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Improving Online Learning Engagement through a Kid-Teach-Kid Approach for High School Students during the Pandemic

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Abstract : Online learning sessions have become an indispensable complement to in-classroom-learning sessions in the past two years due to the emergence of Covid-19. Due to social distance requirements, many courses and interaction-intensive sessions, ranging from music classes to debate camps, are online. However, online learning imposes a significant challenge for engaging students effectively during the learning sessions. To resolve this problem, Project PWR, a non-profit organization formed by high school students, developed an online kid-teach-kid learning environment to boost students' learning interests and further improve students' engagement during online learning. Fundamentally, the kid-teach-kid learning model creates an affinity space to form learning groups, where like-minded peers can learn and teach their interests. The role of the teacher can also help a kid identify the instructional task and set the rules and procedures for the activities. The approach also structures initial discussions to reveal a range of ideas, similar experiences, thinking processes, language use, and lower student-to-teacher ratio, which become enriched online learning experiences for upcoming lessons. In such a manner, a kid can practice both the teacher role and the student role to accumulate experiences on how to convey ideas and questions over the online session more efficiently and effectively. In this research work, we conducted two case studies involving a 3D-Design course and a Speech and Debate course taught by high-school kids. Through Project PWR, a kid first needs to design the course syllabus based on a provided template to become a student-teacher. Then, the Project PWR academic committee evaluates the syllabus and offers comments and suggestions for changes. Upon the approval of a syllabus, an experienced and voluntarily adult mentor is assigned to interview the student-teacher and monitor the lectures' progress. Student-teachers construct a comprehensive final evaluation for their students, which they grade at the end of the course. Moreover, each course requires conducting midterm and final evaluations through a set of surveyed replies provided by students to assess the student-teacher's performance. The uniqueness of Project PWR lies in its established kid-teach-kids affinity space. Our research results showed that Project PWR could create a closed-loop system where a student can help a teacher improve and vice versa, thus improving the overall students' engagement. As a result, Project PWR's approach can train teachers and students to become better online learners and give them a solid understanding of what to prepare for and what to expect from future online classes. The kid-teach-kid learning model can significantly improve students' engagement in the online courses through the Project PWR to effectively supplement the traditional teacher-centric model that the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted substantially. Project PWR enables kids to share their interests and bond with one another, making the online learning environment effective and promoting positive and effective personal online one-on-one interactions.

Keywords : kid-teach-kid, affinity space, online learning, engagement, student-teacher
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