Enhancing Engagement Levels using Kahoot!

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Critical Issue

The aim of the intervention, put in place, was to enhance levels of engagement within a particularly small Criminology module. Apart from one student, the large majority of the students were foreigners who seemed intimidated and overwhelmed by their university experience. This is consistent with research which shows that 'shy or intimidated students are less likely to participate in discussions and activities, as well as students who first language is not English' (Bonk and King, 1998; Saunders and Gale, 2012). There seemed to be no camaraderie within the group. No apparent friendships were forms and there was no cohesion within the group, forming the platform for the lack of engagement. This intervention sought to explore one specific way which would aid in increasing levels of engagement among a timid cohort of students.

Literature Review

Engagement has been defined as 'students involvement with activities and conditions likely to generate high quality learning (The Australian Council of Education Research, 2008: vi). Akey (2006) suggests that engagement is '...the level of participation and intrinsic interest that a student shows' (p.6).

The benefits of engagement are extensively researched. Vygotsky (1978) posits that synergy among peer groups, discourse, communication and discussion are crucial aspects of learning as students begin to give meaning to the content which they have learnt. Research shows that student achievement has been positively correlated with engagement (Salamonson et. al., 2009). Moreover, student engagement is linked with a positive student experience, amplified rates of student satisfaction, their overall mental well-being and the ability of students to withstand challenges (Markwell, 2007). Harper and Quaye (2009) link engagement to student's cognitive development, moral, ethical and psychological development and identity formation. On the flip side, disengagement has been strongly correlated to higher number of drop-out rates (Harper and Quaye, 2009).

There is extensive research on engagement in many academic disciplines (Albers, 2007). However, there is very little research on ways to improve student learning within the pedagogy of criminology or the Criminal Justice system. Some research has been conducted to identify the best strategies of improving learning outcomes for students (Haggis, 2009). Young and Nicolas (2017) of using digital technology to alleviate the low levels of engagement. This research found that digital learning approaches succeeded in overcoming the challenges of low engagement levels (Young and Nichols, 2017).

Intervention

In order to enhance student engagement, the interactive technological tool of Kahoot! was used. Kahoot! is an interactive quiz which is useful in finding how much the students have learnt on a particular module. It allows the student to demonstrate what they have learnt. Kahoot can take place in pairs or groups and encourages collaborative learning.

Data

Following the intervention, the students were asked for feedback on the usage of Kahoot! Students remarked that they liked the fact that they could enter the quiz without revealing their identity and compete against the fellow students to achieve the highest score. Some commented that it made them aware of any gaps in the knowledge and certain material which they would need to revisit. The anonymous element of it removes the shame of scoring a low mark. 'It was such fun', 'It reminded me of who wants to be a millionaire. 'Great ending to the lecture'.

The peer who observed this intervention remarked that she felt that the students seemed 'to get into it…it worked well from an engagement point of view as all students took part and appeared to have enjoyed the competitive aspect of Kahoot'. This is in line with the research of Huessein (2015) who found that student satisfaction surveys reveal that Kahoot was rated notably high on student enjoyment scale.

A further impact of the intervention is that it allowed students to identify their gaps in the knowledge and empowers them to determine where their strengths lie. It allowed the lecturer to surmise which material had been understood and internalised and which material ought to be redelivered or delivered in a different fashion in the future.

Conclusion

The present generation of students, as a result of their prolific use of technology, have been referred to as the Net Generation (Saunders and Gale, 2012) or Homo Ziappines (Veen and Vrakking, 2006). Combining various strategies of teaching and learning, together with blending digital activities can allow students the prospect of engaging more freely and be uninhibited. Incorporating Kahoot into the lectures with the less engaged students allows communication with students 'in their own language'. On the whole, the use of this digital learning approach allows students to engage with the material with more confidence.

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