

The impact of teachers' beliefs on online discussion forums

This paper examines ways in which diverse beliefs of teachers can be identified and found to be effective in online discussion forums, using the Pratt (1998) framework of teaching perspectives as a method of exploring the intentions and actions of e-moderators. It also highlights potential traps for the unwary e-moderator. Research results showed that aspects of Pratt's five teaching perspectives (Transmission, Apprenticeship, Developmental, Nurturing and Social Reform) could all be recognised in teachers' design plans, interactions with students, and assessment. The extent of subsequent student engagement with the learning process indicated that e-moderators from any perspective were potentially able to create successful learning environments and this was frequently related to the extent of scaffolding provided by teachers. Despite this, it was also found that students' online contributions were frequently driven by assessment criteria and grading schemes, regardless of the depth of their approach to learning. It is recommended that institutional professional development plans recognise the major influence that teachers' prior experience as online learners has over their actions, and that their underlying ability to reflect on their own practices has an equally profound impact on the success of their teaching strategies. The paper concludes with a plea directed at tertiary institutions for them to allow their staff the freedom to develop a diversity of e-moderation techniques, using their existing strengths.

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