. (2025). *Innovative teaching methods: Report on pedagogical tools for integrating intersectionality into higher education teaching.* Universitat de Vic-Universitat Central de Catalunya.

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CHALLENGES AND TENSIONS

Implementing an intersectional approach to university teaching involves acknowledging and addressing a series of conceptual and institutional tensions and obstacles. One of the most persistent challenges is the **resistance** that arises when dominant assumptions of neutrality and objectivity are questioned. Because intersectional pedagogy carries explicit political and ethical commitments, it is often perceived as biased or ideological, clashing with the prevailing academic norm of framing education as detached, apolitical and universally applicable.

A second challenge relates to the **lack of training, institutional support, and formal recognition** for educators engaged in intersectional and critical pedagogical work. Teaching from this perspective requires not only a deep engagement with structural analysis and social justice, but also significant emotional labour and pedagogical creativity. However, these efforts are often undervalued or overlooked by academic evaluation systems that prioritise research productivity, standardised teaching metrics, and disciplinary conformity.

Finally, there is a growing **risk of intersectionality being instrumentalised**, reduced to a checklist of identities or to performative gestures of inclusion. As Sirma Bilge (2013) warns, *"ornamental intersectionality"* reflects a superficial engagement that strips the concept of its critical edge and transformative potential. In contrast, intersectional pedagogy demands sustained reflexivity, institutional commitment, and pedagogical practices that meaningfully shape students' learning experiences and educational trajectories. This approach must be routed in a willingness to question institutional structures, to embrace complexity and discomfort, and to pursue epistemic and social justice, not as fixed outcomes, but as ongoing long term collective processes.

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4.

Applying an intersectional perspective in learning environments

Learning environments in universities reflect social, political, and institutional dynamics that frequently reinforce existing inequalities. When we speak of an intersectional approach in education, we must interrogate how educational spaces are designed, accessed, and experienced by students and teaching staff who occupy diverse and intersecting social positions.

This chapter offers a framework for analysing learning environments through that lens, drawing on findings from the InterHEd project. It proposes strategies and tools that can support the shift from reactive adaptation toward **proactive inclusion,** affirming the complexity of all students' identities and lived realities.

4.1.

What are learning environments?

In higher education, learning environments encompass the various **physical, digital, and social spaces** where learning takes place. These include lecture halls, seminar rooms, laboratories, libraries, and fieldwork settings, as well as online platforms. Informal and transitional spaces, such as hallways, cafeterias, co-working areas, and libraries, are also part of the broader institutional landscape. These environments are often more dynamic and fluid, and have been associated with notions of democracy, agency, and community (Deed & Alterator, 2017). Moreover, student workshops have highlighted the importance of online group chats and other digital spaces that extend beyond formal platforms. Although these informal online environments fall outside the scope of this Toolkit, they still play a significant role in shaping students' everyday experiences and sense of belonging.

Despite their diversity, learning environments, understood broadly as spatial, social, and symbolic contexts, are often built around a narrow conception of the **"default student":** typically able-bodied, neurotypical, financially secure, and from the dominant linguistic or cultural background. Such assumptions render invisible the everyday spatial barriers experienced by students who do not match this profile, such as disabled, racialised, queer, migrants, caregivers, or living in economic precarity (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2017; Ahmed, 2012).

As Dolmage (2017) argues, learning spaces are rhetorical: they communicate messages about who belongs, whose knowledge matters, and what kinds of bodies or minds are expected. If these environments are not critically examined and redesigned, they risk **reinforcing structural inequalities under the guise of neutrality.** This includes not only built environments, but also the temporal, sensory, and epistemic dimensions of space: whose pace is supported, whose communi-cation styles are accommodated, and whose presence is anticipated. While this chapter focuses on the physical and relational dimensions of learning environments, related questions concerning teaching practices are further explored in Chapter 6, given the inescapable connections between space, content, and pedagogy.

Recent scholarship invites us to view educational spaces not as static containers but as **relational ecologies**. As Kimmel Chamat Garcés (2025) argues, adopting a "pluriversal" lens to learning spaces means supporting diverse ontologies and epistemologies, challenging dominant Western-centric and anthropocentric designs. This invites institutions to rethink space not as a neutral backdrop but as an active co-creator of educational relations, ethics, and possibilities.

4.2.

How is intersectionality relevant in learning environments?

An intersectional perspective emphasises that learning environments are inherently political, embodied, and relational. The way space is designed and inhabited directly influences who feel they can participate and belong. As feminist geographers and scholars in critical disability studies have shown, **bodies and minds experience space differently** depending on how power, mobility, and visibility operate (see Hansen & Philo, 2007). Learning environments are often structured around normative assumptions, of what bodies and minds are expected, rendering invisible those who move, perceive, or navigate space in other ways. What is accessible, safe, or comfortable for one student may be marginalising or exclusionary for another.

These dynamics became particularly evident in the **student workshops** conducted across partner universities. Participants described how physical, sensory, cultural, digital, and social barriers intersect in learning environments, producing uneven conditions of access and participation.

For instance, **neurodivergent students** described classrooms as overstimulating, especially for those with ADHD or autism, citing harsh lighting, high noise levels, and rigid layouts that made it difficult to concentrate or self-regulate. As Nicole Brown and Jennifer Leigh (2018b) note, neurodivergent students often navigate learning environments structured around neurotypical norms, which can conflict with their learning needs.

By contrast, **co-working and informal areas** were perceived as more flexible and collaborative, but many students highlighted their **lack of physical accessibility**. While formal classrooms tended to include basic features like ramps, elevators or adjustable desks, co-working spaces were harder to reach for students with reduced mobility. This reflects broader evidence that spaces designed to meet some sensory needs may inadvertently neglect others, creating compounded barriers for, say, a neurodivergent student who also uses mobility aids (Kerschbaum et al., 2017).

Students with visual impairments drew attention to the absence of Braille signage on doors and classrooms, which made it impossible to navigate buildings independently. Similarly, for students with **hearing impairments**, the lack of appropriate support in lectures created fundamental barriers to participating in core academic activities. These examples point not only to the inadequacy of technical adaptations, but to a **deeper dependency on others**, which undermines autonomy and reinforces a sense of exclusion. As reported in the workshops, this is further exacerbated by a lack of staff training on the use of assistive technologies and emergency procedures.

Spatial inequalities also intersect with **cultural and religious exclusion**. One Muslim

student shared that prayer spaces were not only located far from teaching areas but often mislabelled as yoga rooms, a misrecognition that erased their needs and sent contradictory signals about inclusion. This echoes Sara Ahmed's (2012) critique of how institutional spaces often fail to accommodate difference, even when advocating diversity. For a Muslim student who is also neurodivergent, navigating an overstimulating hallway to reach a distant and ambiguously labelled room compounds sensory overload with cultural misrecognition. As the student noted, the solution is not to create separate rooms for every group, but to **design multi-use spaces with inclusive signage and trained staff** who understand the diverse ways students experience and use shared environments.

Gendered exclusions were also mentioned. Students reported the absence of gender-inclusive restrooms, and the lack of facilities suitable for changing menstrual cups, highlighting how considerations of gender and bodily diversity are often overlooked in everyday campus planning.

The shift to digital learning has further **amplified existing inequalities**. Not all students have access to reliable devices, stable internet, or quiet study environments (Soria et al., 2020). Some workshop participants noted that online academic platforms such as *Moodle* often assume a degree of digital literacy that not all students possess, particularly **first-generation or older students**. Those without personal computers must rely on university facilities, but restricted opening hours and limited availability make this impractical. Combined with financial pressures, such as commuting costs or the need to work alongside studies, these constraints reveal the **economic dimension of digital inequality**.

In addition, students highlighted **technological and infrastructural barriers**, such as inadequate internet access or rigid institutional platforms, which make it difficult to provide feedback or request adaptations. These challenges reflect how material disparities translate into social exclusion and stress the need for proactive digital inclusion, flexible support systems, and recognition that class, age, and geography shape digital engagement in higher education.

Finally, social integration emerged as a critical concern. Students from minority or international backgrounds frequently described feeling disconnected from the broader student population. As reported in multiple workshops, this sense of exclusion often led students to form smaller peer groups, thereby reinforcing their separation from dominant networks. Informal learning environments, such as cafeterias, study lounges, and common rooms, were thus experienced as **sites of division, mirroring broader social inequalities**. Creating more inclusive and collaborative environments requires intentional spatial design and facilitated interaction, fostering belonging, recognition, and mutual understanding among diverse student groups.

Discipline in-focus
Fieldwork, access,
and inclusion in Biology

Fieldwork is a core component of biology education, enabling students to develop methodological skills in empirical data collection and environmental analysis. Practical training in terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems equips students with essential field techniques, including the use of transects and quadrats for vegetation sampling, invertebrate and vertebrate surveys, abiotic parameter measurement, GPS-based spatial mapping, and habitat classification. These competencies are integral across subdisciplines such as botany, zoology, ecology, and geosciences, where in situ observations and sampling are critical to understanding species distributions, community structure, and ecosystem processes.

However, conventional models of field-based instruction often presuppose **unrestricted physical mobility, cognitive normativity, and the capacity to engage in prolonged off-site excursions,** including multi-day field trips in remote locations. This pedagogical structure may inadvertently exclude students with physical disabilities (e.g., impaired mobility, chronic illness, or medical conditions that make particular activities, such as boat-based sampling, unsafe), neurodivergent students or those with mental health conditions (e.g., anxiety, agoraphobia), and individuals with caregiving responsibilities or employment obligations. Without intentional design and inclusive alternatives, field-based learning can inadvertently reinforce structural barriers to participation, limiting access to key educational experiences for a diverse student population.

Similar challenges arise in disciplines such as Medicine, Nursing, or Education, where internships and practicum experiences often rely on normative assumptions about the ideal student. These settings demand not only physical presence but also social fluency, emotional regulation, and the capacity to navigate unfamiliar spaces.

These examples show that inequalities intersect to shape access and participation in learning environments. Achieving genuine inclusive learning environments involves not only physical design, but also **epistemic recognition, technological infrastructures, and institutional cultures** that determine whose knowledge and presence are considered.

4.3.

What approaches, strategies and tools can help in applying an intersectional perspective to higher education learning environments?

Designing learning environments from an intersectional approach means intentionally shaping the spaces where education happens (both physical and digital), so that they affirm, support, and enable all learners.

Before intervening, it is essential to identify how learning environments, by design or omission, anticipate certain students while marginalising others. The following **guiding questions** can help educators, designers, and coordinators begin this diagnostic work. It must be reminded again that these are not checklists, but entry points for deeper inquiry and discussion:

· Who are my students?

· What diverse needs (sensory, mobility, cultural, linguistic, economic, digital, etc.) do these students bring into the learning environment?

· Are both physical and virtual learning environments truly accessible and inclusive, or just nominally compliant?

· Are technological and accessibility needs identified and addressed?

The framework of **Universal Design for Learning** (UDL) offers a strong foundation for embedding flexibility into the design of learning environments. Rather than relying on retrofitted accommodations, UDL encourages **proactive planning** from the outset, anticipating a wide range of needs, including sensory, mobility, cognitive, and linguistic diversity. In physical spaces, this translates into features such as accessible entrances, adjustable lighting and furniture, clear signage, and low-stimulation areas. In digital environments, UDL encourages the use of multiple modes of content delivery (e.g., text, video, audio), accessible user interfaces, and alternative formats for assessment and participation. For a more detailed discussion of how UDL principles can inform inclusive teaching practice, see Chapter 6 of this Toolkit.

By anticipating diversity, UDL shifts the burden away from the individual student and toward **institutional responsibility** (CAST, 2018; Dolmage, 2017). Yet, intersectionality challenges us further to think that genuinely transforming learning environments involves not only expanding access but also redistributing power and questioning whose presence and knowledge these spaces have historically been designed to serve in the first place.

Beyond UDL contributions, **low-barrier adaptations** in learning environments can also be implemented by individual educators even when broader structural constraints exist. For example: having hybrid classroom, providing

printed versions of slides in advance, ensuring captions on videos, and making course content downloadable. While small, these adaptations can meaningfully expand access and reduce stress for many students (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2017).

The shift to online and hybrid education has exposed and deepened existing **digital divides**. Access to stable internet, adequate personal devices, and quiet, safe study environments is unevenly distributed, often along lines of class, race, and geography (Soria et al., 2020). Institutions must therefore frame digital inclusion as a matter of educational justice. This includes offering equipment loan programs, subsidised internet access, offline learning options, and asynchronous participation formats. It also involves designing digital platforms that are accessible and culturally responsive, moving beyond technical usability to address broader forms of epistemic and linguistic inclusion (Woodley & Rice, 2022). Educators can play a key role by identifying and flagging access barriers to IT services and advocating for student support where needed.

Learning spaces should not only be accessible but comfortable and affirming for **diverse bodies and neurotypes**. This includes quiet rooms for overstimulated students, low-sensory lighting, seating options for different body sizes and mobility needs, and the ability to move or stim during lectures. For neurodivergent students especially, traditional classroom design can be rigid and exclusionary (Brown & Leigh, 2018b). While educators may not control classroom architecture, they can advocate for adjustments, request room changes when needed, and signal inclusivity through language, posture, and classroom norms. For example, stating that students are free to stand, stretch, or wear noise-cancelling headphones can help signal that all bodies and minds are welcome.

Promoting **co-creation** is another strategy educators can use to make learning spaces more inclusive. For instance, the coordination of degrees could conduct brief anonymous surveys early in the semester to identify students' access needs or the barriers they face, co-develop ground rules for using physical and virtual space respectfully and inclusively, and discuss preferences regarding cam-

era use, noise levels, or physical movement. Importantly, co-creation goes beyond merely asking students about their needs; it involves engaging them in the development, design and implementation of solutions that respond to those needs. These practices shift the classroom from a fixed environment to a negotiated one, in which students can exercise agency and be recognised as co-constructors of the learning experience.

Beyond the teaching, applying an intersectional lens to learning environments also involves examining **institutional geography**. Addressing these gaps requires institutions to conduct participatory audits of their campuses, centring student experiences in mapping spatial exclusion and proposing concrete changes. Making learning environments inclusive means **treating architecture and planning as equity work**. This can include reviewing restroom, prayer room, and common space access; addressing hidden hierarchies in who uses or controls space; and ensuring informal and transition spaces (e.g., hallways, cafeterias, lobbies, and libraries among others) are also inclusive.

Resources

Applying intersectionality in learning environments

A range of pedagogical tools can further support these efforts and surface the lived experiences of students and co-create more equitable learning environments. These are the following:

- **Brave Spaces** (Arao & Clemens, 2013): encourage constructive discomfort as a catalyst for learning and transformation, offering a framework for embedding intersectional dialogue, peer reflection, and collaborative feedback practices.

- **Talking Circles** (Coll-Planas et al, 2021): Structured group dialogues that use shared reflection on real-life scenarios to build empathy, address power dynamics, and foster inclusive, socially responsible learning.

- **Relief Maps** (Baylina & Rodó-Zárate, 2016): A reflective mapping exercise to explore how students feel across their educational environments.

- **Body Mapping** (Solomon, 2002): A creative method where students draw or annotate the body to represent how they physically and emotionally experience different learning contexts.

- **Me Bags** (Noah & Souza, 2018): An activity inviting students to fill a bag with objects that represent who they are, sparkling dialogue around diverse backgrounds and needs.

These strategies and tools are not meant to be prescriptive but adaptable. They offer starting points for educators to co-create more inclusive environments with their students, acknowledging that true inclusion is not only about accommodating existing needs. It is, rather, about transforming the structures that produce inequality in the first place.

See García-Romeral, Gloria; Garcia-Castillo, Marina; & González-Ruiz, Lorena. (2025). *Innovative teaching methods: Report on pedagogical tools for integrating intersectionality into higher education teaching.* Universitat de Vic-Universitat Central de Catalunya.

4.4.

Closing reflections

As Sara Ahmed (2012) and Rob Kitchin (1998) remind us, inclusion is not just about who is in the room; it is also about **how the room is created**. Learning environments are shaped by histories of power and exclusion and continue to reproduce social hierarchies unless intentionally reimagined.

An intersectional perspective reveals how space can enable or constrain participation depending on how it responds to intersecting forms of inequality. It pushes us to ask: whose presence is anticipated? whose needs are overlooked? and how are discomfort and conflict distributed across bodies and identities? Rather than seeking spaces that are safe for everyone, a goal that may not always be possible, it calls for a willingness to engage with tension and complexity.

As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2011) argues, **genuine inclusion requires a relational ethics** that centres embodied difference, rather than adjusting norms that privilege some while excluding others. And as bell hooks (1994) reminds us, **education is always political**, and so are the spaces where it happens.

The strategies and reflections shared in this chapter are entry points. The real challenge lies in reimagining learning environments (in all their diversity) not as passive containers, but as active **sites of justice and collective transformation**.

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5.

Applying an intersectional perspective in curriculum design

Curriculum design in higher education involves social, cultural, and institutional choices that determine what knowledge is valued, how it is organised, and whose experiences are represented. Far from being a purely technical process, it shapes the intellectual and political contours of academic life. From an intersectional perspective, the curriculum is a key site where **hierarchies of knowledge are reproduced and contested,** shaping whose voices, experiences, and worldviews are represented, and whose are marginalised or left out.

This chapter offers a framework for reflecting on curriculum content through an intersectional lens. It invites educators to **reflect on how knowledge is constructed:** whose perspectives are centred, whose are marginalised or erased, and how course materials can more accurately reflect the diversity of social realities and forms of expertise.

By doing so, it contributes to a broader shift towards **transformative curricular practice** that of what counts as knowledge in higher education.

5.1.

What is the curriculum design?

In higher education, curriculum design refers to the systematic planning of learning objectives, content, pedagogical approaches, and assessment strategies to achieve coherent educational outcomes. It encompasses the selection, organisation, and sequencing of knowledge in ways that shape academic pathways, influence student experiences, and reflect institutional values (Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Tyler, 1969). While teaching methods and assessment are integral components of curriculum design, these will be addressed in Chapter 6 on teaching practices. In this chapter, we focus specifically on course content and learning objectives, examining how they can be reimagined from an intersectional perspective.

Understanding how these curriculum elements function requires recognising that they are shaped by underlying assumptions and power relations. Curriculum design elements refer to the fundamental components and pedagogical decisions that shape **what, how, and how learning is evaluated** in higher education (Lattuca & Stark, 2009; O'Neill, 2015). The elements of curriculum designs (learning objectives, course content, teaching methods, and assessment approaches), do not exist in isolation but are embedded in **broader systems of power** that determine which knowledge is legitimised, whose experiences are centred, and how students are positioned within learning environments (Apple, 2004; Ahmed, 2012).

Since curriculum design involves making decisions about these elements and these decisions **reflect the mission and societal role of the university** (Tyler, 1969; Taba, 1962; Lattuca & Stark, 2009), curriculum is **both a pedagogical and political tool** that conveys the concept of valid knowledge, the perspectives it prioritises, and how students are expected to engage in learning (Apple, 2004). As such, existing hierarchies can either be reproduced or serve as a framework for transformation.

5.2.

How is intersectionality relevant in curriculum design?

▶ An intersectional perspective reveals how curricula are shaped by the social and institutional hierarchies that underpin higher education. Curricula do not simply transmit knowledge, they also convey assumptions about who the "typical" student is, what forms of knowledge are legitimate, and whose experiences matter. By making these assumptions visible, intersectionality challenges educators to **go beyond surface-level** diversification and contribute to deeper structural transformation (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Ahmed, 2012).

Intersectional curriculum design goes beyond simply including diverse authors or case studies. It critically interrogates how dominant epistemologies are constructed, which forms of knowledge are marginalised, and how systems of power shape what is taught, how it is taught, and how it is evaluated (hooks, 1994; Apple, 2004; Case & Rios, 2016). This perspective calls for examining not only course content, but also learning objectives, pedagogical approaches, and the assumptions embedded within them. Traditionally, curriculum development has privileged dominant ways of knowing, often rooted in white, Eurocentric, masculine, able-bodied, and middle-class norms, while excluding knowledge produced from positions marked by racialisation, gender, class, (dis)ability, sexuality, or linguistic difference (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Bhambra et al., 2018; Le Grange, 2021). An intersectional lens invites educators to **recognise and challenge these exclusions**, understanding how intersecting structures shape both students' access to knowledge and their recognition within academic spaces.

In the InterHEd workshops, students shared examples of how course content and objectives often **presume cultural homogeneity** and shared academic capital. One student recalled how a lecturer used biblical references to explain social concepts, assuming a level of familiarity that not all students shared. Others pointed out that reading lists were dominated by dense academic texts using specialised cultural jargon, which was particularly challenging for international students and those who were the first in their family to attend university. These examples illustrate how curricula frequently rely on implicit norms and on cultural, linguistic, and epistemic capital, such as familiarity with dominant academic discourse and ways of reasoning, which privilege certain students over others and reinforce exclusions based on class, place of origin (rural or urban), prior education, and migration background.

Educators in the faculty workshops echoed these concerns. While many expressed strong commitments to inclusion and accessibility, they also highlighted how **fixed syllabi and rigid learning outcomes constrained their capacity to respond to student diversity**. These frameworks are often shaped by institutional requirements, reviewed in multi-year cycles to ensure consistency and transparen-

5.3.

cy. While such structures offer predictability and stability, they can also constrain responsiveness to changing student cohorts, such as international students, those who work while studying, and students with caregiving responsibilities.

Such tensions reveal how **power operates through curricular structures**. Cultural and linguistic norms may privilege certain students, while rigid bureaucratic systems prevent educators from adapting to others' needs. Yet the aim is not to eliminate structure, but to combine consistency with responsiveness. An intersectional curriculum recognises that **inclusion and academic rigour can coexist** when design processes account for the multiple positions from which students learn.

In this sense, intersectionality is **not an "add-on"** but a framework for understanding how power relations shape the very foundations of academic knowledge, and for reimagining curricula that are both stable and flexible, rigorous and inclusive, responsive and structurally sound.

What approaches, strategies and tools can help apply an intersectional perspective to curriculum design?

Curriculum design should be understood as an ongoing, **collective process of critical reflection and revision**. The following **guiding questions** are not intended as a checklist, but as entry points for dialogue, review and co-creation among educators, teaching teams and curriculum designers. To support this reflection, the questions are organised into three categories that address different dimensions of curriculum design from an intersectional perspective: power relations, representation of knowledge and student participation.

Power, inequality and the hidden curriculum

·   Do the curricular contents explicitly address structural inequalities and power relations, or do they contribute to maintaining them?

·   Are there opportunities within the curriculum for reflecting on inequality, privilege, and intersecting systems of oppression?

·   Can we identify a hidden curriculum (i.e. implicit values, norms and expectations) that may reproduce exclusion or marginalisation?

·   What role does language play in the curriculum? Is inclusive and non-discriminatory language actively promoted?

·   Are we using neutral-sounding terms (e.g. "citizens," consumers", "patients", "children") that obscure differences and inequalities?

·   Are there tools, mechanisms or procedures to review and revise the curriculum when inequalities or exclusions are identified?

· How effective and accessible are these mechanisms in practice?

· Is there room to adapt learning objectives or syllabi to respond to emerging needs and diversify content over time?

Representation and diversity of knowledge

· Do the curriculum contents reflect a diversity of experiences, perspectives and forms of knowledge?

· Which authors, voices or social groups are underrepresented or absent, and why? How could they be meaningfully included?

· Do the examples, case studies and activities used in class reflect the social and cultural diversity of contemporary societies (in terms of gender, race, social class, disability, sexual orientation, migration status, etc.)?

· Are diverse linguistic and cultural needs taken into account, particularly for international, migrant, or plurilingual students?

Student participation and co-construction

· To what extent are students' own experiences, perspectives and feedback taken into account in the curriculum design and revision?

· How do students perceive the inclusivity and relevance of what and how they learn?

· What mechanisms or spaces exist to gather and incorporate student feedback in meaningful ways?

These questions remind us that curriculum design is a **political and ethical process of epistemic inclusion and justice**. From an intersectional perspective, designing a curriculum means critically examining what counts as legitimate knowledge, how it is organised, and for whom it is made accessible. This shift requires moving beyond additive models of inclusion, where "diversity" is introduced into pre-existing structures, towards transformative approaches that interrogate and reframe the very foundations of disciplinary knowledge (Ahmed, 2012; Case, 2016).

This transformation begins with a **rethinking of learning objectives**. Intersectional curricula expand traditional definitions of student success to include outcomes such as **critical consciousness, reflexivity, and social responsibility.** Rather than focusing exclusively on technical knowledge or discipline-specific skills, intersectional learning objectives aim to equip students with the tools to recognise and transform structural inequalities (McNair et al., 2020; O'Neill, 2015; Collins, 2000).

Regarding **course content**, it always reflects choices about which knowledge is legitimised and which perspectives are excluded, making it inherently biased. From an intersectional standpoint, designing content involves challenging the dominance of Eurocentric, heteronormative and patriarchal systems of knowledge, while actively centring the epistemologies of marginalised communities (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Bhambra et al., 2018). This involves more than simply adding 'diverse voices' as optional reading material; it requires a **complete reframing of the core narrative** of a course to address power, privilege and structural inequality as foundational concerns.

A key strategy to integrate intersectionality into the curriculum is to **make visible how knowledge is legitimised**, whose perspectives are foregrounded, and which experiences are silenced. Teaching staff can introduce exercises that interrogate these dynamics and support students in mapping their own social locations. This cultivates awareness of how identity and power shape knowledge production.

Intersectional strategies also involve shifting traditional classroom hierarchies by positioning **students as co-creators of knowledge**. This includes inviting student input into course design, content selection, and evaluation criteria. Such approaches decentralise authority and foster ownership, particularly for students from marginalised backgrounds. Intersectional strategies validate experiential and academic knowledge. Incorporating narratives, community case studies, and reflexive storytelling activities allows students to connect **structural analysis with personal experience**.

Resource

Counter-Storytelling
Counter-storytelling (Hall, 2016), rooted in Critical Race Theory (CRT), invites students to create narratives that highlight their lived experiences of oppression and resistance. Through structured phases of reflection, research, and peer exchange, students challenge dominant ideologies and explore how race, gender, class, and other identities intersect in systems of privilege and exclusion Counter-Storytelling brings marginalised epistemologies to the centre by having students craft and analyse narratives. These narratives can be translated into content selection and evidence criteria.

See García-Romeral, Gloria; Garcia-Castillo, Marina; & González-Ruiz, Lorena. (2025). *Innovative teaching methods: Report on pedagogical tools for integrating intersectionality into higher education teaching.* Universitat de Vic-Universitat Central de Catalunya.

Lastly, sustainable intersectional teaching requires **institutional structures** that reinforce it. Strategies include setting up peer-reflection routines, integrating intersectionality criteria into curriculum review processes, or offering intersectionality-informed feedback channels.

5.4.

Closing reflections

▶ Curriculum design offers a critical entry point for transforming higher education. By examining what knowledge is included, whose voices are heard, and how meaning is constructed, educators can uncover how inequalities are reproduced within academic disciplines. Therefore, an intersectional curriculum design aims to do more than include diverse perspectives. Rather, it critically examines **how dominant knowledge systems are constructed**, which epistemologies are excluded, and how structural power influences what is taught and how it is evaluated (hooks, 1994; Apple, 2004; Case, 2016). By incorporating intersectional thinking into curricular decisions, teaching staff can challenge normative assumptions and better align teaching with the principles of **equity, inclusion, and social justice.**

An intersectional approach moves **beyond tokenistic or nominally compliant inclusion,** toward a systemic rethinking of the epistemic foundations of higher education. It calls for recognising **curricula as living, contested, and culturally situated processes**, and for building spaces where diverse knowledges and experiences are valued as integral to the academic experience.

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6.

Applying an intersectional perspective in teaching practices

In university settings, teaching practices refer to the **actions, methods, and interactions** through which teaching staff facilitate students' learning. This concept encompasses the transmission of knowledge as well as the ways in which students are engaged, supported, and evaluated throughout the learning process (Brookfield, 2017; hooks, 1994).

Within this broad framework, this chapter focuses on three interconnected dimensions: teaching methodologies, participation, and assessment. These dimensions together shape students' learning experiences and influence whether higher education environments reproduce or challenge inequalities:

- **Teaching methodologies** involve the design and delivery of learning activities, this is, how classroom sessions are structured, which materials are selected, how time is organised, and what dynamics unfold between students and educators.

- **Participation** refers to students' opportunities to engage meaningfully in the learning process, to see themselves reflected in course content, to contribute from their own positionalities, and to experience a sense of belonging (Bovill, 2020).

- **Assessment** includes, but goes beyond, measuring achievement; it conveys implicit messages about what is considered valid knowledge, whose skills are valued, and which ways of learning are recognised (Carless & Boud, 2018; Sambell et al., 2013).

This chapter offers a framework for thinking about these elements through an intersectional lens and provides concrete tools for reflection, adaptation, and transformation. The goal is to support educators in developing inclusive, context-sensitive, and justice-oriented approaches, adaptable to diverse higher education teaching practices.

Discipline in-focus. Rethinking the body in Physical Education

Teaching practices in Physical Education often presume a shared baseline of physical ability, bodily confidence, and familiarity with competitive dynamics. Sessions are typically built around public performance, physical endurance, and mastery of sport-related skills, reflecting narrow ideals of competence rooted in normative assumptions about the body and mind.

From an intersectional perspective, these practices can marginalise students whose bodies, identities or life circumstances do not align with dominant expectations. Trans, fat, and disabled students, or students from low-income backgrounds, may face both physical and symbolic barriers to participation. For some, discomfort arises not only from the activity itself, but from navigating spaces, such as locker rooms or gymnasiums, that presume binary gender norms and standardised body types. Others may struggle with the mismatch between institutional ideals of athleticism and their own embodied realities, especially when they do not conform to stereotypes about masculinity, race or sporting aptitude. Class position also shapes access: students from low-income families may not be able to afford specialised equipment or may feel out of place in activities that assume prior exposure to certain sports or bodily disciplines.

An intersectional approach reframes these dynamics as structural rather than individual. Rather than treating bodily difference as something to accommodate, it challenges educators to reconsider how teaching methodologies, routines, spatial arrangements, forms of assessment, and classroom norms, can be designed to affirm diverse forms of participation. This includes valuing cooperative practices, making space for critical reflection on body norms and performance, and legitimising different ways of engaging physically and emotionally with movement-based learning. It also involves fostering respectful peer interactions and proactively naming and disrupting stereotypes that continue to shape how students are perceived and treated within physical education.

6.1.

Teaching methodologies

6.1.1.
WHAT ARE TEACHING METHODOLOGIES?

Teaching methodologies refer to the ways educators **design and deliver learning experiences**, not only what content is taught, but how it is taught and how students are supported throughout the process. Reflecting on methodology means examining formats, materials, and activities and aligning them with the diverse realities of students. This requires **recognising multiple ways of learning** and responding to inequalities shaped by gender, class, race, disability, and other axes of difference.

Traditional lecture-centric models often fail to account for this diversity. Contemporary classrooms include students with varied cultural, linguistic, cognitive and physical backgrounds; some balance work and care; others are neurodivergent or face inequalities that affect their ability to participate fully in academic life (Dolmage, 2017). When methods rely exclusively on lectures and written exams, these differences remain invisible and formats become rigid, marginalising many learners.

Placing teaching methodologies at the centre of reflection enables a **shift beyond standardisation** towards adaptive, participatory and equitable learning environments responsive to students lived experiences (Tomlinson, 2014).

6.1.2.
HOW IS INTERSECTIONALITY RELEVANT IN TEACHING METHODOLOGIES?

An intersectional approach to teaching methodologies marks a paradigm shift: it treats **diversity as constitutive of knowledge** and a pedagogical resource (Collins & Bilge, 2016), not an exception that triggers ad-hoc fixes. This perspective embraces the epistemic complexity of higher education, where multiple standpoints can enrich learning and deepen critical dialogue.

However, despite a growing theoretical commitment to student-centred learning, its practical implementation often encounters **structural constraints**. Insights from Inter-HEd workshops with teaching staff reveal this tension: while educators express a genuine willingness to prioritise students' needs and diversify methodologies, they also face pressure to complete syllabuses, meet formal learning outcomes and maintain perceived academic standards.

These competing demands are intensified by institutional frameworks that provide **limited time, resources or recognition** for pedagogical work informed by intersectionality. Many educators also acknowledge that universities themselves, through their hierarchies, assessment logics and dominant norms, actively reproduce inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics. When "inclusion" is reduced to **individual accommodations** rather than systemic redesign, inequalities persist.

Mainstreaming intersectionality in teaching methodologies requires **collective and institutional** efforts to reimagine not only classroom practices, but also the broader purposes and organisation of teaching and learning in higher education.

6.1.3.
▶ **WHAT APPROACHES, STRATEGIES AND TOOLS CAN HELP IN APPLYING AN INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE TO HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING METHODOLOGIES?**

Applying intersectionality to teaching methodologies involves questioning assumptions about students' capacities, prior knowledge, and ways of engaging with learning, while identifying barriers that exclude particular groups.

The following **guiding questions** are designed to support critical reflection on teaching practices. They are not checklists or evaluation tools, but entry points for ongoing dialogue and shared inquiry among educators, teaching teams, and institutions. They aim to

spark deeper thinking about how we teach, for whom, and with what implications:

· What assumptions do I make about how students learn, and who do I imagine them to be when I teach?

· To what extent do my activities allow students to connect academic content with their own social, cultural, or embodied realities?

· Are there any mechanisms within my methodology that address power relations/asymmetries in the classroom?

· How do I incorporate awareness of structural inequalities (related to axes of gender, race, class, ability, etc.) into my pedagogical design?

· Am I using varied formats of explanation and engagement, such as case study discussions, visual analysis, or co-created content?

· Do my methods allow students to access

and process material beyond the assigned readings or lectures?

· How can I gather ongoing, on site feedback from students on the above issues and their learning experiences?

Moreover, practical steps include **removing unnecessary hurdles**, clarifying expectations, and creating transparent frameworks for classroom dynamics. Simple yet impactful strategies, such as explaining assignments in plain language, structuring activities incrementally, and offering materials in varied formats (audio, video, and text) can make learning more accessible. These approaches align with the principles of **Universal Design for Learning** (CAST, 2018), which promote flexibility from the outset rather than retrofitted accommodations. For a more detailed discussion of UDL principles as applied to learning environments, see Chapter 4.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) (Savery, 2006) offers a valuable methodology for incorporating intersectional perspectives into teaching practice. Through fictional scenarios ground-

ed in real-world inequalities, PBL promotes critical thinking and empathetic engagement. The narrative format allows students with diverse levels of preparation or cultural familiarity to collectively analyse complex social issues, levelling the field and enabling multiple forms of contribution (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

Whenever possible, **co-creating elements of the teaching methodology with students** (for example, inviting them to contribute to case studies, select topics, or reflect on their own learning processes) can deepen engagement and affirm students' agency (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017). These approaches, rooted in constructivist and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010) and pedagogies (Widid, 2023), recognise students' lived experiences as valid sources of knowledge and challenge dominant narratives about who counts as a legitimate learner. Culturally sustaining pedagogies not only value students' cultural identities but seek to maintain and expand them within educational spaces, rather than expecting assimilation to dominant norms.

These inclusive teaching strategies gain strength when supported by institutional frameworks that translate pedagogical commitments into concrete practices. One such mechanism is the use of **Individualised Learning Support Plans** (ILSPs), which can be particularly effective when conceived not as a bureaucratic formality but as a dynamic agreement between students and teaching staff. ILSPs outline mutual commitments, embed reflexive practices, and foster shared responsibility. When regularly reviewed and backed by equity policies and student services, they provide clarity and flexibility, helping educators make principled decisions that respond to diverse needs.

Intersectional teaching activities can play a central role in this process. Far from being peripheral or introductory, they can be integrated into the core of the teaching methodology. By inviting students to share their lived experiences, these activities make visible dynamics of privilege, marginalisation, and exclusion, creating space for dialogue and shared meaning-making. They serve not only as **diagnostic tools** but also as **strategies for collective problem-solving**, enabling educators and students to address inequalities as they emerge in real time.

6.2.

Participation

6.2.1.
▶ **WHAT IS PARTICIPATION?**

Participation in higher education encompasses the **diverse ways students engage in the learning process**, whether by speaking in class, asking questions, contributing to group discussions, collaborating on projects, or expressing ideas through written, visual, or digital formats. These practices are shaped by communicative norms, classroom dynamics, and institutional cultures embedded in the wider structure of the university.

Traditional definitions tend to privilege verbal, confident, and spontaneous contributions, often marginalising those whose learning styles, linguistic repertoires, or cultural socialisation do not align with these expectations. An intersectional perspective challenges this narrow view by emphasising that participation is **not simply about "speaking up,"** but about creating conditions in which all students, across lines of race, gender, class, disability, language, age and other positionalities, can engage meaningfully, be recognised, and actively shape their learning experience.

6.2.2.
▶ **HOW IS INTERSECTIONALITY RELEVANT FOR PARTICIPATION?**

Participation in higher education is not simply a matter of individual willingness or confidence; it is shaped by how learning environments recognise and respond to students' diverse realities. An intersectional perspective shows that opportunities to engage are distributed unevenly, as multiple systems of inequality interact to shape who feels entitled, safe, or encouraged to contribute. Rather than assuming a level playing field, this approach helps uncover how participation is conditioned by students' social positions and how institutional norms can reinforce exclusion.

This perspective also highlights how different layers of inequality do not act independently but become intertwined in ways that shape **how participation is experienced** or foreclosed. A student who is both racialised and neurodivergent, for example, may experience added pressure or discomfort in classroom settings that value fast verbal responses and overlook diverse communication styles. At the same time, socioeconomic constraints may limit their access to private study spaces or support services, adding material obstacles to interaction and engagement (Williamson et al., 2020; Brown & Leigh, 2018a). Similarly, a female student with a disability may encounter intersecting barriers that combine gendered expectations with assumptions about ability, leading her contributions to be undervalued, dismissed, or misunderstood (Dolmage, 2017).

Linguistic and symbolic exclusions also matter. Both international students and administrative staff may experience language-related challenges in academic communication, particularly when limited support is available. Moreover, deeper **symbolic dimensions of linguistic exclusion** emerge in the absence

of feminatives or inclusive language in classroom and institutional discourse. Some professors explicitly reject feminised forms of address, arguing for grammatical purity, while non-binary students remain largely unacknowledged. These practices send a message about who is recognised as a legitimate subject within academic spaces, and whose identities are rendered invisible. From an intersectional lens, the way language is used reflects and reinforces broader power dynamics, shaping recognition, safety, and belonging.

The shift toward **online and hybrid education** has introduced new dimensions to these dynamics. As discussed in Chapter 4, digital platforms may increase accessibility for some but intensify exclusion for others, particularly students with limited internet access, those living in overcrowded or unstable housing, or those with caregiving responsibilities. Digital literacy and confidence navigating online platforms are not evenly distributed, often intersecting with age, class, disability, and migratory background (Williamson et al., 2020). These factors influence who can participate fully, who remains partially silent, and who must expend extra effort just to remain included.

In conclusion, intersectionality invites us to rethink **participation as a relational, structural, and affective process,** not simply a matter of individual engagement. Promoting equitable participation requires intentional practices that address material barriers, create inclusive communicative norms, and value diverse ways of contributing. Designing participation with this complexity in mind is essential for creating learning environments where all students can meaningfully engage, be recognised, and shape the educational experience.

6.2.3.
WHAT APPROACHES, STRATEGIES AND TOOLS CAN HELP IN APPLYING AN INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE TO PARTICIPATION?

Applying intersectionality to classroom participation entails rethinking **how engagement is defined, encouraged, facilitated, and assessed.** Educators must recognise that students' opportunities to contribute are shaped by intersecting cultural, social and material conditions, and reflect critically on the implicit norms that privilege certain voices while marginalising others. Guided reflection on these dynamics, through questions about classroom layout, pacing, modes of contribution, and distribution of attention, helps identify structural barriers and informs more equitable pedagogical choices.

These guiding questions are intended as prompts for collective and personal reflection, rather than definitive criteria. They help educators identify the often-invisible dynamics that shape participation:

· How are speaking opportunities distributed in the classroom? Do certain students tend to dominate discussions?

· Am I attentive to potential biases in who is given the opportunity to speak, and in how their contributions are received?

· Is the classroom (physical or virtual) designed to support dialogue and inclusion?

- Do I vary the formats of participation (oral, written, asynchronous, creative) to accommodate different learning styles and access needs?

- Have I established clear norms to foster safe or "brave" spaces for complex conversations?

- How do I respond to discriminatory remarks or exclusionary behaviours in the classroom?

- Are students given regular opportunities to express doubts, difficulties, or suggestions for improving participation?

- Do I engage all students in a way that respects their agency, avoids infantilisation, and supports their autonomous participation?

- How do I distribute opportunities for participation so that not only a few dominate?

- Am I attentive to gender, race, or other bi-ases in who gets to speak, and how their contributions are received?

Translating reflection into practice requires concrete strategies that disrupt exclusionary patterns. Insights from critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and intersectional theory (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Collins, 2000) underscore that participation must be approached as a shared, co-constructed, and power-sensitive process. Educators can diversify participation by **offering multiple modes of engagement** and **structuring tasks incrementally.** That is, breaking activities into smaller, scaffolded steps that gradually build confidence and competence, making space for students with diverse positionalities, experiences, and constraints to contribute meaningfully.

Co-creating classroom norms, clarifying expectations, providing materials in advance, and monitoring engagement collectively help embed equity into everyday teaching practices. Structural supports such as **Individualised Learning Support Plans** (ILSPs), when developed collaboratively and implemented with flexibility, can enhance autonomy and participation for students navigating intersecting forms of marginalisation (Dolmage, 2017).

Alongside these structural elements, feedback practices play a central role in fostering inclusive participation. This involves not only encouraging academic feedback, but also **actively addressing microaggressions or discriminatory remarks** as they arise. Such responses signal a commitment to accountability and care, helping to build a learning environment where all students feel respected and safe to contribute.

Resources

Practices to engage all learners

A recurring challenge raised by educators is how to engage all students meaningfully during class. This issue extends beyond diversity: it touches on the broader question of how to activate participation across diverse learning styles, needs, and levels of confidence.

Several strategies have proven effective in fostering more inclusive engagement. These include diversifying modes of participation, such as integrating group work, offering the option to respond in writing, or allowing students time to reflect before answering questions. These practices help reduce pressure and accommodate different processing styles.

Creative approaches can also support participation. Co-authored drawings, collective infographics, short poems, or role-playing exercises, when aligned with course content, allow students to express ideas through multiple modalities and connect academic learning to their lived experiences.

Digital tools offer additional support. Apps that enable anonymous, real-time contributions, projected onto a shared screen, can lower the threshold for participation and reveal patterns in students' thinking. Anonymous online surveys are another helpful method for gathering feedback about access needs or discomforts that students might hesitate to voice openly.

Together, these strategies contribute to a more inclusive and responsive classroom culture, one in which all students have opportunities to engage, feel seen, and shape their learning experience.

See for instance:

- Williamson, Ben., Eynon, Rebecca., & Potter, John. (2020). Pandemic politics, pedagogies and practices: Digital technologies and distance education during the coronavirus emergency. Learning, Media and Technology, 45(2), 107–114. *https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2020.1761641*

- Woodley, Xeturah M, & Rice, Mary F. (2022). *Designing Intersectional Online Education: Critical Teaching and Learning Practices.* Routledge.

6.3.

Assessment

6.3.1.
▶ **WHAT IS ASSESSMENT?**

Assessment in higher education refers to the **methods and practices used to evaluate students'** learning, competencies, and progress. It plays a central role in shaping educational trajectories, determining who progresses, who excels, and who is left behind.

However, conventional assessment practices often reflect and reproduce structural inequalities. Standard formats, such as timed exams, rigid written assignments, or synchronous oral presentations, tend to privilege students with strong verbal fluency, prior academic preparation, stable learning environments, or full-time availability. Conversely, they may disadvantage those navigating language barriers, disabilities, neurodivergence, diverse learning profiles (including multiple intelligences that do nor align with conventional literacy practices), caregiving responsibilities, or demanding work schedules (Dolmage, 2017; Brown & Leigh, 2018a).

6.3.2.
▶ **HOW IS INTERSECTIONALITY RELEVANT FOR ASSESSMENT?**

Assessment practices intersect with multiple dimensions of inequality, including race, gender, class, disability, and students' employment or caregiving responsibilities. When these factors intersect, such as in the case of a neurodivergent student from a working-class background or a racialised student balancing academic work with caregiving duties, they can generate **compounded disadvantages under rigid evaluation systems** (Williamson et al., 2020). Inclusive assessment requires questioning how these systems distribute opportunities: which forms of knowledge and participation are recognised, and which are overlooked or penalised (Nieminen, 2021). For example, grading that focuses exclusively on final products may fail to capture students' engagement in the learning process, their contributions to collaborative work, or how structural constraints affect their performance.

Feedback gathered during the InterHEd workshops pointed to several recurring challenges within higher education evaluation: rigid deadlines, unclear grading criteria, an excessive focus on final outputs, and limited recognition of collaborative or alternative forms of engagement. These issues tend to **disproportionately impact students who face intersecting forms of exclusion**. As highlighted throughout the Toolkit, digital inequalities further compound these barriers, students without stable internet access, a private workspace, or suitable devices are often at a disadvantage when completing online assignments or participating in virtual assessments (Williamson et al., 2020). In addition, conventional assessment formats rarely consider cultural and linguistic diversity, penalising students whose modes of expression or reasoning diverge from dominant academic norms.

Discipline in-focus. Language proficiency and assessment equity

Experiences shared during the Inter-HEd workshops also highlighted how language proficiency shapes students' sense of fairness and recognition in assessment. Several participants described difficulties in expressing their knowledge in the vehicular language, that is, the course's language of instruction, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, where academic success relies heavily on written and verbal fluency. For these students, limited proficiency could obscure their actual understanding and critical thinking.

This raised an ongoing dilemma for educators: how to ensure that assessments evaluate content knowledge equitably when linguistic fluency strongly influences perceptions of competence? Even in STEMM disciplines, where language may seem less central, disparities persisted, especially in oral communication, where clarity and confidence were often taken as indicators of understanding.

At the same time, attempts to **accommodate diversity in assessment can raise tensions around perceived fairness**. Some educators described the challenge of balancing differentiated support with maintaining a sense of equity among students. When adaptations are granted to individual students, their peers may perceive them as unfair advantages. To address this, a more inclusive approach involves offering flexible assessment formats to all students, allowing them to choose how they demonstrate their learning. This not only reduces stigma and fosters autonomy, but also normalises diversity in academic performance, reinforcing the idea that fairness is best achieved by recognising and supporting different ways of learning and expressing knowledge.

6.3.3.
▶ **WHAT APPROACHES, STRATEGIES AND TOOLS CAN HELP IN APPLYING AN INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE TO ASSESSMENT?**

Applying an intersectional lens to assessment involves rethinking both what is valued in student learning and how it is evaluated. Rather than relying on narrow definitions of academic success, educators are invited to reflect on the implicit norms and assumptions that shape evaluative practices, especially those that may disadvantage students navigating multiple structural barriers. This includes recognising how social position, material resources, and cognitive diversity influence students' ability to demonstrate learning.

The following **guiding questions** are intended as entry points for educators, curriculum designers, and coordinators to reflect critically on how assessment practices can be made more inclusive and equitable:

· Do my assessment methods allow all students to meaningfully demonstrate their learning, regardless of ability, background, or circumstances?

· What cultural or institutional norms shape how assessment is designed (e.g. emphasis on individualism vs. collaboration)? Which of these norms may create barriers for some students?

· Am I offering a variety of assessment formats to accommodate different learning styles, access needs, and learning contexts? How can I gather feedback to ensure this diversity is effective?

· How can students be involved in shaping assessment processes, such as co-defining criteria, co-assessing, or giving input on formats and timing?

· Have I reviewed my assessment tasks for implicit bias or stereotypes that may disadvantage certain groups?

· Are there mechanisms in place to identify and address grading bias? Can students play a role in co-developing these mechanisms?

· Do I value both individual and collective contributions, and consider the learning process alongside the outcome? How do I integrate co-assessment and self-assessment to foster critical reflection?

Translating reflection into practice requires more than adapting assessment for individual students; it calls for a structural rethinking of how evaluation is conceived and implemented. This involves questioning the assumptions, formats, and conditions under which learning is assessed, and recognising how these may privilege certain students while disadvantaging others. For instance, a neuro-divergent student from a working-class background balancing part-time employment may struggle with synchronous oral presentations, inflexible deadlines, or complex and long-term group tasks. These intersecting challenges illustrate why inclusive assessment cannot rely on one-size-fits-all solutions, it must be designed to anticipate diversity from the outset.

Diversifying assessment formats, including essays, oral or video presentations, portfolios, group projects, and practice-based assignments, allows students to engage through different strengths and learning pathways (Tai et al., 2018, 2021). However, format variation alone is not enough. Participatory processes such as **co-created rubrics, peer- and self-assessment, and dialogic feedback** contribute

to more equitable assessment by distributing power, increasing transparency, and affirming student agency (Nieminen, 2022).

Incorporating both process and product into assessment helps make visible the different forms of engagement and contribution, especially in collaborative work. Mechanisms like **structured peer feedback or periodic check-ins** allow students to reflect on their roles, negotiate fairness, and share responsibility for collective outcomes. These practices are particularly valuable for students navigating demanding life circumstances, such as employment or caregiving, enabling them to demonstrate learning over time and under conditions that acknowledge their realities.

Furthermore, integrating structured, respectful, and **dialogic feedback practices** is essential. Feedback should extend beyond grades to include specific, actionable guidance that recognises diverse competencies and modes of learning. Transparent communication of expectations, clear written instructions, and advanced provision of materials can pre-empt inequities, enabling students to plan and en-

6.4.

Closing reflections

gage effectively. As previously mentioned, **Individualised Learning Support Plans (ILSPs)** exemplify how structured support can be flexible and collaborative, ensuring that students with complex needs, such as combined neurodivergence, family responsibilities, or language barriers, are neither penalised nor infantilised (Brown & Leigh, 2018a; Dolmage, 2017).

▶ Across teaching methodologies, participation, and assessment, integrating an intersectional perspective involves more than adapting to student diversity. It requires reconfiguring how teaching is conceived and enacted. Methodologies grounded in **learning by doing**, active engagement, and reflexivity enable intersectionality to take shape in concrete, situated ways. Rather than treating it as a theoretical add-on, this approach generates knowledge through lived experience, allowing students and educators to collaboratively question the norms and structures that shape the classroom.

Rethinking participation through an intersectional lens shifts the emphasis from individual student performance to shared classroom engagement. Involving students in the co-design of classroom activities, contributing to decision-making, and shaping assessment criteria fosters a sense of **agency and mutual recognition**. Moreover, creating spaces for critical dialogue around privilege, inequality, and identity (Simon et al., 2022) transforms participation into an inclusive and reflective practice. Thus, engagement becomes not only a matter of being present, but of actively shaping the learning environment, acknowledging that students' diverse experiences and identities influence how they learn, interact, and contribute.

Similarly, viewing assessment as a **relational and participatory process reframes its purpose from career gatekeeping to learning co-creation**. By integrating inclusive and intersectional practices, educators can redistribute power, recognise diverse forms of knowledge and expression, and foster agency within the classroom. Students are not only evaluated but are **active participants in shaping how learning is measured, how success is defined, and how collective knowledge is generated**. This approach transforms assessment from a procedural teaching obligation into an ethical learning practice that promotes equity, dialogue, and systemic responsiveness in higher education.

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7.

Students' voices on inequality in higher education

The InterHEd project workshops provided valuable insights into how students perceive and experience inequality in their everyday academic lives. Through their testimonies, it becomes clear that barriers related to class, disability, gender, migration status, and geographic origin intersect to shape participation, belonging, and success in higher education. These are not individual or isolated challenges but manifestations of broader structural dynamics embedded in university policies, pedagogical practices, and material environments.

Although this chapter focuses on students' experiences, many of the dynamics they describe also affect teaching and administrative staff, reminding us that inequality cuts across all layers of the academic institution.

▶ Students' accounts point to multiple, overlapping dimensions of inequality. Drawing on Naylor and Mifsud's (2019) framework, we can distinguish between **vertical inequalities**, which refer to structural barriers affecting students' opportunities to access and complete higher education, such as financial constraints, limited academic preparation, or inaccessible admission procedures; **horizontal inequalities**, which reflect stratification within the system through differentiated study choices, institutional prestige, or academic trajectories; and **internal inequalities**, which emerge once students are enrolled, through precarious living conditions, exclusionary curricula, or assessment practices that fail to accommodate diversity. While analytically distinct, these dimensions often overlap and intensify each other, particularly for students navigating multiple axes of marginalisation.

As Kathleen Lynch and Catheleen O'Riordan (2019) argue, **mere access to university constitutes only the initial barrier**. Ensuring meaningful participation, understood as the ability to engage fully with academic life and benefit equitably from its opportunities, requires confronting the economic, cultural, and institutional exclusions that shape students' trajectories throughout their studies.

In this context, the following **reflective questions** can support institutional analysis and dialogue:

· How do vertical, horizontal, and internal inequalities manifest in our institution? Who is most affected by them, and in what ways?

· What institutional mechanisms or everyday practices, intentionally or not, may be reproducing exclusion?

· In what ways are students actively involved in identifying problems and co-creating solutions to the inequalities they face?

· Which individuals or groups are most often made responsible for navigating or overcoming barriers that are structural in nature?

· How can responsibility for promoting equity be more fairly shared across leadership, teaching staff, administrative services, and student organisations?

Discipline in-focus. Material inequalities in STEMM and the arts

Intersectional inequalities in higher education often emerge in subtle yet pervasive ways, particularly when institutional structures overlook the diverse material realities of students, in a context already marked by gendered and racialised barriers (Nkrumah & Scott,2022; Sekuła et al., 2018).

In STEMM disciplines such as computer science or biology, students are often required to use specialised software, access lab equipment, or participate in fieldwork. While these elements are pedagogically justified, they may unintentionally disadvantage students facing economic hardship or health-related constraints (Andrews-Clark, 2023; Cooper & Berry, 2020). For example, a student without access to an up-to-date laptop may struggle to complete assignments, while a student with a mobility impairment may find

mandatory fieldwork inaccessible, limiting both academic achievement and a sense of belonging.

In artistic disciplines such as fine arts, music, or design, structural inequalities frequently manifest through expectations around cultural capital and out-of-pocket expenses. The high cost of materials, private lessons, or extracurricular workshops can become exclusionary, reinforcing privilege even in fields often associated with creativity and individual expression. Here, financial and cultural resources operate as hidden entry points, shaping who can fully participate and thrive.

The following sections present key patterns of inequality and intersectional dynamics identified in the student workshops conducted at the three partner universities within the InterHEd project. While each institutional context reveals distinct realities, a number of shared challenges and structural exclusions also emerged. These insights are not meant as comparative findings or universal categories, but rather as situated reflections that illuminate how students from different social positions experience and interpret inequality in higher education.

7.1.

Insights from Uniwersytet Jagielloński

In the student workshops held at Jagiellonian University, participants expressed a strong critique of the **neoliberal transformation** of higher education. As discussed in Chapter 2 (Layers of inequality), this shift refers to the reconfiguration of universities under market-driven logics: the prioritisation of performance indicators, individual responsibility, and institutional efficiency over collective care, equity, and public mission. Students described how this reorientation has led to the erosion of institutional support systems and an increasing expectation that individuals bear the full responsibility for their academic success and well-being. Many felt that universities were **retreating from their social roles**, placing the burden of survival and participation squarely on students.

Economic inequality emerged as one of the most pressing concerns. Students spoke at length about their **precarious material conditions**, emphasising how scholarships, while intended to provide support, often fail to do so in practice. Eligibility criteria were described as opaque, unstable, and difficult to plan around. Rather than offering security, the system reinforces uncertainty. Those with access to family financial support are buffered from these effects, but others must combine full-time work with academic obligations. This creates a vicious cycle: working students may struggle to meet the academic performance required for merit-based aid, while their income disqualifies them from need-based assistance.

Cost of living, especially in larger cities, further compounds these challenges. The **lack of affordable student housing** and the cost of private rentals can deter students from attending their preferred institutions. Participants **commuting** from small towns highlighted how inadequate public transport limits their access to campus life and academic opportunities, deepening their sense of exclusion.

Additionally, the absence of affordable dining options on or near campus was identified as a concern, with students noting its impact on both their health and financial stability. Eating well becomes a privilege rather than a basic need, adding another layer of inequality to the student experience.

While economic struggles were central to many narratives, students consistently framed their experiences through an intersectional lens (Klein, 2024). Financial precarity was rarely experienced in isolation. Rather, it intersected with other axes of inequality, such as disability, rural or urban origin, neurodivergence, and gender identity. Students described how economic hardship forced them into **precarious jobs**, often in service sectors, while studying, with added strain for those also managing chronic illness or neurodivergence within rigid academic systems. A first-generation student working night shifts to afford a laptop navigates not only economic hardship, but also time poverty, cultural alienation, and mental health strain.

These intersectional dynamics become even

more visible when structural conditions collide: when a disabled student must choose between buying medication or textbooks, or when a trans student's scholarship is delayed due to bureaucratic deadnaming, the violence of neoliberalism is rendered tangible. These experiences underline that what may be described as "economic inequality" often reflects the entangled effects of multiple exclusions, material, institutional, epistemic, and affective, shaping who can participate fully in academic life and on what terms.

Accessibility was another major concern raised by students. Many university **buildings remain physically inaccessible** to those with mobility impairments, and digital exclusion continues to limit equal participation. Students from low-income households often lack stable internet access, personal computers, or quiet spaces for study, barriers that became especially visible during the COVID-19 pandemic but persist in hybrid and online learning environments. These infrastructural deficits not only affect academic performance but also reinforce the sense of not belonging within the institution.

Closely linked to these material conditions were **health and psychosocial inequalities.** Many students described the toll of balancing employment with their studies, leading to chronic exhaustion, sleep deprivation, and the absence of time for rest or recovery. Despite these pressures, students reported a lack of empathy and understanding from teaching staff, particularly towards those who must work to support themselves. Institutional support mechanisms, such as Accessibility Centres, were often described as inconsistent or ineffective. In some cases, agreed accommodations were not implemented, or students had to repeatedly advocate for their needs to be recognised**. Bureaucratic obstacles** were also noted, especially by students estranged from their families, who struggled to access financial aid due to rigid requirements for parental documentation.

These structural barriers were further compounded by **class and cultural inequalities**. Students from well-educated or urban families often entered university with a clearer understanding of academic norms and informal networks, while those from working-class or rural backgrounds described feelings of disorientation and exclusion. Many were unable to attend optional seminars, workshops, or networking events due to work obligations, limiting their academic and professional opportunities.

Across all these areas, a pattern emerges: neoliberal reforms have transformed universities into spaces where **structural support is replaced by individual responsibility**. Inequalities related to class, disability, and geographic origin intersect to compound mechanisms of exclusion, while the rhetoric of inclusivity frequently contrasts with students' material realities.

7.2.

Insights from Universitat de Vic-Universitat Central de Catalunya

At the Universitat de Vic – Universitat Central de Catalunya, discussions revealed how inequalities emerge at the intersection of neurodivergence, gender, class, and cultural background. These patterns are not isolated, but deeply embedded in the institutional and social fabric of higher education.

One of the clearest dynamics identified was the entanglement **of neurodivergence with gendered and class-based norms.** Neurodivergent students often navigate universities not designed to accommodate different cognitive and sensory experiences. These challenges are intensified when institutional

definitions of "disruption" or "support needs" are shaped by normative expectations, typically white, middle-class, and masculine. For example, women students are more likely to be **misdiagnosed or overlooked**, as gendered expectations of "appropriate" behaviour can mask signs of neurodivergence or create tensions when students do not conform. Class also plays a critical role: students from working-class backgrounds are less likely to have received a diagnosis before arriving at university, and may lack the language, documentation, or cultural capital to effectively articulate their needs within institutional support systems.

Even when diagnosis is available through university services, ongoing personalised support remains scarce, constrained by limited public resources. These are not merely individual difficulties, they expose how meritocratic ideals in higher education continue to **reward neurotypical, middle-class behaviours**, while marginalising those who fall outside these norms.

Mental health challenges further compound

these dynamics. While psychological support is often necessary, students support services are typically limited to a few sessions, if available at all, and do not always respond to the chronic or structurally rooted nature of students' distress. Social inequalities shape both the causes and the solutions: students who work while studying, who shoulder care responsibilities, or who lack financial stability are more vulnerable to anxiety, burnout, and depression. These conditions are further shaped by **intersecting experiences of neurodivergence, gender-based expectations,** and, in some cases, **racism or xenophobia**. Yet access to long-term mental health support remains stratified, reinforcing the very inequalities that generate the need for it.

Another critical intersection discussed in the workshops was that of **religion, gender, and migration,** particularly in the experiences of Muslim women. Whether born in Catalonia or elsewhere, many of these students navigate university spaces that render their religious identity either hyper-visible, especially for hijab-wearing students, or entirely invisible in curricula, calendars, and institutional dis-

course. They often feel compelled to self-monitor: deciding when and how to speak, which aspects of their identity to downplay, and how to perform "belonging" in environments that view them as outsiders. These are not simply cumulative barriers but qualitatively distinct forms of exclusion that elude single-axis analysis. Two recurring concerns were the lack of accessible and inclusive **prayer rooms**, and the absence of recognition for **religious and cultural celebrations** within the academic calendar. While the first relates to material infrastructure, the second reveals deeper issues of institutional (mis)recognition and a broader lack of cultural and religious literacy.

Geographical context also plays a crucial role in shaping inequality. Many students come from **rural or small-town areas**, where traditional gender roles remain deeply entrenched and often intersect with class and cultural dynamics. Women from conservative backgrounds may face pressure, whether subtle or explicit, from their families or communities to follow socially sanctioned career paths. These pressures do not disappear upon entering university; instead, they often shape students'

academic choices, time allocation, and long-term aspirations. For queer students, coming to university may offer the first opportunity to explore and express their identity, but in a small campus environment where anonymity is limited, visibility can feel risky. Fears of gossip, exposure, or family backlash lead many to remain partially closeted, which in turn limits their engagement and sense of belonging. However, at the Universitat de Vic, the process of registering a chosen name and gender identity is well-established and normalised, offering an institutional safeguard that supports students in affirming their identity. Although this protocol is an important step forward, broader concerns around visibility and privacy may still influence students' experiences on campus and beyond.

Material constraints further exacerbate these dynamics. **Transportation** emerged as a major barrier, particularly for students from low-income and rural backgrounds. Inadequate public transport means that having access to a car can determine one's ability to attend not just classes, but also group meetings, mentoring activities, or extracurricular

learning opportunities. Several students reported making difficult choices, skipping sessions, rotating attendance, or spending significant portions of their income on fuel, just to stay enrolled.

Finally, in certain academic fields such as the physical sciences, technology, or physical education, **structural inequalities can become harder to name**. This does not mean that exclusion is absent, but that it often takes more subtle forms: through silence, invisibilisation, or normative assumptions about who "naturally" belongs in these disciplines. Gender norms, racialisation, and class-based exclusion are frequently reinforced by the demographic makeup of teaching staff, participation patterns in classroom dialogue, and implicit expectations about behaviour or competence. Women in male-dominated fields, for instance, often report feeling isolated or having to overperform to gain the same recognition as their peers.

7.3.

Insights from Technische Universität Dortmund

At TU Dortmund, the student workshop illuminated how intersecting inequalities shape students' everyday experiences of learning, participation, and belonging. A prominent theme was the intersection of **first-generation status and socioeconomic background**. Students who were the first in their families to attend university frequently described feeling disoriented and alone in navigating academic expectations, communication styles, and bureaucratic processes. This absence of inherited academic capital was compounded by **financial precarity**. Several participants had to work alongside their studies to meet basic living costs, reducing their ability to engage in group projects, networking, or extracurricular activities. The combination of unfamiliarity with academic culture and economic strain underscored how structural disadvantage accumulates even within formally meritocratic systems.

Language, culture, and social integration also emerged as key intersecting dimensions. International students highlighted how linguistic barriers affected not only their academic performance but also their sense of belonging. One participant shared that even ordering a coffee caused anxiety during their first weeks, a reminder of how exclusion can manifest through seemingly minor, everyday encounters. Moreover, cultural differences in socialisation norms, such as the expectation in some countries to study together informally in cafés, revealed the absence of spaces for casual academic interaction in the German context. These observations underscore that inequality is not only institutional or structural but also embedded in the cultural and spatial norms of campus life.

Further intersections emerged between **health, time, and financial insecurity**. One student with a chronic illness described how working part-time to afford tuition fees and living expenses left them physically and emotionally exhausted, with little flexibility to rest or keep up with course demands. This case illustrates how disadvantage operates through interlocking pressures, illness, economic hardship, institutional rigidity, that reinforce each other rather than acting in isolation.

Across these accounts, a common thread becomes visible: inequalities in higher education are not experienced as discrete barriers, but as **cumulative, interconnected conditions** that shape students' emotions, opportunities, and capacity to participate. Intersectionality, in this context, becomes not only a theoretical framework but a practical tool for recognising how educational structures can either mitigate or exacerbate these layered exclusions. Universities must therefore design learning environments and support systems that acknowledge the complexity of students' lived realities, rather than addressing single categories in isolation.

7.4.

Closing reflections

The voices and experiences shared throughout this chapter remind us that inequalities in higher education are not abstract or exceptional, they are lived, structural, and deeply contextual. Rather than offering generic solutions, the aim of applying an intersectional perspective is **to foster critical reflection grounded in specific institutional, cultural, and social realities**. What emerges in each university setting depends on its student population, policy environment, and academic traditions. Therefore, the meaningful application of intersectionality is not about implementing ready-made checklists, but about engaging in collective processes of diagnosis and transformation that are attentive to context and led by those most affected.

Foregrounding student perspectives helps us move beyond surface-level understandings of access or inclusion. It draws attention to the material, cultural, and institutional conditions that shape academic trajectories, exposing how exclusion often emerges through the everyday functioning of policies, spaces, and pedagogical norms. Listening to students is not just a matter of representation, it is essential to institutional learning and transformation. Their testimonies illustrate how inequalities are not experienced in isolation but through intersecting dynamics of class, disability, migration, gender, health, geography, and more.

As Ryan Naylor and Nathan Misfud (2019) argue, dominant approaches that focus on building students' "cultural capital" or "resilience" risk placing the burden of adaptation on those already marginalised. Instead, they advocate for structurally enabling approaches that ask: "*Rather than ask how students need to change to fit into an institution, we should be asking what institutions are doing to become inclusive to all students, staff, and the wider community*" (Naylor & Misfud, 2019, p. 7). This shift in perspective is at the core of an intersectional approach: not fixing students, but **transforming systems.**

Concrete institutional change requires **sustained commitment and shared responsibility**. For instance, reducing the financial burden on students, through affordable housing, accessible dining options, or more flexible and realistic scholarship systems, can significantly improve participation and wellbeing. Revising bureaucratic procedures, including scholarship eligibility or support services, to reflect students' lived conditions and actual needs is equally important.

Inclusion also means ensuring that physical spaces, learning materials, and communication practices **are accessible and affirming for all**. Academic staff need support and training to understand how structural inequalities affect students' ability to engage, particularly those combining study with caregiving or employment responsibilities. And finally, student voice must be embedded in **institutional governance:** consultations, surveys, and participatory decision-making structures can offer key insights and create more responsive policies.

In sum, creating more equitable universities requires a shift in mindset and practice. Intersectionality offers a lens and a methodology for this transformation, one that recognises complexity, values lived experience, and embraces co-responsibility. When students are invited not only to share their experiences but to shape the conditions of their education, institutions become more just, inclusive, and capable of change.

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8.

Practical case studies

This final chapter presents a series of case studies developed within the InterHEd project, illustrating how intersectionality can be meaningfully embedded in higher education. Each case is grounded in the **lived experiences of students and teaching staff,** demonstrating how participatory, creative, and reflective approaches can help address everyday structural inequalities in teaching and learning environments. Rather than offering one-size-fits-all models, these examples are **context-specific practices that invite critical reflection** and adaptation across disciplines and institutions.

The case studies, developed during the academic year 2024-2025, include **student-led initiatives, participatory workshops, and examples of curriculum and teaching innovation** from partner universities. Each is structured around a common template that includes: context, teaching dimensions addressed, identified needs or problems, objectives, activity or intervention, intersectional analysis, evidence and outcomes, challenges encountered, required materials and time, and contributors. This shared framework supports readers in understanding how intersectional principles can be translated into concrete, situated practices across diverse educational settings.

8.1.

Practical applications of intersectionality in teaching

The following four cases were developed within the framework of the InterHEd teachers' workshops. Although workshops were held at each institution, the cases presented here originate from the Universitat de Vic – Universitat Central de Catalunya and TU Dortmund University. These specific activities were implemented either in the participants' classrooms or directly within the workshops themselves.

Nineteen teaching staff from a range of disciplines and levels of experience at the Universitat de Vic engaged in a structured process combining conceptual input with practical application. As part of the workshop, each educator designed and implemented a classroom intervention that addressed one of the project's core dimensions: curriculum, learning environments, teaching methodology or assessment. While the activities in Biology and Early Childhood Education were implemented directly in the classroom, the *Clinical Case Design Guide* was created as a resource for teaching staff to integrate intersectional reflection into their course materials. These three cases reflect the different outcomes

of this process, demonstrating how intersectionality can be translated into context-sensitive pedagogical practices.

The fourth case, developed at TU Dortmund, presents an activity carried out as part of the workshop itself. It combines the Power Flower and the Net of Similarities, two participatory tools designed to foster reflection on privilege, identity, and group dynamics among teaching staff.

Together, these examples demonstrate how reflection on inequality can be translated into concrete pedagogical strategies that promote inclusion and critical engagement across higher education contexts.

▶ Case A:
Incorporating intersectionality in Clinical Case Study Design

A. CONTEXT
This specific activity was carried out by members of the Faculty of Health Sciences and Wellbeing (FCSB) at Universitat de Vic – Universitat Central de Catalunya.

B. DIMENSIONS ADDRESSED
Curriculum • Teaching Methodology

C. NEED / PROBLEM
Clinical case studies commonly used in health-related teaching often reflect limited social diversity and risk reproducing normative assumptions about patients and their environments. There was a clear need to support teaching staff in reflecting on these biases and redesigning case materials to be more inclusive and contextually grounded.

D. OBJECTIVES
· Encourage critical reflection among teaching staff on how inequality is represented in clinical case study design.

· Provide a practical tool to guide educators in identifying bias and incorporating inter-sectional perspectives.

· Contribute to the training of future health professionals equipped to recognise and address complex social inequalities that affect health and well-being.

E. ACTIVITY / INTERVENTION
A reflective teaching guide was developed to support educators in integrating intersectionality into the design and use of clinical cases. The guide proposes a **three-step approach:**

1. **Review the case study:** Identify the subject, data presented, and any implicit assumptions or omissions.

2. **Pose reflection questions:** Analyse the case through the lens of social positions and power relations, considering potential barriers, normative assumptions, and contextual factors that shape intervention.

3. **Redesign or complement the case**: Introduce elements that reflect social diversity, such as migration background, age, socioeconomic status, disability, living conditions, or experiences of discrimination.

Example:

· Original case study (neutral version): 78-year-old woman attending physiotherapy for shoulder pain, living alone with progressive mobility loss.

· Revised intersectional case study: Khadija, 78-year-old woman of Moroccan origin, living alone in a peripheral neighbourhood with limited access to public services. She speaks basic Spanish, migrated 20 years ago, is active in her religious community, experiences chronic shoulder pain, and expresses distrust towards medical treatment due to previous experiences of racism.

F. INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS
The activity supports the identification of how structural inequalities, such as those related to gender, age, ethnicity, migration

▸ Case B:
Introducing inequalities in Early Childhood Education BA Programmes

status, and socioeconomic background, for instance, shape health experiences and care.

G. EVIDENCE & OUTCOMES
The guide functions as a pedagogical resource to foster reflection and redesign of teaching materials. It equips educators with a framework for integrating social complexity and equity considerations into clinical training.

H. CHALLENGES
· Requires time and engagement from teaching staff.

· Depends on educators' familiarity with intersectional approaches.

I. MATERIALS & TIME
· Reflection guide document.

· Example of redesigned case.

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A. CONTEXT
This particular activity was designed and implemented by teaching staff from the Faculty of Education, Translation and Humanities (FETEP) at Universitat de Vic – Universitat Central de Catalunya.

B. DIMENSIONS ADDRESSED
Teaching Methodology • Participation

C. NEED / PROBLEM
This activity addressed unequal participation within large student groups and students' reluctance to engage with peers outside of their usual social circles. Previous classroom experience had revealed how underlying socioeconomic and cultural dynamics influenced the formation of working groups, particularly between students from different educational pathways (baccalaureate versus vocational training) and geographical origins (urban versus rural areas).

D. OBJECTIVES
· Identify factors contributing to unequal participation in class.

· Encourage flexibility in group formation for cooperative work.

· Promote collaboration and interaction among students from diverse backgrounds.

E. PARTICIPANTS & SETTING
Course: *Naturalesa del Coneixement Artístic i Literari*
Degree: Early Childhood Education (1st year)
Faculty: FETEP (Facultat d'Educació, Traducció i Humanitats)

F. ACTIVITY / INTERVENTION
To promote more heterogeneous cooperation dynamics, the teaching team redesigned a core course assignment: the design of an artistic installation based on the theme *"nest"* or *"own room"*. Before initiating the group project, students completed three preparatory activities aimed at fostering self-reflection and breaking established group patterns:

1. **Childhood play space description:** Students described a space where they played at the age of five, considering whether it was shared or individual, purpose-designed or improvised, indoors or outdoors, and how it shaped their early experiences.

2. **Current personal space description:** Students described their current room, which revealed inequalities linked to housing, family context, and environmental surroundings.

3. **Group reorganisation:** Based on the typologies of childhood play spaces (shared, designed, improvised, or outdoor), the teacher formed new groups, intentionally mixing students who had not worked together before.

Following this regrouping, students co-created artistic installations while reflecting on how space, collaboration, and shared memory influenced classroom participation and creativity. To assess the impact, ten focus groups were conducted with student participants to explore whether the new dynamics fostered more equitable collaboration

G. INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

The activity surfaced how cultural, socioeconomic, and geographical factors influence classroom interactions and group formation. It encouraged reflection on diversity and collaboration beyond pre-existing social divisions.

H. EVIDENCE & OUTCOMES

Focus group findings revealed that group formation tended to be guided by practical factors such as commuting logistics and perceived academic ability, rather than explicitly cultural or socioeconomic criteria. Nevertheless, resistance to changing groups highlighted students' preference for familiar peer networks. The activity demonstrated the value of intentionally disrupting default groupings and pointed to the need for sustained strategies to embed flexible, inclusive collaboration practices throughout the curriculum.

I. CHALLENGES
· Persistent resistance among students to changing groups.

· Need for continuous reinforcement of flexible grouping across courses.

J. MATERIALS
· Descriptive worksheets for play and personal spaces.

· Group formation and artistic installation project on "nest / own room".

· 10 focus groups for evaluation.

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▶ **Case C:**
Exploring inequalities within the Biology BA classroom

A. CONTEXT

This case was created and implemented by teaching staff from the Faculty of Science, Technology and Engineering (FCTE) at Universitat de Vic – Universitat Central de Catalunya.

B. DIMENSIONS ADDRESSED

Learning Environments • Curriculum • Pedagogy and Teaching Methodology • Assessment

C. NEED / PROBLEM

The activity aimed to identify and address inequalities perceived by students in first-year Biology and Biotechnology BA degrees. It responded to the need to understand how students experience inequalities in classroom and laboratory settings and to identify actions to minimise these inequalities.

D. OBJECTIVES

· Explore students' perceptions of inequalities in the university classroom.

· Analyse how such inequalities affect their educational experience.

· Identify possible actions to reduce these inequalities.

E. PARTICIPANTS & SETTING

Faculty: Faculty of Science, Technology and Engineering (FCTE)
Degrees: Biology and Biotechnology
Year: First year
Number of participants: 136 students (survey respondents)

F. ACTIVITY / INTERVENTION

The activity involved the design and distribution of a diagnostic questionnaire aimed at identifying perceived inequalities in the university classroom. Targeting first-year students enrolled in a Bachelor's degree programme, the survey sought to gather qualitative insights into student experiences. Rather than relying on closed-response formats, the questionnaire included three open-ended questions for each thematic area:

· What personal need do you feel has not been addressed?

· How has this affected you?

· What do you think could be done to improve the situation?

These questions were repeated across the following three thematic areas:

1. Learning Environments: including classrooms, laboratories, and digital platforms

2. Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Teaching Methodology

3. Assessment and Academic Support

The responses offered a detailed picture of how students experienced inequality in their everyday academic lives. Reported **challenges in learning environments** included poor acoustics, inadequate lighting, lack of accessibility for students with mobility impairments, and limited access to computers or reliable internet. Some students also noted the absence of prayer or rest spaces on campus.

In **terms of curriculum and teaching**, students highlighted monotonous or overly theoretical classes, limited opportunities for participation, and a lack of interactive or practical activities. Language barriers, different learning styles, and insufficient use of visual or multimodal resources were also mentioned. Several respondents reported experiences of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, or age.

Regarding **assessment and academic support**, students expressed concern over an excessive reliance on final exams, rigid deadlines, and a lack of recognition for effort or participation. They also pointed to the inconsistent implementation of Individualised Support Plans and questioned the fairness of peer and self-assessment mechanisms.

In the final section of the questionnaire, students were invited to **propose concrete improvements**. Suggestions included enhancing classroom infrastructure, offering more study and rest spaces, diversifying assessment formats, increasing practical activities, improving communication with faculty, and promoting more equitable group work practices.

G. INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS
The responses revealed that inequalities in teaching and learning are linked to diverse and intersecting factors, including physical accessibility, socioeconomic background, gender, language proficiency, and learning styles.

H. EVIDENCE & OUTCOMES
Out of 136 responses, 26 students reported not being affected by inequalities, while 110 identified barriers affecting their education and provided comments.
The survey provided a comprehensive picture of the areas where inequalities are most visible and offered a basis for designing institutional and pedagogical improvements.

I. CHALLENGES
– Ensuring sufficient participation to obtain representative data.

– Designing a questionnaire that is clear, accessible, and relevant to diverse student experiences.

J. MATERIALS
– Online questionnaire on perceived inequalities.

– Data collection from 136 students.

– Analysis of responses grouped by three dimensions (learning environment, curriculum/pedagogy, and assessment).

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Case D.
Thinking about Intersectionality through the Power Flower and Net of Similarities

A. CONTEXT
As part of the InterHEd project, two-day workshops were held at TU Dortmund University to support teaching staff in understanding and applying intersectionality within their curriculum design (Mergner et al., 2025). 24 participants from different academic backgrounds, mostly with fewer than three years of teaching experience, attended both workshops.

B. DIMENSIONS ADDRESSED
Curriculum • Teaching Methodologies • Participation

C. NEED / PROBLEM
Participants were new to the concept of intersectionality and sought practical ways to translate it into their own teaching contexts.

D. OBJECTIVES
· Support teaching staff in understanding and applying intersectionality within curriculum design.

· Enable reflection on positionality and structural inequality.

· Provide participatory tools to experience intersectionality as practice rather than theory.

· Encourage discussion on how course content and teaching methods reflect or challenge dominant norms.

E. PARTICIPANTS & SETTING
24 teaching staff members from different academic backgrounds, mostly early-career educators, took part in two-day workshops held at TU Dortmund University.

F. ACTIVITY / INTERVENTION
Two participatory tools were used: the **Power Flower** and the **Net of Similarities**.

· The **Power Flower** guided participants through reflection on dominant and marginalised social positions across categories such as language, citizenship, ability, gender identity and class background. It helped surface how intersecting axes of privilege and exclusion shape not only who is in the classroom but also how knowledge is positioned, legitimised and delivered.

· The **Net of Similarities** served as a warm-up activity. Participants were asked to find shared experiences with people they did not know and to visualise these connections in a physical network. While not explicitly about power, the method prompted discussion about how common ground is shaped by social position.

G. INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS
Participants discussed how assumptions embedded in course content or examples may reflect dominant norms and how diversifying references, voices and modes of engagement could challenge this.

H. EVIDENCE & OUTCOMES
The post-workshop evaluations confirmed that participants found the tools helpful for applying intersectional thinking to their teaching. All respondents reported having gained a better understanding of intersectionality, and most had already begun implementing aspects of it in their courses.

Some participants found the **Power Flower** emotionally intense, underlining the importance of framing and careful facilitation when planning such reflections in their own courses.

I. CHALLENGES

Emotional intensity for some participants, requiring careful facilitation.

J. MATERIALS & TIME

· Power Flower worksheet or template.

· Space for participants to move and connect for the Net of Similarities.

· Duration: two-day workshop.

K. REFERENCES

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▶ **Figure 2.**
Power Flower template from WeRise (n.d.)

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8.2.

Exploring student experiences and inequalities in higher education

The following two case studies were developed in the framework of the student workshops conducted at the Jagiellonian University (Uniwersytet Jagielloński) as part of the InterHEd project. They explore how intersecting inequalities shape their everyday experiences of higher education, from access to housing and material resources, to classroom participation and collective action. Together, they illustrate how participatory approaches can amplify student voices and provide critical insight into the structural conditions that affect equality in higher education.

▸ **Case A:**
Exploring intersectionality in a student strike context

A. CONTEXT
The pilot seminar on intersectionality took place in May 2024 during a 17-day student occupation of a dormitory called "Kamionka" in Kraków, which the university authorities had decided to close. During the strike, students organised meals and discussions on strategy and tactics, as well as lectures, workshops and debates with invited guests to collectively address the housing crisis they were facing. The proposal for a seminar on intersectionality was approved by the organisers.

B. DIMENSIONS ADDRESSED
Learning Environments • Participation • Curriculum

C. NEED / PROBLEM
Students faced economic hardship, housing insecurity and lack of institutional support. The dormitory closure threatened access to affordable housing, a key condition for enabling self-supporting students to study. The seminar aimed to provide a space to discuss how inequalities intersect in students' daily lives and educational experiences.

D. OBJECTIVES
· Introduce the concept of intersectionality and its usefulness for understanding the situation of striking students.

· Create a safe and collective space for sharing personal experiences of inequality.

· Identify the main barriers students face in relation to class, housing, health, and gender.

E. PARTICIPANTS & SETTING
Approximately 50 students took part in the occupation and the seminar. Two university teachers were invited to hold the session. The meeting took place in the basement of the dormitory building, where electricity had been cut off by the authorities.

F. ACTIVITY / INTERVENTION
After a brief introduction to the concept of intersectionality and its relevance to the strike, participants engaged in an open conversation. Students shared personal stories of their experiences with econom-

Case B:
Collaborative manifesto from an intersectional perspective

ic difficulties, housing problems, mental health issues, neurodivergence, and menstruation poverty. The discussion unfolded in a setting of shared emotions, community and trust, illuminated by candlelight due to the power cut.

G. INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

Themes raised during the conversation revealed how different axes of inequality (class, migration status, health, gender, and neurodiversity) intersect to shape students' access to study and well-being. The experiences of foreign students from Ukraine and Belarus, students with mental health conditions, and those affected by menstrual poverty highlighted the multiplicity of barriers within the academic environment.

H. EVIDENCE & OUTCOMES

The seminar allowed participants to express and connect diverse experiences of marginalisation. The discussion emphasised that economic conditions, bureaucratic barriers, and health issues combine to restrict equal participation in higher education. The setting

fostered solidarity and collective reflection among students and teaching staff.

J. CHALLENGES
· The seminar took place during a politically sensitive student strike.

· Emotional and personal disclosures required careful facilitation and trust.

· Lack of electricity and formal support created difficult conditions.

A. CONTEXT

The workshop titled *"Crafting Change: Intersectionality and Student Advocacy"* was organised at the Jagiellonian University as an immersive and participatory experience for a group of students who met in three consecutive weekly sessions. The aim of these meetings was to explore how intersectionality shapes students' academic lives through theoretical reflection, creative expression, and collaborative work.

B. DIMENSIONS ADDRESSED

Curriculum • Participation • Pedagogy and Teaching Methodology

C. NEED / PROBLEM

Students experience diverse and intersecting forms of inequality within higher education. There was a need to create a space where they could reflect on these experiences and articulate them collectively.

D. OBJECTIVES
· Introduce the concept of intersectionality and its relevance to students' academic experiences.

Figure 3.
Exemplary Manifestos created by students of Jagiellonian University presenting economic struggles while studying

· Facilitate reflection on how identity shapes interactions with curricula, assessment, and learning environments.

· Enable students to co-create a manifesto expressing their collective insights, challenges, and demands for solutions to address these needs.

E. PARTICIPANTS & SETTING
Participants: A group of students from Jagiellonian University.
Duration: Three meetings in consecutive weeks.
Setting: Participatory workshop combining discussion and creative exercises.

F. ACTIVITY / INTERVENTION
The workshop introduced students to intersectionality as a framework for understanding how various aspects of identity, such as gender, race, class, and disability, intersect to shape individual experiences. Through guided discussions and readings, participants engaged with theoretical foundations and reflected on how privilege and marginalisation operate in academic settings.
Students worked in small groups to discuss how their identities affected their experiences of assessment methods, teaching styles, learning environments, and curricula. Creative exercises such as drawing, role-playing, and body sculpture were used to express emotions and insights.
The main activity involved co-creating a **manifesto**. Each group focused on a specific challenge and developed a short-written document articulating its nuances. The manifestos were later presented and discussed during a final exhibition day. The exhibition, under the title *Is a Student a Human Being?*, showcased a series of manifestos written by Sociology BA students. The exhibition was organized alongside an open seminar presenting the outcomes of the InterHEd workshops and a publication focused on the material conditions affecting student life. The publication was based on research projects carried out by students from the course *Sociology in Action*. The event aimed to bring together students, faculty members, and university authorities to foster dialogue around students lived experiences and the structural factors shaping higher education.

G. INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS
The workshop employed intersectionality as both an analytical and creative tool, enabling students to connect structural inequalities with their lived experiences and to articulate the ways in which these inequalities intersect and manifest within higher education.

H. EVIDENCE & OUTCOMES
Students produced manifestos highlighting experiences such as economic struggles, gendered expectations, and linguistic barriers. The manifestos served as reflective and advocacy tools to raise awareness of intersectional challenges in academia.

I. CHALLENGES
· Requires an environment of trust and emotional safety.

· Depends on voluntary participation.

· Needs facilitator guidance and time for collective synthesis.

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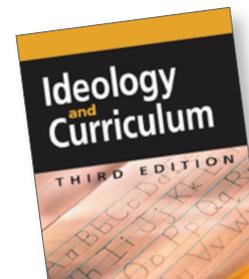
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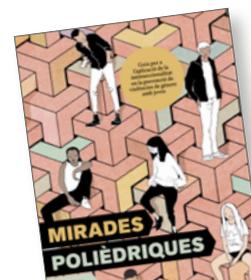
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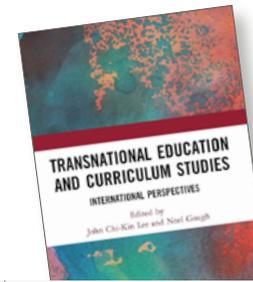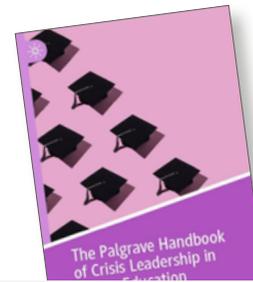
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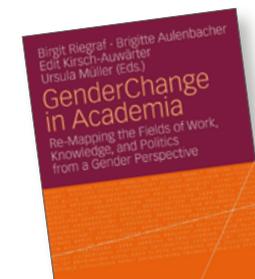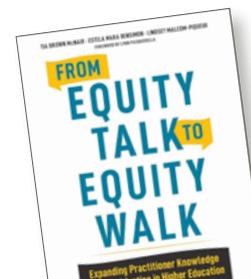
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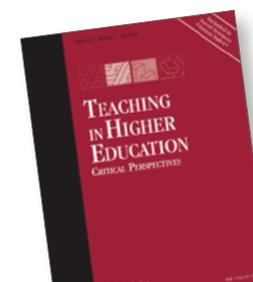
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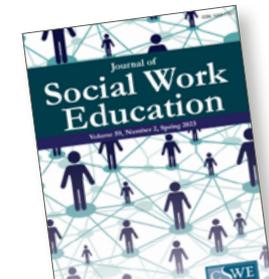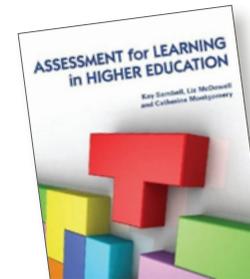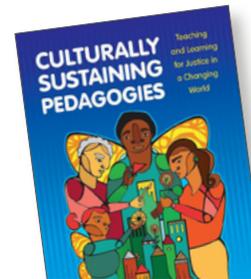Noah, Tolulope, & Souza, Tasha. (2018). What to do before, during, and after difficult dialogues about diversity. Boise State University. https://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/ctl_teaching/11/

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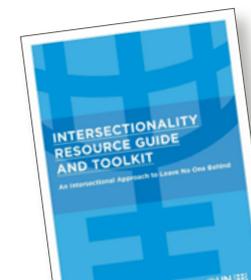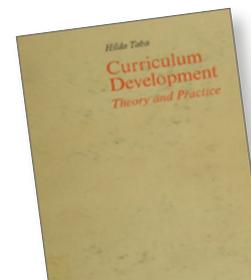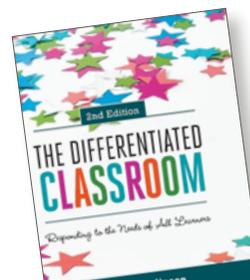
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