Chapter 11
Engaging Learners: A Digital Best Practice

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines innovative online peer engagement collaboration across geographic regions. This chapter has two parts. Part 1 discusses the research that peer deliberations on a collaborative website leads to academically reflective engagement among student peers and students and the content. Statistically proven results are provided from the past 11 years in that their academically reflective interactions lead students to personalize, extend, and push each other to examine and re-examine academic ideas and content in these online spaces. Part 2 of this chapter provides cross disciplinary educators reasons to and ways by which to incorporate peer engagement in their face-to-face, hybrid, or online class along with a step-by step approach for educators across disciplines to implement as an innovative means to engage students in academic deliberation.

INTRODUCTION

With the immense growth in online education, creating and implementing innovative instructional strategies for effective pedagogy are a critical in this digital age. This chapter, therefore, provides a statistically tested innovative digital practice that engage students with each other and the content. In order to address the viability of this digital practice and its application across discipline, this chapter is organized in two parts. The first part discusses forms of student-student engagement and student-content engagement with the research behind how these peer engagement practices maintains academic achievement that is on par with face-to-face courses (Botsch & Botsch, 2012; Chadha, 2018a; Chadha, 2018b; Baek et al., 2012; Ellis et al., 2006; Galston, 2007; Keramidas, 2012; Pollock & Wilson, 2002). This first part also addresses means and strategies by which collaborative engagement can be used based on disciplinary specific reasons, their learning outcomes and its applicability across different modes of instruction from
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face-to-face, hybrid to online classes. This part of the chapter then discusses this innovative practice that has been used for the past eleven years, along with the measurement of this innovative engagement practice with over a dozen publications in the past three years.

Part two of this chapter discusses how to implement this engagement practice, providing step-by-step guidance so that faculty across any discipline can develop and design an e-site for interactivity, along with the a guide to ready both faculty and students for effective engagement. In addition to adoption of peer engagement, the formulation and implementation of this engagement practice is provided so that educators can follow and apply these strategies to their own classes. As this engagement strategy allows for incorporation of peer engagement across a variety of teaching modes such as teaching face-to-face, self-directed, blended classes and distance learning courses as well, making this cross-disciplinary innovative digital practice a best practice.

PART ONE

Why Collaborative Learning Through Peer Engagement?

For pedagogically viable education in this digital age an innovative pedagogy for online environments is student engagement through peer deliberative strategies. Peer student engagement implies a relationship that is mutually beneficial to each student participant, which involves the sharing of knowledge, ideas and experiences among them. Peer engagement is a process where students reflect on an issue, carefully listen to the ideas and arguments expressed by others, respond, revisit discussion and participate in interactive dialogues with their peers in a time and manner that is convenient to them. In their engagement with peers, they consider the arguments of others and question and reconsider their own viewpoints by engaging with their peers even when it places their own views in doubt (Boud, 2001; Eveland et al., 2003; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Stitzlein, 2010). Throughout the engagement process, they ask insightful and respectful questions that seek future information, clarification of the issue, or challenge a participants’ viewpoints to future deliberation of an issue (Bozanta & Mardikyan, 2017; Chu et al., 2017). This type of “structured academic controversy” is a way to engage students about contentious issues (Guttman, 2000, p. 75), and in their deliberations to consider alternative solutions and potential consequences, while developing critical reasoning skills about an issue furthering academic content.

What Is Peer Engagement Online?

While the process of peer engagement occurs informally everyday ad hoc without instructors and left to chance or circumstance, formalizing peer engagement in an academically inclined online environment moves beyond the independent ad hoc approach to interdependent or mutual learning (Boud, 2001). In formalizing their use of peer practices students explain their academic ideas to others, participate in critical thinking with peers, thereby providing an opportunity to formalize peer learning while reducing errors in academic content as these are also vetted by an instructor. In addition students develop additional skills when working collaboratively as they give and receive feedback strengthening a peer respectful relationship.
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