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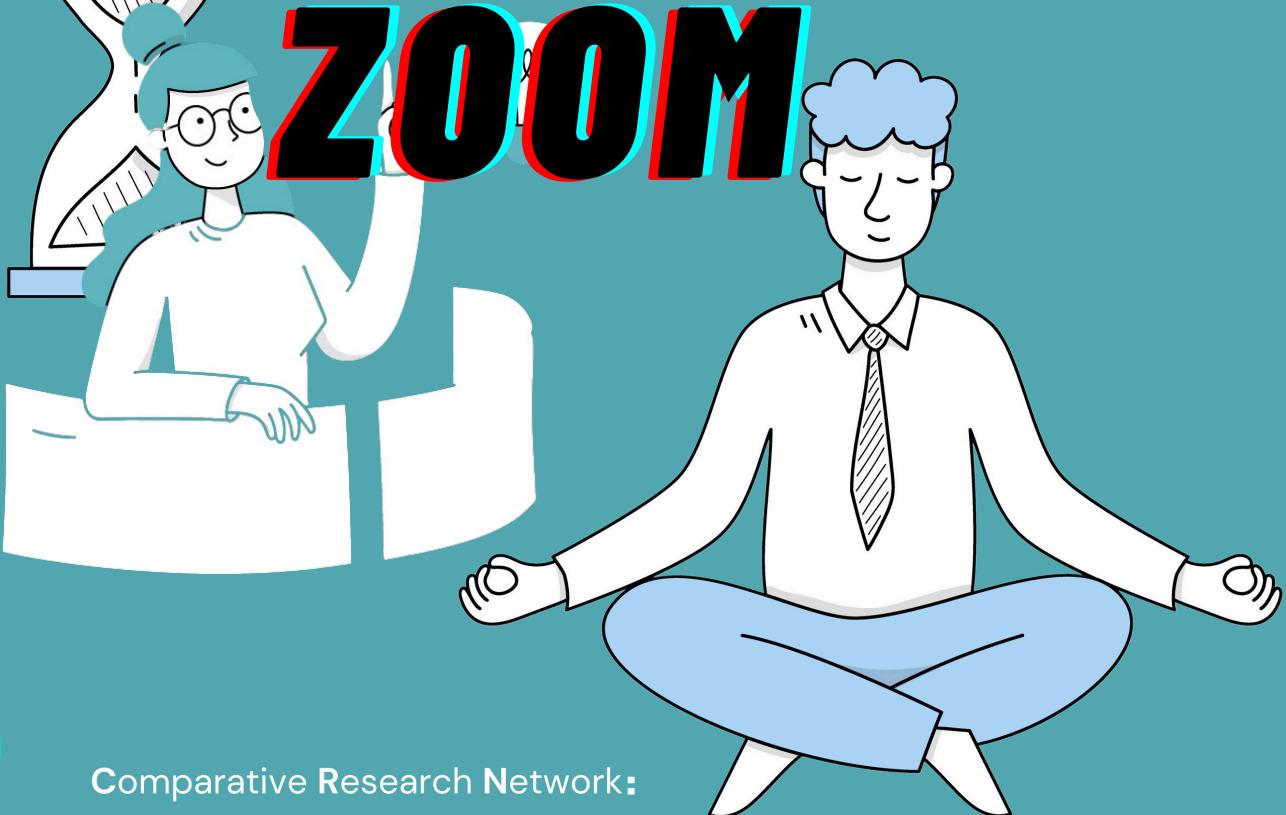
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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in one of the most significant disruptions in the history of education. Academics, teachers, and students at all levels had to abruptly transition to online learning due to stay-at-home orders aimed at curbing the spread of the virus. This shift highlighted the challenges of online teaching, as maintaining students' focus and interest often proved difficult. It became clear that creative strategies are essential for motivating students to participate.

Student engagement is commonly understood to have three dimensions: behavioral, cognitive, and affective (Chapman, 2002; Fredricks et al., 2004, 2016; Mandernach, 2015). Behavioral engagement is characterized by active participation, persistence, and positive conduct in learning activities. Cognitive engagement involves mental effort, deep learning, self-regulation, and comprehension. Affective engagement reflects emotional investment in learning, positive reactions to the learning environment, peers, and teachers, and a sense of belonging. Detailed indicators for each dimension are available in Bond et al. (2020) (Fredricks et al., 2004; Coates, 2007).

To understand what influences student engagement, three key types of classroom interactions are typically considered: student-student interactions, student-instructor interactions, and student-content interactions (Moore, 1993).

Creativity in Hybrid Settings

Student-student interactions (Moore, 1993) help to alleviate boredom and isolation by fostering a vibrant sense of community (Martin & Bolliger, 2018). In online learning environments, features that promote these interactions include group activities and the use of virtual communication tools such as social media, chat forums, and discussion boards (Revere & Kovach, 2011; Tess, 2013; Banna et al., 2015).

Integrating online discussion boards (e.g., Miro board, Kialo, Flip) into hybrid classrooms is a highly effective strategy. Students can anonymously post questions on the discussion board at the end of each lesson. This approach encourages participation from those who might be shy or reluctant to speak up in a traditional classroom setting.

The online format ensures that both remote and in-person students feel included and engaged. By reviewing and answering these questions at the conclusion of the session, teachers and students can collaboratively deepen their understanding of the subject matter.

This practice not only enhances students' written communication skills but also fosters critical thinking by encouraging them to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information.

Moreover, online discussions create a valuable written record of the dialogue, which students can refer back to for review and study purposes, reinforcing their learning and providing a useful resource for exam preparation and future reference.

Moreover, group activities have a crucial role in an engaging and creative hybrid classroom. Some ideas of group activities teachers can use in order to make their lesson more interesting, and their students participate more are the following:

- *Brainteasers* are fantastic for sparking creativity. The inherent trickiness of these puzzles can captivate and engage even those who are typically disengaged.
- *Collaborative concept mapping* is an effective tool for activating prior knowledge, reviewing for a test, or planning a project. By working in small groups and using digital sticky notes, students can collectively brainstorm and organize their ideas, fostering teamwork and deeper understanding.
- *Case studies* have long been an effective collaborative method for encouraging students to explore issues in depth and see real-world applications of course content. With the use of UC&C tools, they are equally effective in hybrid learning environments as they are in traditional classrooms.

Student-content interactions (Moore, 1993) encompass any engagement a student has with the course material. Factors that enhance student engagement with content include the use of curricular materials and classroom activities featuring realistic scenarios, prompts that support deep reflection and understanding, multimedia instructional resources, and options that give students the ability to choose their content or activity format (Abrami et al., 2012; Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2013; Britt et al., 2015; Martin & Bolliger, 2018).

In online learning environments, students must have access to and be able to use various technologies to engage effectively with content. The use of online interactive tools during the lesson is critical to achieving the student-content classroom interaction. Interactive tools (e.g., Mentimeter, Kahoot, Slido) like live polls and quizzes encourage active participation from all students, whether they are attending in-person or remotely. Online collaboration tools (e.g., Google Docs, Slack) facilitate group projects and discussions, allowing students to work together seamlessly regardless of their location.

Moreover, Interactive tools can include features like captions, transcripts, and adjustable playback speeds, making content more accessible to students with different needs.

CONCLUSIONS **Conlcusions**

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted traditional education systems, necessitating a rapid shift to online learning. This transition revealed the challenges associated with maintaining student engagement in a virtual environment. Student engagement, which comprises behavioral, cognitive, and affective dimensions, is critical for effective learning.

Various types of interactions, student-student, student-instructor, and student-content, play a vital role in fostering this engagement. Student-student interactions are essential for alleviating feelings of isolation and boredom by creating a sense of community. Online tools such as discussion boards and group activities are indispensable in promoting these interactions.

Similarly, student-instructor interactions can be enhanced by utilizing online discussion boards, allowing students to anonymously ask questions. This encourages participation from shy students and ensures inclusivity in both online and hybrid classroom settings.

Furthermore, student-content interactions involve students engaging with course materials through interactive tools like live polls and quizzes, which promote active participation and a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Pedagogic Recommendations

To foster engagement in hybrid learning, encourage collaborative learning by integrating online discussion boards like Miro, Kialo, or Flip, allowing students to ask questions anonymously and promoting inclusivity.

Utilize collaborative tools for group activities such as concept mapping and case studies to enhance teamwork and critical thinking. Incorporate interactive tools like Mentimeter, Kahoot, and Slido for live polls and quizzes, actively involving students.

Provide access to multimedia instructional resources to cater to various learning styles, ensuring a more comprehensive educational experience. Designing engaging content is also crucial.

Develop curricular materials with realistic scenarios and prompts to encourage deep reflection and understanding. Allowing students to choose their content or activity format can further enhance cognitive engagement and personalize the learning experience.

Policy Recommendations

Investing in technology infrastructure is essential for supporting online and hybrid learning models. Ensure all students have access to necessary technology and reliable internet connectivity.

Provide teacher training on the effective use of online tools to enhance student engagement.

Promote inclusive education by developing policies that integrate online and hybrid learning environments to accommodate diverse student needs. Ensure online tools include accessibility features like captions, transcripts, and adjustable playback speeds to support all students.

Supporting teacher innovation is key to maintaining an engaging learning environment. Encourage professional development focused on innovative teaching strategies and technology use. Foster a culture of continuous improvement, allowing teachers to share best practices and learn from one another.

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