

# STUDENTS' TRAINING MODEL

MAPPING INEQUALITIES WITH RELIEF MAPS TOOL:  
INTERSECTIONALITY IN ACTION

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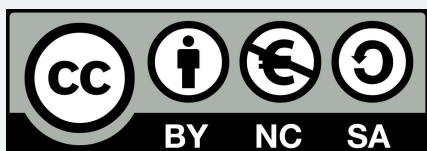
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This result is part of InterHEd, an Erasmus+ project that aims to advance towards more inclusive and diverse higher education institutions by promoting intersectional mainstreaming in higher education teaching. This Training Model has been developed under Work Package 3 (WP3): Mutual Learning and Awareness-Raising, which aims to generate transferable knowledge to support the development of pedagogical competences and curricular resources for mainstreaming intersectionality in higher education teaching.

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## 1. PURPOSE OF THE TRAINING MODEL

Over recent decades, access to higher education has expanded significantly across Europe, leading to increasingly diverse universities in terms of students' backgrounds, identities and experiences. However, greater diversity has not automatically translated into more equitable educational experiences. Despite often being perceived as neutral spaces, higher education institutions continue to reproduce structural inequalities that shape students' opportunities, participation, sense of belonging and educational trajectories.

In this context, intersectionality provides a valuable theoretical and methodological framework for understanding how multiple social positions and systems of power interact to produce context-specific experiences of privilege, discrimination and exclusion. Rather than viewing inequalities as separate or additive, intersectionality examines how dimensions such as gender, race, ethnicity, social class, disability, sexuality or age intersect within institutional and social contexts. Yet, while intersectionality has become increasingly visible in research and policy, its integration into higher education teaching and learning remains limited.

**The InterHEd, Intersectionality in Higher Education project** was developed to address this gap by supporting the mainstreaming of intersectionality across higher education teaching through research, institutional collaboration and the development of practical educational resources. Among its key outcomes are these **Training Models, designed to bridge theory and practice by providing structured learning experiences that promote critical reflection and the practical application of intersectionality.**

Recognising that educational contexts differ across institutions, disciplines and countries, these **Training Models have been conceived as flexible and adaptable pedagogical frameworks** rather than fixed teaching scripts. Accordingly, **facilitators are encouraged to tailor the activities, examples and materials to their own context**, ensuring that the training remains relevant to the realities and needs of their students while maintaining the core principles of an intersectional approach.

## 2. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A training is understood as a structured learning process designed to develop participants' knowledge, skills and critical competences over the course of a coherent educational programme. Unlike a workshop, which typically focuses on a specific activity or experiential exercise, a training combines theoretical input, guided reflection and practical application to support deeper learning.

Findings from the student workshops conducted throughout the InterHEd project identified learning environments as a key area for reflection and action in advancing intersectionality within higher education teaching. Building on these findings, this training model focuses on exploring how students experience learning environments as spaces of inclusion, exclusion, participation and belonging. As the spaces where students spend a significant part of their daily lives, learning environments are not neutral settings. Rather, they are shaped by power relations and institutional practices that can reproduce, reinforce or challenge existing inequalities. This makes them a particularly relevant context for fostering students' awareness of their own positionality through an intersectional perspective and for encouraging critical reflection on how educational environments can become more inclusive and equitable.

Designed to be adapted across diverse higher education contexts, this training model encourages students to critically reflect on how intersecting social positions shape experiences of learning, participation and belonging. In doing so, it supports them in recognising and questioning inequalities within their own educational environments, while fostering greater awareness of the role intersectionality can play in promoting more inclusive, equitable and socially just universities.

The student workshops also identified **specific learning needs that this training model seeks to address:**

- To enhance students' understanding of intersectionality through experiential learning.

- To foster students' awareness of how their social positions and lived experiences shape their learning experiences from an intersectional perspective.
- To facilitate the transfer of the knowledge and educational resources co-created through the InterHEd project to students and higher education institutions beyond the project consortium, enabling the training model to be adapted and implemented in diverse educational contexts.

### 3. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

**By the end of the training, participants will be able to:**

- Develop a **basic understanding of intersectionality** and its relevance to everyday experiences in higher education.
- **Reflect on their own identities, social positions and learning experiences** from an intersectional perspective.
- Recognise how different **social dimensions can influence opportunities, barriers and experiences** of belonging at higher education institutions.
- Reflect on and **analyse their own educational experiences through the Relief Maps methodology and tool**, fostering an intersectional perspective on their learning experiences.
- Identify **ways to contribute to more inclusive and equitable learning environments**.

### 4. CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

This training model is designed as a flexible 3-hour, face-to-face training for higher education students (undergraduate or postgraduate) that combines a theoretical introduction to intersectionality with experiential learning activities centred on participants' own educational experiences. It is intended for groups of approximately 20-30 students and can be facilitated by one or two trainers with a basic understanding of intersectionality and participatory learning methodologies. While the training has been designed as an in-person session to encourage dialogue, collective reflection and collaborative work with the Relief Maps methodology, it can

be adapted to online or blended learning formats if required. The proposed structure provides a common pedagogical framework; however, facilitators are encouraged to adapt the content, examples, timing and activities to the specific characteristics of their institutional, disciplinary and cultural context to maximise the relevance and effectiveness of the training.

The first part of the session introduces the core concepts of intersectionality and their application to higher education, drawing on the knowledge and educational resources developed throughout the InterHEd project. These include **From Reflection to Action: The InterHEd Toolkit for Introducing Intersectionality in Higher Education Teaching**, which provides practical guidance for applying intersectionality across curricula, teaching methodologies, and learning environments; the **Innovative Methodologies Report**, which presents pedagogical approaches for integrating intersectionality into higher education teaching; and the **Promising Practices Collection**, which showcases examples of intersectional initiatives and educational practices implemented across different higher education contexts. Facilitators are encouraged to use these resources to prepare and contextualise the training. **All InterHEd publications are available here.**

The second part focuses on experiential learning through the Relief Maps methodology, inviting students to critically reflect on their own positionality and explore how intersecting social positions shape their experiences of learning, participation and belonging in the university. The training specifically focuses on learning environments, as these are the spaces where students spend a significant part of their daily lives. Rather than being neutral settings, learning environments are shaped by power relations and institutional practices that can reproduce, reinforce or challenge existing inequalities. Reflecting on these spaces from an intersectional perspective enables students to better understand how experiences of inclusion, exclusion, privilege and discrimination are produced and reproduced within higher education.

## 5. MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

To facilitate the implementation of this training, facilitators are encouraged to prepare the following materials and resources in advance:

### 1. Computers and internet access

The **ReliefMaps+ platform** is designed to be completed on a laptop or desktop computer. It is therefore recommended that the training takes place in a computer room or in a learning space where participants can use their own laptops with internet access. Completing the exercise on tablets or smartphones is not recommended, as these devices may limit the platform's functionality and the overall learning experience.

### 2. Theoretical resources on intersectionality

To prepare the theoretical introduction, facilitators are encouraged to use **Chapter 4 of the InterHEd Toolkit** (see section 7. List of References. InterHEd Publications and Resources), which provides the theoretical foundations and key concepts needed to introduce intersectionality in higher education, with particular attention to learning environments as spaces where inequalities are experienced, reproduced and can be transformed., which provides the theoretical foundations and key concepts needed to introduce intersectionality in higher education, with particular attention to learning environments as spaces where inequalities are experienced, reproduced and can be transformed.

### 3. Illustrative categories for the Relief Maps tool and methodology

Section **9. Annex** includes a set of illustrative categories developed from the experiences collected during the student workshops conducted at the Universitat de Vic-Universitat Central de Catalunya within the InterHEd project. These categories reflect this specific institutional and cultural context and are intended as inspiration rather than fixed categories. Facilitators are encouraged to adapt, modify or replace them according to the realities, priorities and learning environments of their own higher education institution.

## 6. INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

The table below presents a suggested structure for delivering the training, including the recommended timing for each section and an overview of the main content. It is intended as a practical guide for facilitators and can be adapted to the specific needs, characteristics and time constraints of different higher education contexts while maintaining the overall learning objectives of the training.

### Timing Content

15' **Welcome and introduction to the training.** Welcome participants and present the objectives of the training. Briefly introduce the InterHEd project and its aim of mainstreaming intersectionality in higher education through research, teaching and institutional change. Establish a safe and respectful learning space by agreeing on basic principles for participation, dialogue and confidentiality. Where appropriate, inform participants about the purpose and format of the training and obtain informed consent in accordance with the institutional context and local ethical requirements. This may vary depending on whether the training is delivered as part of a regular course or as a stand-alone educational activity.

45' **Introduction to intersectionality in higher education.** This first part of the training will encompass a comprehensive introduction to intersectionality and the project results/deliverables, to set the working framework and enhance students' knowledge on this theoretical concept and useful tools to be used in their professional future.

Introduce intersectionality as both a theoretical and methodological framework for understanding how multiple social positions, such as gender, social class, ethnicity, age or disability, interact to shape experiences of privilege, discrimination and inequality. For the theoretical explanation of intersectionality, use **Chapter 3 of the InterHEd Toolkit** as the main reference (see section 7. List of References. InterHEd Publications and Resources). Emphasise that intersectionality is not an additive approach to inequality. Instead, it

focuses on how different social categories and systems of power intersect in specific contexts to produce unique experiences of inclusion, exclusion, privilege and marginalisation that cannot be explained by examining each category separately.

As intersectionality may be a new concept for many participants, invite students to discuss and reflect on their initial understandings of inequality, privilege and discrimination before and after the theoretical introduction. Facilitators can encourage dialogue through open questions, short examples or everyday situations that help participants connect the concept to their own experiences and recognise its relevance within higher education. Discuss how these intersecting dynamics shape students' experiences of learning, participation and belonging within higher education.

Drawing on findings from the InterHEd student workshops, introduce **learning environments** as different physical, digital, and social spaces where learning takes place. "This includes formal settings such as lecture halls or online platforms, but also informal spaces like co-working areas or common spaces, which are equally part of the student experience" **Chapter 4 of the InterHEd Toolkit** (p. 36). To prepare this part of the training, facilitators are encouraged to use **Chapter 4 of the InterHEd Toolkit** (see section 7. List of References. InterHEd Publications and Resources), which provides the theoretical foundations and key concepts needed to introduce intersectionality in higher education with particular attention to learning environments. Encourage students to connect these concepts to their own educational experiences through short reflective questions and discussion.

- 15' **InterHEd educational resources.** Present the educational resources developed within the InterHEd project, including the **Promising Practices Collection**, the **Innovative Teaching Methods Report** and the **InterHEd Toolkit** (see references below). Explain how these resources can support students and higher education institutions in further exploring and applying intersectionality beyond the training session.

15'

**Break**

45'

**Intersectionality in practice: Relief Maps.** In this second part of the training, students will reflect on their own positionality and on the privileges and forms of discrimination they may experience by using the **Relief Maps (or Maps of Lived Experience), a visual and methodological tool** developed by researcher Maria Rodó-Zárate (2014). Grounded in an intersectional perspective, the Relief Maps methodology enables participants to explore how social positions, places and emotions interact to shape experiences of privilege, exclusion and belonging across different contexts. In this training, the exercise focuses specifically on students' experiences within higher education learning environments.

Introduce the Relief Maps as a methodology for systematically exploring lived experiences through three interconnected dimensions: social (e.g., gender, social class, economic status, ethnicity and age), geographical (the different places that make up every day educational life) and psychological (the emotions associated with those experiences). By visualising how these dimensions intersect, the Relief Maps support participants in critically reflecting on the ways inequalities are experienced, negotiated and, potentially, transformed within higher education.

Relief Maps arose from academic research, specifically from the study of geography with a feminist intersectional perspective. However, the proposed model could be useful in higher education courses (Baylina & Rodó-Zárate, 2016) and many other fields, given that the issue of social inequalities, emotions and place is transversal. Although its theoretical foundations are in gender studies, it can be used for topics such as homophobia, Islamophobia, classism, ageism, racism, xenophobia, ableism, nationality and more. Possible fields of applications range from social science research, health education and sport sciences research, teaching, consulting, company or organisation management.

Clarify that the current training design focuses on the analysis of

learning environments. **For a set of illustrative example categories, developed as inspiration and intended to be adapted to different higher education contexts, see section 9. Annex.** Invite students to

create their own individual Relief Maps, reflecting on how they experience different learning environments within higher education.

- 15' **Small-group discussion.** Invite participants to voluntarily share reflections from their Relief Maps exercise in small groups. Facilitate a discussion around common patterns, differences in experiences and the ways in which intersectionality helps make sense of students' experiences of inclusion, exclusion and belonging within higher education. Remind participants that they are free to decide what they wish to share.

- 15' **Collective reflection and debriefing.** Bring participants together for a final collective discussion. Encourage reflection on key insights from the exercise and explore how greater awareness of positionality and intersectionality can contribute to more inclusive and equitable learning environments. Emphasise that the aim of the activity is not to categorise individuals, but to critically reflect on how identities, places and emotions interact in the production and experience of educational inequalities within higher education.

- 15' **Evaluation and closing.** Invite participants to complete the evaluation questionnaire (see below) and conclude the session by summarising the main learning outcomes. Encourage students to continue exploring the InterHEd resources and the ReliefMaps+ platform, using the Relief Maps methodology to critically reflect on a wide range of experiences and contexts beyond the learning environments explored during the training.

## 7. LIST OF RERENCES

### GENERAL REFERENCES

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**Rodó-Zárate, Maria.** (n.d.). ReliefMaps+: A Digital Platform for Mapping Lived Experience from an Intersectional Perspective. Universitat Pompeu Fabra. Retrieved July 3, 2026, from <https://reliefmaps.upf.edu/>

**Widido, Kaesang.** (2023). *From awareness to action: Enhancing equity and inclusion in classrooms through culturally responsive teaching. Social Science Chronicle, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.56106/ssc.2023.005>*

## INTERHED PUBLICATIONS AND RESOURCES

**García-Romeral, Gloria, & Garcia-Castillo, Marina. (2025).** *From reflection to action: The InterHEd Toolkit for Introducing Intersectionality in Higher Education Teaching.* Universitat de Vic-Universitat Central de Catalunya. [https://repositori.uvic-ucc.cat/bitstream/handle/10854/180871/artconlli\\_a2026\\_garcia\\_romeral\\_gloria\\_from\\_reflection\\_2.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://repositori.uvic-ucc.cat/bitstream/handle/10854/180871/artconlli_a2026_garcia_romeral_gloria_from_reflection_2.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

**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. <https://mon.uvic.cat/interhed/files/2025/09/Innovative-Teaching-Methods-Report-EN.pdf>

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## 8. ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

It is important to measure the effectiveness of the training in achieving the learning objectives and making any necessary adjustments for improvement.

Please find below a proposal to be adapted to each context:

### Block 1. Demographics

1. Q1 How many years of university study experience do you have? Select an option.
  - ☐ More than 1 year, up to 3 years
  - ☐ More than 3 years, up to 5 years
  - ☐ More than 5 years
  
2. Q2 Type of university studies you are pursuing. Select an option.
  - ☐ Bachelor's degree
  - ☐ Master's degree
  - ☐ PhD
  
3. Q3 Year/level of your university studies. **Select an option.** If you are studying in more than one field, indicate your highest year of study.
  - ☐ 1
  - ☐ 2
  - ☐ 3
  - ☐ 4
  - ☐ More than 4 years
  
4. Q4 What is your gender? **Select an option.**
  - ☐ Woman
  - ☐ Man
  - ☐ Non-binary person
  - ☐ Prefer not to answer
  - ☐ Other

**5. Q5 What is your age? Select an option.**

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18–24
- ☐ 25–34
- ☐ Over 34

**6. Q6 Do you have any characteristics (age, ethnicity, language, social class, functional diversity, sexual orientation...) that you feel impact your study process?**

**Select an option.**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

**7. Q6a. (If yes) Please describe it briefly: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Block 2: Previous knowledge**

**8. Q1 Had you previously heard about the concept/term “intersectionality”?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I am not sure / I don't know

**9. Q2 How would you rate your prior knowledge of intersectionality?**

- ☐ Hard to say/ I am not sure
- ☐ Basic knowledge
- ☐ Moderate knowledge
- ☐ Advanced knowledge
- ☐ Very advanced knowledge

**10. Q3 Had you previously attended any workshop or class where intersectionality was included in the syllabus?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

**Block 3. Overall satisfaction: rate each statement from 1 to 5**

**1 = Strongly disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly agree**

- Satisfaction: In general, I am satisfied with the training
- Satisfaction: The training has met my needs and expectations
- Satisfaction: I am satisfied with the trainer/facilitator of this training
- Participation: I had enough chances to engage and share experiences.
- Participation: I felt comfortable sharing my ideas and experiences during the session.
- Clarity of content: The materials and explanations were clear and easy to understand.
- Organization: The structure and management of the training were effective.
- Timing: The duration of the sessions was appropriate.
- Practical relevance: the training helped me to further understand my studying process from a perspective of intersectionality
- Interest: I am interested in incorporating intersectionality in my learning and studying daily life
- Self-reflection: this training has helped me to question my privileges / possible discriminations I have experienced
- Learning: My understanding of the concept of intersectionality and its application within higher education contexts has increased.
- Overall satisfaction: I am satisfied with the training overall.

**Block 4. Open ended questions:**

- What did you like most about this training? Please provide specific examples.
- What did you like least about this training? Please provide specific examples.
- Which topics or areas would you like to explore further in relation to today's training content?

- Do you have any additional comments or suggestions on how we can improve the training?

## 9. ANNEX RELIEF MAPS - CATEGORIES

The categories presented below focus on different dimensions of higher education learning environments and are intended to support participants in reflecting on how these spaces shape their educational experiences. They are provided as illustrative examples, based on the experiences collected during the student workshops conducted at the Universitat de Vic–Universitat Central de Catalunya within the InterHEd project. As such, they reflect the realities of this specific institutional and cultural context and are intended as inspiration rather than fixed categories.

**Facilitators are encouraged to adapt, modify or replace them to reflect the priorities, learning environments and institutional contexts in which the training is delivered.**

Together, these categories illustrate the types of experiences, places and social dynamics that can be explored using the Relief Maps methodology, as well as possible dimensions that can be represented across the different axes of the map. Participants and facilitators can create their own Relief Maps using the **ReliefMaps+ digital platform:** <https://reliefmaps.upf.edu/>

### Profile Questionnaire

#### 1. Degree you are studying

- Biology BA
- Communication BA
- Social Pedagogy BA
- Early Childhood Education Teacher BA
- Primary Education Teacher BA
- Other
- I prefer not to answer

#### 2. Year of study

- First
- Second

- Third
- Fourth
- Other
- I prefer not to answer

### **3. Gender**

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- Prefer to self-describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- I prefer not to answer

### **4. Sexual orientation**

- Heterosexual
- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Asexual
- Other
- I prefer not to answer

### **5. Age**

- 17–19
- 20–24
- 25–29
- 30–34
- 35–39
- 40–44
- 45–49
- 50 or older
- I prefer not to answer

**6. Functional diversity or condition / (Dis)ability**

- None
- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual or cognitive
- Chronic disease
- Physical motor
- Neurodivergence
- Psychological
- Visual
- Other
- I prefer not to answer

**7. Place of origin or birth**

(Full list included as provided)

**8. Place of current residence**

- Barcelona
- Other cities
- Village
- Rural area
- Other
- I prefer not to answer

**9. Race / Ethnicity**

- White
- Latina
- Maghreb or Arabic
- Black
- Romani or Gypsy
- South Asian
- East or Southeast Asian
- Other

- I prefer not to answer

### **10. Religion / Beliefs**

- Agnosticism, Atheism or Non-believer
- Buddhism
- Catholicism
- Spirituality
- Evangelism or Protestantism
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism
- Sikhism
- Taoism
- Other Christianity
- Other
- I prefer not to answer

### **11. Main language**

- Catalan
- Spanish
- English
- Arabic
- Aranese
- Caló
- French
- Basque
- Galician
- Italian
- Mandarin
- Urdu
- Other
- I prefer not to answer

## **12. Social class of the family of origin**

- Upper class
- Upper middle class
- Middle class
- Lower middle class
- Lower class
- I prefer not to answer

## **13. Difficulty making ends meet**

- Always
- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Very rarely
- Never
- I prefer not to answer

## **Relief Map:**

### **Places:**

- Home study space (bedroom, study, common area, room, etc.)
- Physical spaces (classroom, gym, laboratory, etc.)
- Virtual spaces (virtual classroom, forums, Virtual Campus, etc.)
- Practical training locations (school, care centre, field trip, public institution, organisation, private company, etc.)
- Informal campus spaces (corridors, courtyard, social areas, etc.)
- Informal virtual spaces (WhatsApp groups, social media, etc.)

## **Axes of inequality:**

- Gender / Sexual orientation
- Age

- Origin / Racialisation / Religion
- Health / (dis)ability
- Social class / Socio-economic condition

**Emotions:**

- Acceptance
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Empowerment
- Fear
- Freedom
- Frustration
- Guilt
- Humiliation
- Insecurity
- Joy
- Loneliness
- Nervousness
- Rejection
- Sadness
- Safety
- Shame
- Tranquillity
- Worry

**Classify based on your experience**

- **Oppressive**

Places where you experience discomfort due to one or more identities.

- **Controverted**

Places where you feel comfort by one identity (i.e. age) but discomfort by another one (i.e. gender). If your feelings are contradictory for one place, probably this is a controversial place.

- **Neutral**

Places where you don't experience any discomfort.

- **Relief**

Places where you feel comfortable, places that are a shelter for you and where you feel relief.

- **I don't use it**

I don't use this place.



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