Tools for Transition: Supporting the Path to Third Level Education Through Effective Literacy and Information Literacy Supports

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Tools for Transition: Supporting the Path to Third Level Education Through Effective Literacy and Information Literacy Supports

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Agenda

• Learning to Learn Module

• Online Tutorials

• Peer Assisted Learning Support Programme [PALS]
Traditionally we have thought about literacy as the skills of reading and writing; but today our understanding of literacy encompasses much more than that. Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media. (National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy, 2011)

Information literacy is a natural extension of the concept of literacy in our information society, and information literacy education is the catalyst required to transform the information society of today into the learning society of tomorrow. (Bruce, 2004)
Background

- Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT Dublin) - range of courses / 4725 FTEs

- Non-traditional students

- Literacy / information literacy / digital literacy – strategic focus
  - 3 level Information Literacy Framework (2004)
  - Strategic Plan (2009-2014)
  - Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy (2011)
Learning to Learn (L2L) at Third Level

• Rationale
  - learning skills deficit
  - first year retention issues

• Launched September 2012
  – mandatory 5 credit module for all first year students

• Modules aims
  - help students adapt to a third level educational environment
  - engage students - reflective, independent learners

• Delivery - first semester across all disciplines
Learning Outcomes

- Identify and engage in the learning process / create a personal learning plan
- Study effectively as an independent learner / work collaboratively in a team
- Manage time efficiently - plan and organise learning tasks
- Use critical thinking / analytical skills to solve a variety of problems
- Recognise importance of academic integrity, avoid plagiarism through good practice and referencing

Assessment

- Learning journal: students reflect on their learning programme of study 40%
- Project or group project, including a written research-based report and presentation 40%
- Online assessment quizzes from the Library SCORM tutorials (integrated with Moodle to facilitate grading) 20%

Delivery

- Lectures / in-class exercises
- Group discussion
- Small group tutorials
- Introductory IT workshops
- Moodle VLE
- Online library tutorials
Some Observations

• Pros
  - Active learning
  - Reflective practice
  - Improved writing / communication skills
  - Group work / interactions
  - Link to subject area

• Cons
  - Time pressures / workload
  - Lack of engagement
  - Not seeing value of L2L to other modules
  - Language difficulties
  - Poor ICT skills
Evaluation

• Over 2400 students completed L2L

• Need to assess overall impact

• Spring 2014 – online survey software - SurveyGizmo

• Discussions / interviews / focus groups
“I don’t think I would have adapted so well in third level without the support of this module...it is a huge transition from secondary school to college and this course helped me with basic skills such as reading, report writing and study skills”.

“I found the whole experience very rewarding...as a mature student this course helped me get back into education, it was helpful in so many aspects and I can use these skills for other subjects”.

“there is far too much time dedicated to the module, too heavy a workload particularly the group assignment which falls at a time when other more pertinent modules have assignments/exams due”.

I believe there can be an over reliant on Web based learning and not enough on note taking...I think more handwritten assignments would have benefitted towards preparing for a written exam”.
L2L - Next Steps

• Analyse survey findings / make recommendations
  - Integrated activities / assessments
  - Ongoing staff training and support
  - Raise awareness / promote
  - Community of practice
Online Tutorials

• Sept 2010 - self-paced / interactive / 24x7

• Undergraduates / postgraduates

• Reading, writing, grammar, research, critical thinking, report writing, plagiarism

• Multiple delivery platforms

• Sustainable / reusable under Creative Commons
Tutorials available at: http://library.ittdublin.ie/screens/tut.html

How to Think Critically
Implementation

• Integrated into academic modules via Institute VLE – Moodle

• Enhanced delivery of core academic skills / information literacy
  - Blended approach
  - Collaboration
  - January 2015 – tutorials added to 50+ academic modules
Tutorial Usage


Total Completions: 6538

- Undergraduate: 76%
- Postgraduate: 10%
- Academic: 8%
- Support staff / other: 6%

[Pie chart with the above breakdown]
Student Feedback

- Develop and reinforce key skills - reading, writing, note taking, critical analysis, information use
- Self-directed research
- Facilitate transition to higher education

“As a new student this online resource has made my introduction to college a lot easier, and helped me with my studies. I feel that I am more likely to succeed now at all levels of my course”
“PAL may be defined as a scheme for learning support and enhancement that enables students to work cooperatively under the guidance of students from the year above” [Capstick et al, 2004]

• September 2014 – PALS for 1st year mechanical engineering students through use of 2nd year peer support on the L2L module

• Aim

  - enhance student learning and develop literacy skills
  - support integration into third level
  - culture that facilitates student centred lifelong learning
The 1st Year Experience

- **Study Methods**
- **Literacy Skills**
- **Social Interaction**
- **Peer Support**

**PALS Stage 1**
- peers recruited/trained
- provide support to L2L activities
  - study plan
  - writing lab reports
  - poster creation
  - exam revision

**PALS Stage 2**
- specific tutorial sessions
The peers and project team from left to right: Philip Russell; Conor Farrell; Brian Conlan; Gerard Ryder; Paul Quinn; Sarah Talbot; Clinton McCurdy.
Initial Evaluation

• Structured interviews
• Online questionnaire – students asked to rate activities
• Benefits of PALS
  - integration into college
  - improved personal / academic skills
  - greater engagement
• Develop PALS toolkit / manual
• Expand PALS programme

“the peer network has supported my coursework and made adapting into college a lot easier.”

“the peers helped me understand the college system better and what is expected of me at third level.”
"Higher education providers should address identified shortfalls in students’ skills during their first year in higher education. This can be done by expanding the availability of induction and preparation courses for first-year students, covering skills such as self-directed learning, time management, information literacy and critical analysis". (National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, 2011)

Thank You

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References


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