ATTENTION PLEASE !

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ABSTRACT

This intervention looks at ways of improving student engagement in the creative disciplines. To do so, a range of theories such as constructive alignment, active learning, problem solving and peer learning have been explored, together with more specific ones, such as 'Computational thinking' which explore how to teach specific software in a more engaging way.
A series of steps were introduced allowing students to actively engage with the subject. A variety of visuals and text were distributed during and after the classes; clear learning objectives were presented; live exercises were carried out and continuous assessment and feedback took place throughout the sessions. However, the IT skills gap amongst the students has shown to be a key issue in engagement, leading to the need to strategically plan teaching sessions to aim at different skill levels in order to close the gap and simultaneously to maintain engagement thought the sessions.

REFERENCES

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CRITICAL INCIDENT

I work as media production technical demonstrator across creative e subjects for the London School of Fashion Media and Design and was requested by a lecturer in fashion to deliver a workshop on image postproduction techniques. The request came midterm, so students had progressed to a certain level but I had no knowledge of the students and their skill levels.
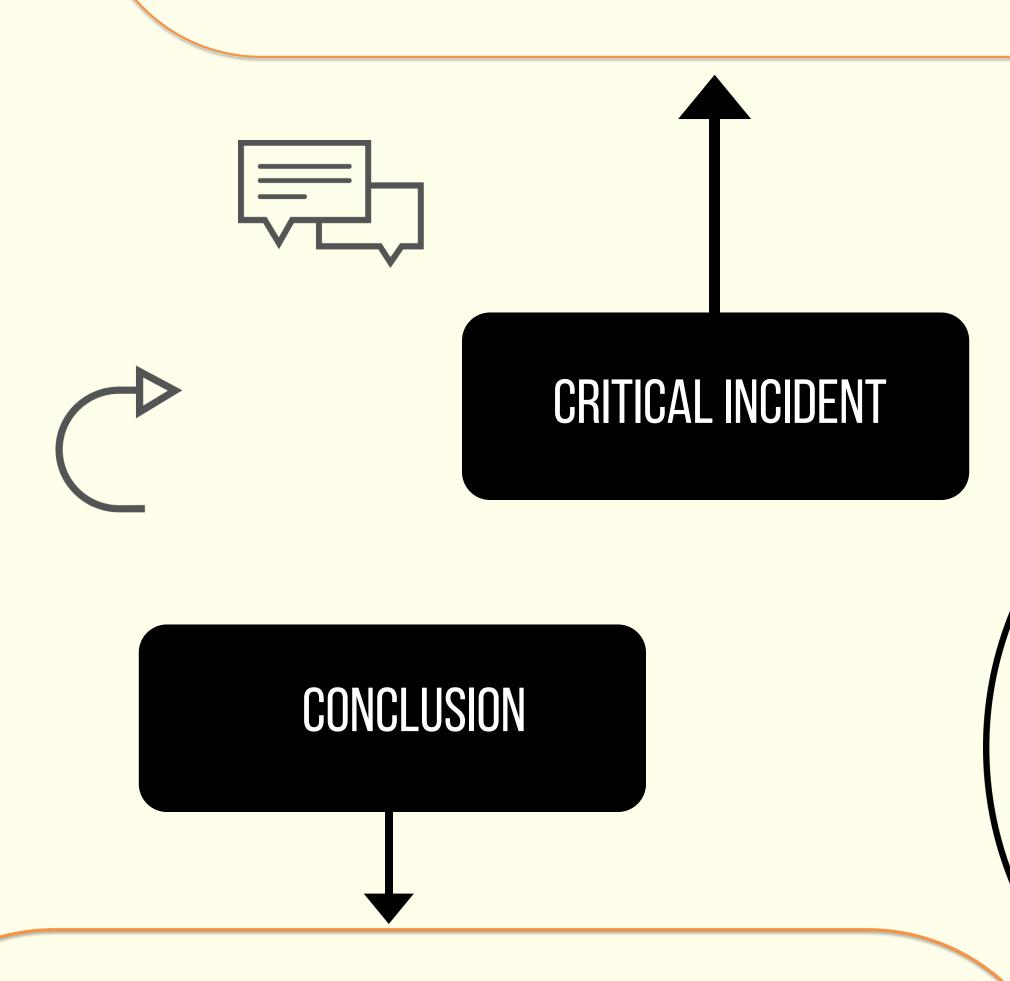I was presented with a brief introduction to each student's project where it became apparent that each student was working on varied subject matter linked by a common unique selling point namely 'sustainability'. My initial discussions started with the aesthetic of the image followed by the application of specific tools to convey the key message. This exercise fully engaged the students for a short period of time, but soon after I noticed some students diverted into other work as this particular workflow may not have applied directly to their own or were not as advanced as others. This have resulted to a lack of engagement across the full class.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To address this issue, key topics in the literature were researched focussing on the subject of engagement Trigwell, Prosser and Taylor (1994) identified different approaches to teaching, such as 'teacher- focused strategies' and the 'student-focused strategies'. Student-focused strategies, require the teacher to promote critical thinking, and, by doing so, enhance levels of engagement. Trigwell, Prosser and Waterhouse (1999 investigated the relationship between teaching approaches to students' approaches to learning and found a direct relationships between the two. This outcome suggests that teacher-focused approaches end with students adopting surface learning whereas student-focused approaches result in student's deep learning and higher levels of engagement. Similarly, Biggs and Tang (2011), in discussing constructive alignment, state that the learner constructs their knowledge through activities which are directly linked to the assessment tasks. Something that Biggs (1996) states is supported by objectives that are specified in the activities in which students have to complete.
The combination of these positions, together with an active learning approach, such as 'Buddying' or 'Group Working' (Shreeve, Wareing & Drew,2009, p.345) and 'Computational thinking' (Wing,2006), for software users which it is based on problem solving including mind mapping, seemed to be the basis for students to acquire their skills in a more engaging and exciting way.
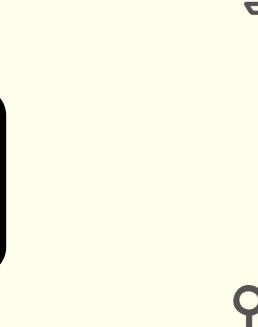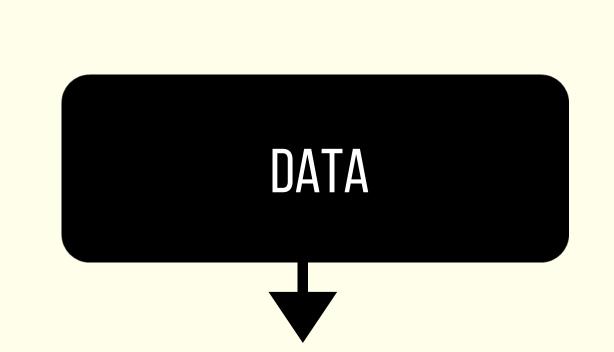
INTERVENTION

The first step was to assess students' skills in order to pitch at the right level. This was done by sending a 'traffic light' test through the University online platform. This allowed me to evaluate students' skills and to tune a lesson plan in line with the FHEQ (The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies, 2014) to the students' needs.

The second step was the introduction of a presentation with clear objectives at the start of the class, and the use of a mind mapping approach with relevant problems and solutions related to images (which consequently led to the application of the appropriate software's tools) to stimulate independent work, problem solving and critical thinking. Lastly, students were paired in class using the 'buddying' technique with the aim of learning from each other.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

DATA

Two sources of data were collected to assess the impact of this intervention: mentor feedback and my professional reflections.

DATA MENTOR'S FEEDBACK

Preparation
- Aims are appropriate to the learning outcomes.

Delivery
- Overall students look very comfortable within the classroom.
- Pictures are given to highlight key points; power point slides are simplified so students fully engage with what the lecturer is saying.
- Students were given both a visual and written explanation of the tool in use, with some examples of what the image looked before and after the tool was applied.
- The tutor could be heard throughout the room, and regularly checked on each pair to make sure they understood the use of the tool, through their own work. This enabled students to work at their own pace so they did not get frustrated.
- Active Learning and Student Engagement
- Students freely asked questioned and were willing to experiment with the images they had taken. Students felt comfort enough to ask questions, especially as there were many opportunities for students to have one to one contact with the tutor which made them more relaxed.
- Students were able to work in groups and use the information on the power point shown as a guide.
- The class was very interactive and open to discussion.

DATA MY REFLECTION

Post evaluation of the workshop and the learning methodologies applied, it was notable that the general level of student engagement increased, however the IT skill gap was a recurrent issue. This could be supported through handouts and mini exercises distributed to students during the session which would have further maintained the whole class engagement as all students would have engaged with a specific activity at their individual skill level.

CONCLUSION

During this intervention a series of relevant teaching/learning methodologies aimed at student engagement were applied (constructive alignment, peer learning, active learning) as guidance for increased engagement. However, although engagement and participation were notably increased as perceived by the knowledge student gained from the sessions, the student IT skill gap remained. This skill gap (particularly in creative subjects which require the use of specific software) then becomes the predominant reason for disengagement. Therefore it appears that in order to maintain full engagement, the teacher should own a flexible approach aiming at merging the skill gap by planning the lesson and producing teaching material (with a series of steps in mind) that would be simultaneously relevant to everyone at their appropriate skill level.
This intervention would be appropriate to maximise engagement in the traditional classroom teaching environment and in the online classroom. Recent of online teaching shows the need for extra levels of learning support as well as higher levels of student diligence to remain focused. Online teaching could be the norm in the near future, consequently this intervention will inform my future teaching approach focussing on engaging with students so as to enhance teaching and learning outcomes.