

TEACHER MODERATING AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN SYNCHRONOUS
COMPUTER CONFERNCES

By

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ABSTRACT

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Online learning has received a great deal of attention lately, especially in higher education. The bulk of research has focused on asynchronous environments (such as web-based bulletin boards, email systems etc.). Synchronous communication, by contrast, despite its popularity, has received less research attention. Of particular interest is the manner in which instructors manage the ebb and flow of classroom discussion and how this affects student engagement. This dissertation study attempts to develop a deeper understanding of this relationship (between teacher moderating and student engagement).

Data for the study was collected from 44 transcripts of a synchronous online course offered at a Canadian university. The study used a mixed method design where the results of the quantitative analysis were used to select cases for qualitative analysis to better understand the substantive processes of engaged collaborative discourse. An important part of the analysis was the development of new constructs and measurement methods to measure teacher moderating behaviors and a range of student engagement variables (behavioral, social-emotional and intellectual). The quantitative analysis revealed that student intellectual engagement was a function of both students'

participation, and the number and quality of teacher postings. For the qualitative part of the research, the researcher applied discourse analysis techniques to an entire transcript in order to discover specifically what was happening with teacher moderating. This provided a unified picture of the complex nature of the interactional process in synchronous learning environments as well as an opportunity to identify and present key themes and practices for effective online moderating.

In summary, the methodologies and findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of how teachers can provide effective online mentoring and scaffolding to facilitate student engagement with each other and with the subject matter. It also contributes to a better understanding of whether and how a community of inquiry develops by means of synchronous computer conferencing and how students can become invested behaviorally, social-emotionally, and intellectually. This research also informs both research and practice on the larger goal of improving the quality of online teaching and learning.

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In memory of my father,
Xianqian Shi

Dedicated to my son,
didi Michael

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