A Response to 'Engaging My Gen Z Class: Teaching with Memes'

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Dear Editor,

I found the approach described in Mendez-Reguera and Cabrera's paper insightful [1]. The authors discuss engaging their Gen Z learners (students born after 1996) online by utilising memes and meme culture to teach immunology. Their assignment involved students designing and posting their own memes on various immunological concepts. By utilising student creativity in their curriculum, Mendez-Reguera et al. have required their students to work at the higher cognitive domains outlined within Bloom's taxonomy and have promoted enhanced relatedness between students and teachers [2]. These effects have been shown to improve understanding and motivation, respectively [2, 3].

While this approach was clearly effective, as a current student, I would like to explain how using memes within the classroom introduces several challenges. Firstly, memes are deceptively complex. They are reliant on extensive background knowledge of pop culture, meme culture, and how particular meme templates are used. Additionally, memes are constantly evolving so teachers are at increased risk of 'getting it wrong' if they are not up to date [4]. I have experienced medical educators utilising 'out-of-date' memes or using templates incorrectly. Students generally receive these attempts well. However, these attempts risk exacerbating the perceived differences between students and teachers which may impair student–teacher relationships. Secondly, the complexity of memes themselves may distance some students who are not familiar with meme use. This may include students from different cultural backgrounds and mature students.

Utilising memes is not enough. Educators should adopt strategies to utilise their knowledge and experience of

memes to target particular student groups. This way, the educational benefits can be maximised, while the risks are minimised. The strategy adopted by Mendez-Reguera et al. was particularly insightful as students themselves produced their own memes; therefore, the risk of the author's alienating students by getting things wrong was minimised.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest The author declares no competing interests.

Disclaimer I confirm that this manuscript was submitted on the behalf of me (Luke Read, author). The manuscript is not under consideration by another journal.

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