

Prosocial Behavior in Online Instruction

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Abstract

A significant body of literature has supported the assertion that communication in the classroom is central to the learning process. Prosocial behaviors, such as nonverbal and verbal immediacy, have been found to promote affective and cognitive learning in traditional instructional settings. The short paper presents the results of a study that examined the effects of instructor verbal immediacy on affective and cognitive learning in the online classroom. The results of this study found that students who rated their instructors as more verbally immediate expressed greater positive affect and higher perceived cognition than students taught by less immediate instructors. These results are consistent with similar studies in traditional courses and reinforce the influential role of the instructor in the online learning environment.

An understanding of the significance of prosocial behaviors in the online classroom has benefits to instructor and student alike, as practitioners could improve their course development and delivery in light of these results. Furthermore, such information goes beyond the “no significant difference” studies that continue to appear in the literature and would serve to validate an intuitive perspective held by many online instructors. Therefore, this presentation will not merely address the results of the study but will use them as a framework to suggest improvements to online pedagogy. Building upon these results, I will offer suggestions as to how to improve the effectiveness of the online learning experience through instructional design, pedagogical strategy, and social facilitation. This presentation will weave my experience, as both an online instructor and distance learner, with the results of the study to assist those who seek to effectively teach online.