

# LET'S TAKE A LOOK INSIDE DISCUSSION BOARDS

Dr. Annie Hoekman  
Kansas Wesleyan University

SIDLIT  
Tools / Trends / Challenges  
August 2 – 3, 2018  
Johnson County Community College

# About the Presenter



- Associate Professor, Department of Computer Studies, Kansas Wesleyan University

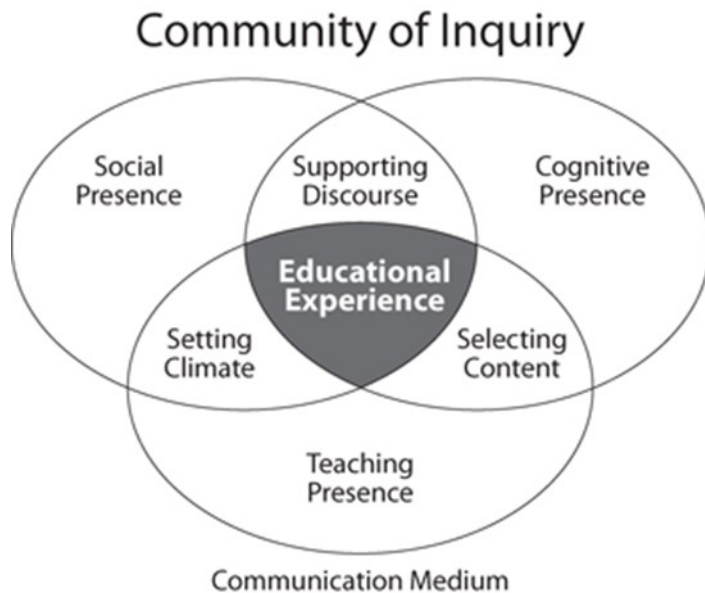
# Statements of Problem and Purpose

- While many institutions are delivering anything from an online course to full online degree programs, little is known about the patterns of communication that takes place inside online discussion boards, along with the power dynamics observed in this communication.
- The purpose of this research is to examine the nature of the patterns of communication of discussion board users in undergraduate distance education courses and add to the existing body of research involving the creation and development of online discussion boards in online courses. More particularly, it is to differentiate the patterns, power struggles, and significant meaning behind the language presented through the discussion board threads.
- Useful for faculty, administrators, instructional design staff

# Rationale

- “over 5.8 million fall 2014 distance education students” (Allen et al., 2015,p.4)
- For the fall 2014 data “there are nearly five times as many undergraduate enrollments (4,862,519) as graduate enrollments (966,307) among students taking at least one distance education course” (Allen et al., 2015, p.17)
- Research is needed for the undergraduate population as they are the majority population taking online courses.

# Conceptual Framework



Garrison et al., (2000), p. 88

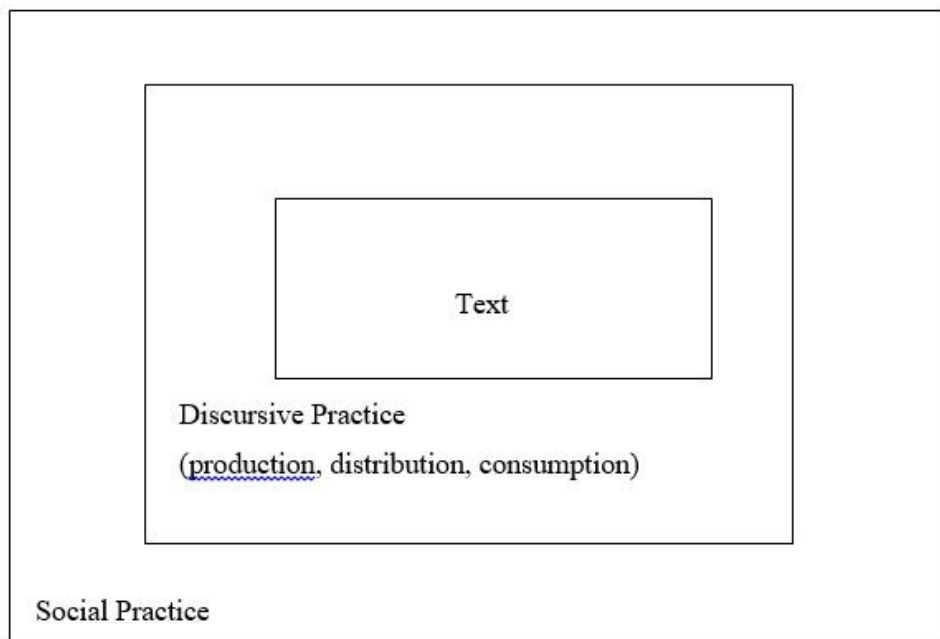
Social Presence  
Teaching Presence  
Cognitive Presence

# Research Questions

1. What is the nature of the patterns of communication inside the discussion boards?
2. Does the structure of the language that is used by students in online discussion boards create and/or maintain power relationships? If so, how and to what extent?
3. Are the verbal interactions that are present in online discussion boards reflective of various social and historical factors? If so, how and to what extent?

# Theoretical Foundation and Methodology

- Critical Discourse Analysis
  - Social constructivism
  - discourse produces power



Fairclough, (1992), p. 73

- Fairclough Three-Dimensional framework
  - Text - turn-taking, ethos, grammar, politeness
  - Discursive Practice - interdiscursivity, intertextual chains, and manifest intertextuality
  - Social Practice – specify nature of discourse practice which is the basis for explaining why discourse practice is the way it is

# Data and Collection

- 8 distinct undergraduate courses
- Copy and paste threads
- Store by course, semester, year
- Download a copy of the course syllabus



# Data Sample

Students

Re: The recent Supreme Court ruling

Posted: Wed 7/1/2015 at 10:44 PM, in reply to [redacted]

Reply

I believe that our generation is more open to the idea of gay marriage and welcoming the whole LGBT community as a whole. With more and more exposure to the LGBT community, there is more and more acceptance. My opinion has slowly been formed my whole life due to family and friends who are gay. On the legalization of gay marriage, my opinion is that if a person is lucky enough to find someone they want to spend the rest of their lives with then they should be able to marry them. However, I know my mother's opinion is very different because she was influenced by a different generation of thinkers.

Also, I think it is slightly selfish of politics to use such a sensitive subject just to get more votes. [redacted] I too am on Facebook quite often. Just the other day I saw a post by Hilary Clinton saying that in the past she was against gay marriage, but now her page is posting nothing but support to the LGBT community and to the celebration of Pride. In my opinion, that is the type of fake support that is not needed for the healthy growth of the LGBT community.

Again agreeing with [redacted] are still major obstacles for the LGBT community. However, I believe that this one huge step will slowly make all of the other steps to full rights a little smoother. I personally hope we can witness full rights for LGBT's in my lifetime.

Private Comment Edit Delete

6/6 for Week 1 Discussion

248 words - excluding quoted text

Students

Re: Re: The recent Supreme Court ruling

Posted: Thu 7/2/2015 at 11:25 PM, in reply to [redacted]

Reply

I agree that politicians should not use gay marriage as a platform to try to get elected (or reelected), however, when discussing these topics, you have to ask yourself if they are simply manipulating the situation or if they truly believe in what they are supporting. I think over the years, many people's opinions have changed because now there are more people who are publicly gay and therefore, more people know someone in their friend group who is gay. As this happens, many people who were previously against gay marriage may soften their views and sympathize with their friends whom they are seeing struggle because of the previous anti-gay laws. I too saw a video on facebook, however it was one of Obama talking about gay marriage. It was quite some years ago and he mentioned that he believed marriage belonged between a man and a woman, however that he was a supporter of civil unions. Nobody commenting on that video noted that this video was taken from when he was running for Illinois senator (in the 1990's) rather than 2008. I think it is important to remember that belief systems can change dramatically in 20+ years. Perhaps politicians aren't always using it for their benefit. It's important to note also, that by 2008 when Obama was running for president, he had stated that his position was that Gay Marriage should be legal. I think also with Hilary Clinton that her statement against gay marriage was quite some time ago and that perhaps increased exposure to the LGBT community has really opened many people's eyes and hearts.

Edited: Mon 7/6/2015 at 11:59 PM [redacted]

Private Comment Edit Delete

6/6 for Week 1 Discussion

# Limitations and Assumptions

- Analyzing existing data from discussion board posts
- Evaluating undergraduate courses only
- By the number and extent of courses available to the researcher for analysis
- Data are truthful, meaning that the participants in the class who are posting on the discussion boards are posting statements which are accurately reflective of their thoughts

# Summary of Major Characteristics

Course	Level	Length(weeks)	Term	Enrollment	Expectations by Faculty for Posts	Point or Percentage (%) of Grade	Faculty Role
Course 1	Freshman	16	Summer 2016	8	Not stated	40%	Consistent Participation
Course 2	Freshman	16	Spring 2016	10	1 Original post ; 1 reply minimum	150 points	Consistent Participation
Course 3	Freshman	8	Summer 2015	3	1 <sup>st</sup> week original post. 2 <sup>nd</sup> week one reply	20%	Sporadic participation
Course 4 *	Freshman	8	Summer 2015 2016	6 ,1	1 <sup>st</sup> week original post. 2 <sup>nd</sup> week one reply	20%	Sporadic participation
Course 5	Senior	8	Spring 2016	22	Original post by Wednesday. Replies to two others by Sunday	140 points	Never participated
Course 6	Sophomore	8	Spring 2016	23	Original post by Wednesday. Replies to two others by Sunday	140 points	Never participated
Course 7	Freshman	16	Spring 2016	22	Not stated	130 Points	Consistent Participation
Course 8	Sophomore	4	Summer 2015	10	Not stated	25 points	Consistent Participation

# Major Findings

- Pattern of topic introduction
  - Faculty very powerful
- Acceptance or rejection of topics
- Overwhelming positive politeness
- “Conditioned” over time to use netiquette, but does this prohibit rejection
- Development of ethos
  - Affirmation of understanding
  - Building beliefs/positive politeness

# Research Questions Answered

- What is the nature of the patterns of communication inside the discussion boards?
  - Patterns from analysis tied into teaching presence
- Does the structure of the language that is used by students in online discussion boards create and/or maintain power relationships? If so, how and to what extent?
  - Power of faculty member in topic control tied into cognitive presence
- Are the verbal interactions that are present in online discussion boards reflective of various social and historical factors? If so, how and to what extent?
  - Face-to-Face student implications along with ethos and positive politeness/netiquette tied into social presence

# Conclusions

- Teaching Presence
  - Presence of the faculty member
  - Facilitation role by faculty member and students
- Social Presence
  - Biographies
  - Introductions
  - No use of emoticons or special characters
- Cognitive Presence
  - Most lacking element
- Controversial topics
  - Why not more debate
  - Power of Faculty member on topics selected along with divergent viewpoints on these controversial topics
- Constant Communication
  - Weekly, bi-weekly is constant
  - Never revisit material, or come full circle with the discussions in the course

# Implications and Recommendations

- More studies to answer more of the questions we opened up
- How this applies to faculty, administrators, and instructional design staff
  - Purpose of discussion boards
  - Divergent viewpoints through materials presented
  - Challenge and develop critical thinking skills vs just establishing social presence
- Future studies
  - larger sample size; larger course sizes; different geographic locations; different student demographics; similar student demographics; similar geographic location; public vs private vs for-profit institutions;
  - Review of netiquette rules to include rejection of topics and ideas

## References

Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2015). Online report card: Tracking online education in the United States. Retrieved from <http://onlinelearningconsortium.org/read/online-report-card-tracking-online-education-united-states-2015/>.

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T. & Archer, W. (2000). Critical thinking, cognitive presence, and computer conferencing in distance education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 2: 87-105.



Thank you!

Questions and  
Answers