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The Impact of Cyber learning

On Moral Development

An exploration of Tertiary Education in New Zealand

A Thesis presented in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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By

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Abstract

Cyber learning is learning that takes place making use of cyberspace technology or computer technology. This encompasses any type of learning that occurs while connected to cyberspace, including the Internet, e-mail, virtual reality, computer assisted learning, or computer-mediated learning, electronic learning or telelearning.

This research study is an exploration of views and ideas of tertiary level educators on the impact of cyber learning on moral development. Lawrence Kohlberg's (1981) moral development theory has been used as a framework to establish whether there are any factors that make cyber learning a challenge to moral development in tertiary level students. Kohlberg's moral development theory explains the cognitive development process of moral reasoning and decision making in an individual. The research method used to gather data was in-depth face-to-face interviews. The participants were tertiary level educators from Palmerston North in New Zealand.

The themes that emanated from the data analysis were categorized as negative and positive impact of cyber learning. Related to these categories the following propositions emerged from the research study. They were: cyber learning has resulted in the birth of 'Cyber Identity'; 'Cyber Choice' in cyber learning overrules moral reasoning; cyber learning encourages alienation from human interaction into 'Cyber Isolation'; cyber learning has resulted in 'Cyber Freedom'; cyber learning introduces students into 'Cyber Illusion' in virtual reality; cyber learning is a gateway to new dimensions of learning; a paradigm shift in learning could permeate tertiary education as a result of cyber learning; and, in order to enable tertiary students to face the challenges of cyber learning successfully it is important to equip them with tools of moral reasoning and decision-making skills.

Participants polled in this study believed that New Zealand tertiary education system is impoverished in moral development and as a result New Zealand students are more vulnerable to the impact of cyber learning. The findings highlighted the importance of a moral reasoning framework in tertiary education in order to prepare tertiary students to meet the challenges of cyber learning.

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