

THE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF NON-TRADITIONAL WOMEN WITHIN
SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST 3D IMMERSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

A Dissertation
by
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ABSTRACT

THE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF NON-TRADITIONAL WOMEN WITHIN SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST 3D IMMERSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

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Many women who seek college degrees later in life enroll with some trepidation. These students, referred to in this study as non-traditional women, believe they are taking a risk when adding the role of student to their already demanding and challenging lives. The degree to which their learning and development is encouraged or hindered depends on the teaching and curricular approaches used by the faculty and by the learning environment itself.

Twenty-first century technology provides educators with the opportunity to try different modes of interaction to extend the traditional classroom, some of which non-traditional women may find particularly supportive. One such technology is constructivist 3D immersive environments, such as AET Zone, Department of Leadership and Educational Studies at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. In these types of social constructivist 3D immersive environments many non-traditional women find they are encouraged to take control of their learning and development in ways they have not experienced in more traditional face-to-face settings.

The purpose of this study was to examine the learning and development of non-traditional women within social constructivist 3D immersive environments that resemble the design and pedagogy of AET Zone. This phenomenological qualitative study examined the experiences of two non-traditional women enrolled in Appalachian State University's Instructional Technology/Computers MA Program. Three major themes emerged from the data analysis, including life experiences, ways of making meaning, and learning environments. The findings from this study indicate that the research participants found the following to be true of AET Zone, a social constructivist 3D immersive environment:

- Non-traditional women's learning and development can gradually be fostered by the tools and specific pedagogy found in AET Zone
- The synchronous and asynchronous tools found in AET Zone can provide the opportunity for non-traditional women to take control of their learning
- A sense of presence is crucial for some non-traditional women to interact and communicate within AET Zone
- AET Zone instructors who use Presence Pedagogy or P2 can be effective guides that encourage and support non-traditional women's