ONLINE THEOLOGICAL PEDAGOGY: THE INFLUENCE OF DIALOGUE ON SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN THE ONLINE THEOLOGICAL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This research study evaluated if a relationship exists between dialogical interaction in an online theological course and student spiritual development. This study examined spiritual formation in light of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) standards for distance education courses in theological institutions. The population for this study was comprised of undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in online theological courses. Students in this study attended one of four Assemblies of God Higher Education institutions. Two indices were used to evaluate Spiritual Development. The first index measured Quality of Relationship with God and Awareness of God using Hall and Edwards’ (2002) Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI). Recognizing that spiritual development is abstract and multi-dimensional, Fetzer’s (2003) Brief Multi-Dimensional Measure of Religiosity/Spirituality (BMMRS) was used to provide greater detail for the characteristics of spiritual development. The Reformed Teacher’s Observation Protocol (RTOP), a measurement tool created by the University of Arizona, was used to determine the degree of dialogue and collaboration experienced in a course. Though results from the survey indicated relationships between communication and students to awareness of God and a relationship with God exist the research did not indicate significant spiritual growth occurred. The short duration of the course may have been a contributing factor to the lack of spiritual growth and further research calls for a longitudinal study to determine spiritual growth over a period of time. Participant comments indicated a desire for increased dialogue and collaboration in the course. This suggests that spiritual growth may be found to be significant in a course where dialogue and collaboration occur in a greater degree.
Keywords: collaboration; community; dialogical interaction; dialogue; distance education; elearning; online theological course design; pedagogy; spiritual development, spiritual formation