

# ***Inquiry-based Learning Development Cases***

## *Reading Skills in Level 1 Spanish*



1. *Where I/we started from and wanted to achieve*
  2. *What happened*
  3. *What worked*
  4. *What I/we learned and how it will be taken forward*
  5. *Any other comments*
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### **1. Where I/we started from and wanted to achieve**

Prior to this project language work in the Department adopted a variety of approaches, but a common feature is the need for students to participate as active partners in the learning process. Activities such as open-ended exercises and problem solving, while present at all levels of study, had not used ICT in ways that broke away significantly from more traditional modes of (paper) delivery that rely on the member of staff as the central point of contact. While there was some collaborative work in the language teaching programme, it was thought that there was scope for this to be embedded to a far greater degree. At the same time it was felt that this offered a valuable opportunity to increase levels of student autonomy. By writing the project into core modules at each level of study, it was hoped that its impact would be ongoing, with refinements envisaged in the light of experience in the implementation period, and that the projects would emerge as flagships to encourage colleagues to develop the rest of the Department's language teaching programme along similar lines.

Other **contexts** which influenced the project at the outset were:

- Rapidly rising staff-student ratios There was thus a perceived need to find ways to reduce the pressure on teaching staff.
- There was a gap between the abilities of students to work with native language texts and the department's expectations of their abilities. Student questionnaires from previous iterations of the module indicated that students wanted more opportunities to engage with texts
- Students expressed a desire for more language contact.
- Students were often ahead of academic staff in terms of their ICT and information literacy skills.
- Increasingly, there was a desire to accommodate a wider variety of learning styles and needs.

The project had the following **aims and objectives**:

- **Students**
  - develop requisite information literacy & ICT skills.
  - approach their studies with increased independence, engagement and ownership.
  - work confidently, autonomously, and take responsibility for their learning.
- **Staff**
  - teaching time is used more efficiently and effectively because demand for intensive staff input to students' language work decreases.
  - develop ICT and information literacy skills and knowledge.
  - use features of the virtual learning environment, such as discussion boards to create and manage an effective learning environment.
  - increase their understanding and teaching of information literacy and use of 'new' teaching technologies.
  - increase their skill and confidence in using IBL approaches that encourage more independent student learning.
  - are able to enjoy teaching more, partly because teaching and learning becomes more of a two-way process.
- **Department**

- Alternative methods and delivery of curriculum are developed that can be applied in other course modules across the department.
- Extra resources become available to students.
- There is a greater sense of coherence in department approaches and use of both staff and ICT resources.
- There is increased departmental capacity to effectively meet the learning needs of increasing numbers of students through the development of new materials and teaching strategies.
- IBL Projects become a model for other language modules and courses across the Department and the School of Modern Languages and Linguistics.

## 2. What happened

The project built upon the following strengths within the Department and the teaching team:

- Knowledgeable and teaching-oriented staff many of whom have teaching qualifications;
- A range of existing materials that could be adapted for the purposes of this project;
- Many students were already familiar with the use of the virtual learning environment.

The following resources were used to support further innovations:

- Staff time was needed to develop the materials;
- Technical design assistance was sought to support the development of the virtual learning environment (software selection; application development; ensuring sustainability);
- Connections were made with the Library to support the information literacy strand of the project.

The following teaching & learning approaches/ activities were developed/ carried out:

1. A package of materials were developed that covered information literacy and related skills. This was hosted on the virtual learning environment and was used in conjunction with the core Level 1 study skills module 'Reading Skills'. This module involved 3 groups of 40 students who have an hour of contact time per week. The 'Reading Skills' module covers most of the 7 pillars of Information Literacy, especially at the 'lower end', although students are also required to compare and evaluate texts (for example, in terms of their denotative and connotative aspects), and to synthesise and create information (for example, through the preparation of summaries).
2. Existing paper-based portfolio and seminar-based delivery was supplemented by the use of web-based problem exercises, both individual and collaborative, to encourage students to prepare more effectively in advance of class discussions by attempting to resolve the problems themselves.
3. Use was also made of online materials accessed through the Library's e-journals page and the Library's Information Skills tutorials. Students who follow *ab initio* Spanish at L1 were able to use this package in an equivalent core 'Reading Skills' module in semester 1 of Level 2.
4. Quizzes were used to stimulate engagement with texts and these included elements of feedback which had been identified as an area where students felt the module needed development.

## 3. What worked

This project effectively combined the development of students' information literacy with acquisition of key study skills.

By encouraging the students to engage with problems in advance of contact time with staff in the classroom students could take full advantage of staff contact because they had prepared to a greater level than was previously the case. Staff were able to achieve the same outcome

as they were able to be better prepared for lesson and thus increased their engagement with the students.

The IBL elements of the Reading Skills module introduced all students on the post-A level course to a range of inquiry-related learning strategies at Level 1, thereby preparing them for further use of these skills at subsequent stages of their programme.

The project formed part of a broader effort to embed collaborative inquiry, self-reflection, autonomous learning and use of ICT into core modules at level 1, 2 and 3 and should therefore have had a significant impact on the student learning experience at all levels of the degree programmes offered in the Department. The exact extent of this impact will become clearer over subsequent years.

<b>4. What I/we learned and how it will be taken forward</b>
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<b>5. Any other comments</b>
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