Participants will be presented a brief paper that describes and analyzes a qualitative research study in progress designed to determine the effectiveness of a variety of online asynchronous discussion strategies and offline learning strategies intended to stimulate higher order thinking (analysis, synthesis, evaluation) in students enrolled in a totally online graduate program in art education. Results of a student qualitative survey intended to identify the perceptions of students about the type and level of their own thinking will be shared. Instructor comments from periodic journal entries will also be shared. Finally, the results of existing instructor and student discourse analyses will be presented. Preliminary results indicates that when a combination of offline and online strategies are used, students engage in higher order learning and thinking more frequently in discussion forums than when online strategies are used alone.

Previous recent qualitative research on stimulating higher order learning in asynchronous discussion forums have yielded disappointing results. Analysis of this prior research indicates that it is still unclear whether or not the strategies themselves failed to stimulate higher order thinking or if the disappointing results were due to other factors such as the overall instructional design of the courses, the overall research design of the studies themselves or other unknown factors. This research study analyzes the possible effects of the sequences of the strategies, the overall effect of a social constructivist instructional design, and the qualitative difference between using asynchronous discussion strategies alone and offline and online strategies used in combination.

Preliminary results indicate that this comprehensive approach in analyzing the learning environment is yielding valuable descriptive data. Specifically, preliminary results indicate that higher order thinking is more often stimulated once students become familiar with each other and the online environment in general. This usually occurs around the third week for most students. It is during this time frame that a variety of online discussion strategies and offline learning strategies are introduced. This includes asynchronous discussion strategies such as Socratic questioning, and a complex variety of peer asynchronous discussion strategies that require students to adopt roles such as offline facilitator, online cross facilitator, Socratic questioner, resource identifier, devil’s advocate and creative thinker. This also includes offline strategies such as, collaborative journaling, contemplative practices, and the creation of interactive PowerPoint presentations that students are required to post and facilitate an asynchronous discussion about their PowerPoint. It is also about this time that the instructor assigns situated learning discussion questions that require students to recommend solutions to real world learning problems. Preliminary results indicates that when a combination of offline and online strategies are used within a social constructivist learning environment, students engage in higher order learning and thinking more frequently than when online strategies are used alone.

References


