

In-depth induction for our international students using a board game



Karen Crinnion
Assistant Liaison Librarian
Robinson Library
Newcastle University
karen.crinnton@ncl.ac.uk

Introduction

Newcastle University is a Russell Group institution based in North East England with a current student body of 21,000. The university also has a campus in Singapore, whose students study in the faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering (SAGe). Each summer undergraduate students who have completed their first year in Singapore visit the Newcastle campus to take part in the Overseas Immersion Programme (OIP), which includes lectures, assignments and visits to different parts of the university and the region as well as cultural and sporting activities. The aim is to give students an affinity with the university and the city of Newcastle as well as developing their academic and study skills.

The Robinson Library plays an active role in this immersion programme and the students spend a whole day with us developing their information and digital literacy skills. This article describes how the SAGe Liaison Team developed a new blended, themed programme using face-to-face activities and online content in a virtual learning environment.

Design and development of the programme

The internationalisation of higher education has had an impact on the modes of course delivery and the technologies that UK universities offer their students as discussed by educators and academics alike (Weller, 2003; Brindley, 2012). Supporting our students based in overseas campuses is an important part of the work of the library service at Newcastle University and we adapt our services and the technologies we use to meet their needs. One of the aims of our OIP induction is to make an impact and develop a relationship with students when they arrive for their library induction. We also want to make it clear that we are here to support them when they return to Singapore.

The SAGe liaison team decided to develop a board game for the 2014 programme as we are aware that such games are popular in Singapore, and it was hoped that there would thus be an element of fun and competitiveness to the activities. Many online and blended approaches to teaching are based on the constructivist approach to learning developed by theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, Duffy and Jonassen (Conole *et al.*, 2004). This is based on the theory that learning happens through an individual's experience as well as through their interaction with the environment and with others. Rather than a passive approach to learning, which existed in educational institutions for many centuries, the constructivist approach also relies on the active element of the process to contribute to the storage of information in the long-term memory. The 'blended' aspect of this programme involved a combination of lectures, group work and self-guided activities around the library. We wanted to create a more effective programme based around social constructivism (Fosnot, 2005; Allen, 2008; So & Brush, 2008) with a mixture of collaborative and online learning. The students are working on assignments when they visit the library so they can immediately apply new skills to their assignment topics.

A printed handbook was developed using the board game theme, each library skill being represented by a different coloured game card. Students were required to do a number of different activities, e.g. finding a resource on the library search catalogue and writing down what they had found. A number of colour-coded 'stations' were set up around the library and students were asked to visit them to collect additional handouts, freebies or sweets. In their group activities students were asked to choose a group name, and prizes were awarded for the most original and fun names.

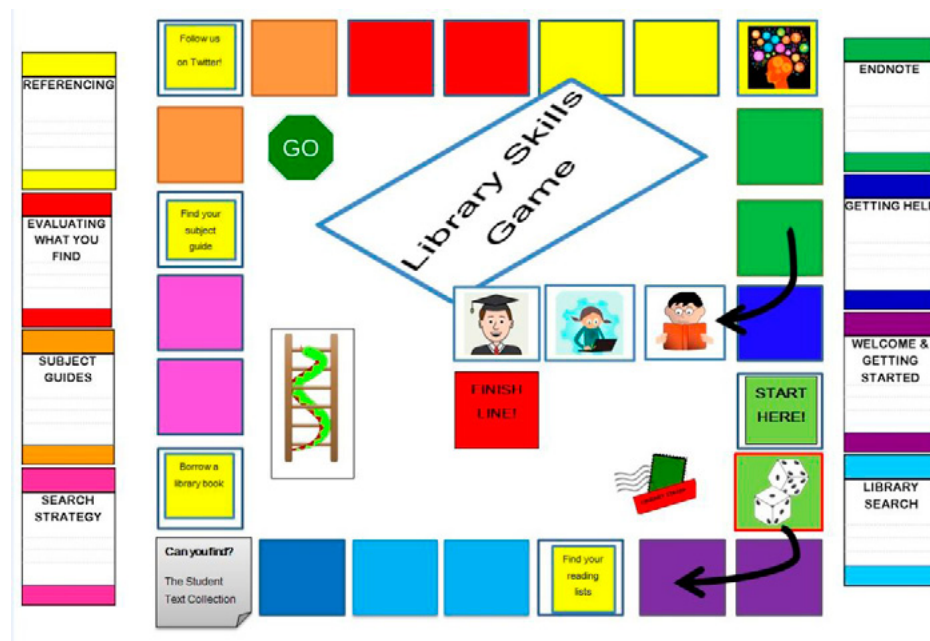
The Singapore students have access to a Blackboard (virtual learning environment) community and the library had previously developed content in this space. The use of virtual learning environments to support information literacy teaching is common practice in higher education both for assessed

The copyright in items published in *SCONUL Focus* remains the property of the author(s) or their employers as the case may be.



In-depth induction for our international students using a board game

programmes and as a self-directed learning resource (Pastula, 2010; Ladell-Thomas, 2012). The content already in place in Blackboard was quite outdated and needed to be reviewed and refreshed. So this was done in line with the themes of the face-to-face workshops (library search / subject guides / search strategy / evaluating resources / referencing / EndNote). Additional information about how to get help and support when off campus and how to keep up to date using social media was also provided.



The board game theme was transferred into Blackboard with different colour-coded activities for each of elements of library induction. These activities included audio-visual material (e.g. Camtasia video introduction to e-books) and games (e.g. a drag-and-drop board game created with Xerte software).

An online assessment is always included in the OIP library programme. This used to be marked manually by library staff, so it was updated in Blackboard so that it could be automatically marked using the Grade Centre. Prizes were given for the highest scores in the test.

Why did we do it?

The overriding aim of the programme was to create a fun and relaxed environment for students to learn about the library and research skills while they are on campus. However, we also wanted to provide a step-by-step online course for students to access when they return home, either to complete from start to finish, or to dip in and out of, depending on their information needs. We saw the benefits as:

- providing off campus resources for Newcastle University International Singapore students when they return home
- making them feel confident about asking for help when they return to Singapore
- linking face-to-face OIP activities with Blackboard content
- using Blackboard grade centre assessment and saving staff time in marking work
- ability to reuse assessments and learning objects

The copyright in items published in *SCONUL Focus* remains the property of the author(s) or their employers as the case may be.



In-depth induction for our international students using a board game

Conclusion

Students' feedback on the library element of the programme indicated that they found it both fun and interactive. Library sessions were seen by 83% as well structured and enjoyable. The average score in the online Blackboard assessment was 134 out of a possible 200 marks. The lowest scores were for questions relating to the use of operators and truncation when searching for information on the Internet and in databases. Based on the responses to one question, over 40% of the students thought that online databases were freely available to all.

Overall the programme was a success. We are now planning the 2015 programme, using the same format while reviewing and updating the content to keep it fresh. Having a parallel theme for the face-to-face delivery and online content helped to bring both parts of the programme together while also providing access to research skills guidance and help when the students returned home after their visit.

References

- Allen, M. (2008). Promoting critical thinking skills in online information literacy instruction using a constructivist approach', *College & undergraduate libraries*, 15(1-2), pp. 21-38
- Brindley, L. (2011). Introduction to Collaborate to compete: Seizing the opportunity of online learning for UK higher education. Report to HEFCE by the Online Learning Taskforce
- Conole, G., Dyke, M., Oliver, M. and Seale, J. (2004). Mapping pedagogy and tools for effective learning design, *Computers & education*, 43(1), pp. 17-33
- Fosnot, C.T. (2005) *Constructivism : theory, perspectives, and practice*. 2nd edn. New York; London: Teachers College Press
- Ladell-Thomas, J. (2012). Do-it-yourself information literacy: Self-directed learning at a distance, *Journal of Library & information services in distance learning*, 6(3-4), pp. 376-86
- Pastula, M. (2010). Use of information and communication technology to enhance the information literacy skills of distance students', *Journal of library & information services in distance learning*, 4(3), pp. 77-86
- So, H.-J. and Brush, T.A. (2008). Student perceptions of collaborative learning, social presence and satisfaction in a blended learning environment: Relationships and critical factors, *Computers & education*, 51(1), pp. 318-36
- Weller, M. (2003) *Delivering learning on the Net: The why, what & how of online education*. Psychology Press

The copyright in items published in *SCONUL Focus* remains the property of the author(s) or their employers as the case may be.

