Elevating Engagement in a Virtual Lesson: The Case at SIT Library

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OBJECTIVE

With the COVID-19 pandemic shifting learning online, the purpose of this study was to determine how the librarians could continue to effectively facilitate learning, and how the lessons they learned could be helpful to other educators.

INTRODUCTION

As a university of applied learning, the Singapore Institute of Technology Library has always used applied learning pedagogies to help the students explore and apply critical thinking skills in selecting, evaluating, and using information.

The Librarians also work closely with the Faculty to ensure the concepts of information searching are constructed within the context of the student projects. The lessons are heavily case-based and require careful classroom facilitation.

If education is a "social activity based on communication" where the communication is both verbal and non-verbal (Al Tawil, 2019, p. 145), the librarians were keen to explore what happens when the non-verbal side is almost completely removed.

APPROACH TO TEACHING

applied learning pedagogy

student course projects

faculty support

group work

case-based approach requiring careful classroom facilitation
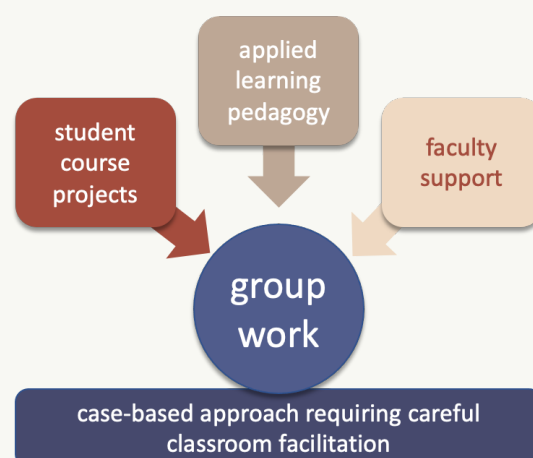
METHODOLOGY

SIT Librarians engage the students online in varying ways using

- breakout rooms for group work
- chunking for easily digestible learning
- humor because learning should be fun
- Zoom annotations for sharing answers to questions
- blended learning that combines asynchronous modules with online classes
- well-designed slides to avoid Death by PowerPoint, e.g. https://mcdreeamiemusings.com/blog/2019/4/13/gsux1h6bnt8lqjd7w2t2mtvfg81uhx
- engagement triggers to grab attention (Omura et al., 2019
- online polls and virtual walls to increase social presence (Community of Inquiry)
- higher order thinking skills (Bloom's taxonomy) e.g. How would this article rate on the CASP Cohort Study checklist? http://bit.ly/3iJzB7y

RESULTS

When it comes to asynchronous online learning, the librarians found that the use of informal language, music, videos, humor, and a strong Social Presence from the Community of Inquiry framework worked best.
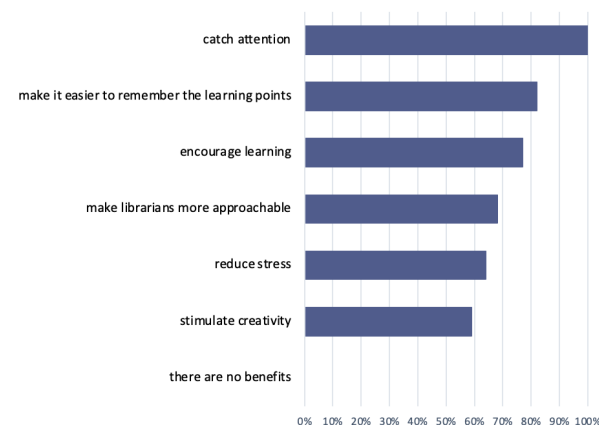
To explore the statistical validity of the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores for the asynchronous online programme, a paired samples t-test was applied and the difference was found to be statistically significant – an indication that the programme is successful in helping the students learn.

The feedback gathered from the other online sessions and events was most encouraging as it shows that, after one or two hiccups, the librarians were able to engage the students, meet their needs, and continue to help them learn.

Paired Samples t Test showed a significant difference
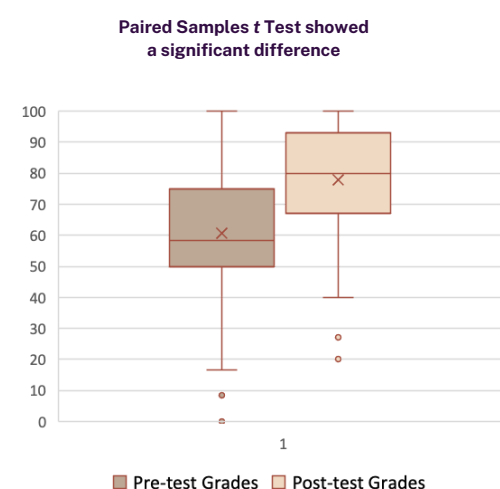
The asynchronous online library module helped the students

The benefits of using humor online, according to SIT students

catch attention
make it easier to remember the learning points
encourage learning
make librarians more approachable
reduce stress
stimulate creativity
there are no benefits

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Humor works well

CONCLUSIONS

- Teach less, so the students can learn more
- Virtual lessons are very different - plan carefully to avoid emergency eLearning (Muller et al., 2021)
- Put your "heart and soul into the class" (Acevedo, 2020, p. 12461) as the students now need more support than ever

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Which engagement strategies have you used in your virtual classes?

Scan this QR Code to participate in a poll!