



Re-imagining our curriculum  
Consolidating the First Year Experience

Prototype Project Updates:

January 2016

| General Details  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Project Title</b>   | Reading skills for first year engagement and the development of research proficiency  |
| <b>Name of Main Applicant</b>  | Dr.Brendan Devlin   |
| <b>Position Held</b>   | College Librarian   |
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| <b>Names of any co-applicants (&amp; colleges they are based in):</b>  | Philip Russell, Institute of Technology Tallaght<br>Aine Lynch, Institute of Technology Blanchardstown<br>Dr. Roisin Donnelly, DIT<br>María-José González, DIT  |
| <b>Signed</b>  |    |
| <b>Date</b>  | 28-1-2016   |
| <b>TU4D Theme (Please tick)</b>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Induction/early orientation</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Peer mentoring</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Graduate Attributes</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Learning spaces – virtual &amp; physical</b></li> <li>✓ <b>First 5,6 or 7 weeks;</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Assessment and feedback;</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Students/ autonomous self-directed learners,</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Alternative Curriculum models</b></li> </ul> |   |
| <b>Summary of Prototype project</b><br>(max 200 words)   | <p>This project is concerned with the development of critical readings programmes in the three partner Institutions of TU4D. The philosophical position informing this project is that critical reading is an integral element of academic literacy. It is envisaged that the trajectory of the project would be towards the development of integrated programmes where critical reading, critical thinking and critical writing are integrated.</p> <p>The initial phase of the project has involved the development of staff and student surveys and securing ethical approval. The purpose of these surveys is to elicit current practice and provide a framework for the ongoing development of online and face to face resources for critical reading programmes. This data will be enriched with data from focus groups. A wordpress site that includes resources relevant to critical reading programmes has been developed.</p> <p>Phase two will inform the analysis of survey and focus group data which will inform ongoing developments of existing and emerging critical reading programmes. Phase two will also involve the development of an online critical reading programme similar to that in Manchester University. The wordpress site can be developed as a reflective space where academics can share experiences and resources and enhance their critical reading programmes.</p> <p>WordPress site:<br/><a href="https://criticalreadingskillsproject.wordpress.com/about/">https://criticalreadingskillsproject.wordpress.com/about/</a></p> |
| <b>Project dates</b>   | August 2015 – January 2016  |

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| <p><b>Main proposed original project outputs for the TU4D</b><br/>(max 100 words)</p>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How to speed read – online resources</li> <li>2. How to critically read text books – online resources</li> <li>3. How to critically read journal articles – online resources</li> <li>4. Identification of relevant active reading techniques such as CREATE</li> <li>5. Identification of hardcopy critical reading textbooks</li> <li>6. To develop critical reading skills among first year students</li> <li>7. To develop critical reading programmes informed by collected resources.</li> <li>8. To consider the development of an online resource based on identified best practice in the higher education sector.</li> <li>9. To identify academics involved in or interested in the delivery of critical reading programmes</li> </ol>   |
| <p><b>Project outputs including any evaluation data</b> (max 300 words, data to be included in an appendix but can be summarised here)</p> | <p><b>Outputs</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Survey and Focus group data to be used to further develop Wordpress site and additional resources relating to critical reading to be identified and developed.</li> <li>2. Ethical approval for project obtained for DIT and ITB,ITT pending</li> <li>3. How to speed read – online resources</li> <li>4. How to critically read text book – online resources</li> <li>5. How to critically read journal articles – online resources</li> <li>6. Identification of relevant active reading techniques such as Create</li> <li>7. Identification of hardcopy critical reading textbooks</li> <li>8. To identify academics involved in or interested in the delivery of critical reading programmes</li> </ol> <p>The decision to place the project within a research based framework resulted in the decision to conduct staff and student surveys and focus groups. The difficulty in a timely acquisition of ethical approval has impeded some deliverables. To date, we still await ethical clearance from one institution. What is included below are plans for evaluating the pilot stage.</p> <p><b>Steps in Evaluation for this Pilot Project</b></p> <p>We planned for a number of stages in the pilot project in order to evaluate its outputs in relation to the TU4D themes identified above.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understand what our project is trying to achieve [completed]</li> <li>2. Develop an evaluation plan [completed]</li> <li>3. Select the potential participants from the first year student population across the three institutions [completed]</li> <li>4. Collect data/information [still awaiting ethical clearance]</li> <li>5. Analyse and interpret the data/information</li> <li>6. Report on and use our findings</li> </ol> <p>We believe that the evaluation will also help us to learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What worked and what did not?</li> <li>• How can we repeat the successes and minimise the mistakes?</li> <li>• To discover if the project is sustainable?</li> </ul> |

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|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To know that the evaluation will contribute to our evidence base around what works.</li> </ul> <p>Please see Appendix 1 for complete information on project outputs and evaluation</p>   |
| <p><b>Lessons Learned</b><br/>(max 200 words)</p> | <p><b>Collaboration across TU4D Institutes</b></p> <p>Over the last number of months members of the group had the opportunity to meet, talk and exchange ideas on the project. This process revealed the multidisciplinary nature of the group which will enrich the project moving forward. This collaborative approach provides a solid foundation for engaging the various stakeholders of the project: students, academic staff and student support services.</p> <p>A considerable amount of time was used to put in place online communication systems (Google Hangouts) and online dissemination platforms (WordPress site). The usability of these platforms will bear fruit in the next phase of this project. The development of a communication framework that caters to the diverse locations of team members is an essential feature for organising the project moving forward.</p> <p>The unwieldy framework for gaining ethical approval across the partner Institutions has proved an impediment to achieving all our intended deliverables in Phase 1. However we have developed an online hub our WordPress site which we see as accelerating progress in phase two of the project. We finish phase 1 with a cohesive team with a streamlined communication process and a plan for developing the project in the months ahead.</p>  |
| <p><b>Next stage</b>(max (max 200 words)</p>      | <p>Phase I required the groundwork of survey design and ethical approval. In Phase II the surveys will be distributed to students and staff across the three institutes. An analysis of the survey results will be used to structure the focus groups and elicit a rich dataset of the current experiences and needs of first-year students and their lecturers.</p> <p>The project team is comprised of members who teach both in the classroom and via online tutorial development. The rich dataset and continuous collaboration with lecturers will inform the design of both face-to-face and online resources. These resources will support project outputs, e.g. speed-reading, active reading, critical reading etc. The resources will support students during induction, initial assignments in the crucial 5-7 week period, and throughout first year as they become autonomous, self-directed readers.</p> <p>Phase II will see the ongoing development and sharing of resources on critical reading skills, both physical and online. The project's WordPress site will be developed as a resource to support critical reading skills across the three institutes. Further funding will be sought to develop the physical collection of resources, to facilitate the development of online tutorials and face-to-face lessons, and to highlight the importance of supporting critical reading skills in TU4D's curriculum.</p> |

## Appendix 1: Project outputs including any data evaluation

As we have reached the end of the pilot stage of the project (and reflections in Wordpress have indicated), we have been constrained on beginning the data collection process of administering the two surveys and initiating the resultant focus group interview, by the length of time taken to achieve ethical clearance across the three institutions. To date, we are still awaiting ethical clearance from one institution. What is included below are our plans for evaluating the outputs of the pilot stage.

### List of outputs aligned to TU4D themes

We will be continuing to work on developing the following rubric (Table 1) to help us with evaluating the outputs of the project with the developing of critical reading skills within the first year learning experience across the three institutions.

Table 1: Pilot Project Evaluation Rubric aligned to TU4D Themes

| <b>Pilot Project Evaluation Rubric</b> |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
| <b>Evaluation Dimensions</b>           | <b>Supporting students at the induction stage in critical reading skills</b>   | <b>Supporting students within the crucial 5-7 weeks of first year in critical reading skills</b>               | <b>Supporting students to be autonomous self-directed learners in critical reading skills</b> |
| <b>Purpose</b>                         | Aim: To motivate students to use reading lists and understand the importance of pre-lecture reading  | Aim: To strengthen reading comprehension to empower students to use academic sources appropriately.            | Aim: To develop critical reading skills and the capacity for independent learning.            |
| <b>Content</b>                         | To enable students to critically read academic texts   | Presenting and exploring the value of specific critical reading techniques including SQ3R, active reading etc. | Presenting and exploring g content analysis, contextualisation and synthesis.                 |
| <b>Organisation</b>                    | A combination of face-to-face lesson plans and online tutorials based on the findings of staff and student surveys and focus groups. While we have documented three relevant themes we believe that other themes are or can be incorporated into critical reading programmes so that all themes are addressed. |  |   |

### Steps in Evaluation for this Pilot Project

We planned for a number of stages in the pilot project in order to evaluate its outputs in relation to the TU4D themes identified above.

1. Understand what our project is trying to achieve [completed]
2. Develop an evaluation plan [completed]
3. Select the potential participants from the first year student population across the three institutions [completed]
4. Collect data/information [still awaiting ethical clearance]
5. Analyse and interpret the data/information
6. Report on and use our findings

We believe that the evaluation will also help us to learn:

- What worked and what did not?
- How can we repeat the successes and minimise the mistakes?
- To discover if the project is sustainable?
- To know that the evaluation will contribute to our evidence base around what works.

In order to ascertain if our project is ready for evaluation, it is important to clearly define the following: • the problem being addressed • how this project will address the issue or problem • the target groups and • the primary objective/s or purpose. This has all been completed and is indicated elsewhere in this report.

The evaluation model that we are using is an **Impact Evaluation**, see Figure 1 below – to assess short term objectives which suggest that our larger goals are being achieved. This was chosen because impact evaluations are easier to measure as they consider benefits in terms of changes in beliefs and attitudes, skills, behaviour, and structures in relation to the supports for first year students in critical reading skills.

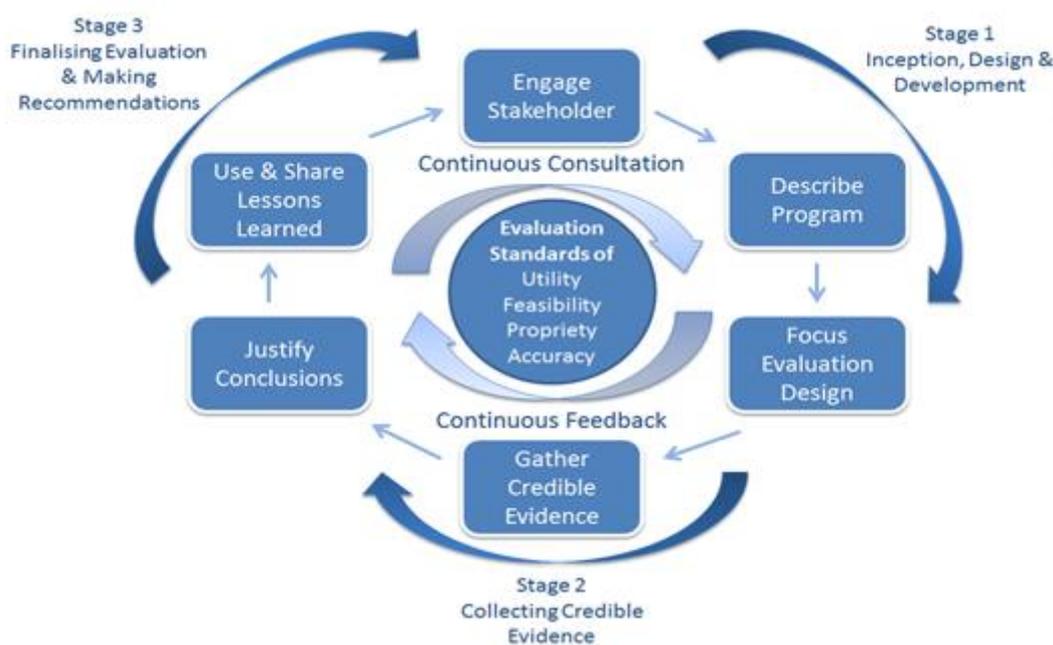


Figure 1: Evaluation Approach to the Pilot Project

For this impact evaluation for the pilot study, information or data about a defined group or population needed to be collected. We decided to use purposeful sampling from the first year student population across the three institutions. We intend to pilot our student and staff survey to ensure that it collects the information we need, and at the same time that the first year participants or their lecturers will not be offended by or feel uncomfortable with the process.

**Online student and staff survey** – we are using these to obtain a broad understanding from a relatively large first year student population across DIT, ITT and ITB. The surveys comprise of forced choice and open ended questions with spaces for short replies. Careful attention was given to the construction of the two surveys to ensure that they were appropriate and that the participants can understand and are able to answer the questions that are being asked.

**Focus Groups** – we decided to use these for gathering in-depth information, which may be further enriched by the sharing of ideas and thoughts within the group. We are aware that the limitations include the cost of getting a group of people together, and the need to employ a trained facilitator who is able to effectively manage group interactions. In order to obtain the information we require, careful consideration is being given to the selection of participants and the types of questions that are asked.

**WordPress Blog** – We are using this to record the processes and accomplishments of the entire pilot project. We are starting to find it useful for tracking various decision making processes across this collaborative working group.

**Thinking ahead to analysis and interpretation of our data**

The process will involve the following steps:

- Preparing our data so that it is all together and easy to read.
- Analysing our data in order to develop a general sense of what it is telling us.
- Interpreting our data which involves reflecting upon the analysis and presenting an understanding which integrates the mass of information that has been collected.

Finally, findings of our evaluation will also be used to support a learning environment by providing a focus for group reflection; empowering the project to move forward and; documenting the process for other staff involved in first year across the TU4D institutions.