Implications for Gender and Status
Differences in Online Teaching

TREO Talk Paper

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Abstract
The current empirical study explored factors contributing to effective online learning considering gender and perceived status. Conclusions were derived from dynamics that emerged among a group of working professional students using a social media platform called VoiceThread with text, audio and video capabilities. Social network characteristics were examined using SNA, sentiment analysis, and topic analysis to investigate social presence and related impact on discussion quality. Key findings included that males were more likely than females to use multimedia options. Higher quality replies were elicited for multimedia posts suggesting higher social presence led to richer discussions. Likewise, class members with higher centrality tended to make more positive comments. Other findings included that males responded to threads started by females more negatively than did other females. High status females responded most positively to other high status females and negatively to low status males. Low status females responded most favorably to other low status class members regardless of gender and least favorably to high status females. Overall, the results suggested that status and gender difference do impact online classroom discussions in a variety of ways.

The current study focused on working professional students that are taking classes to acquire a Master's degree. We sought to better understand how links formed between students and whether specific factors, such as gender and status, exerted pressures that influenced student engagement in these venues. This research was intended to help researchers and educators better understand how to bring elements of social constructivism into an online classroom by looking data collected from a group of working, professional students. The research provides several helpful findings that inform future research and offer educators with insight for improving their teaching craft. Among these: multimedia use and other techniques that enhance social presence result in higher quality discussions and posts; being engaged in classrooms discussions correlates with positive comments and richer discussions; and, males were more likely than females to use multimedia options. Class members with higher centrality tended to make more positive comments and build their social connections. Other students making lower quality comments built their social connections but failed to develop significant betweenness measures indicating their classmates did not value their contributions.

References