Preface

The main purpose of this book is to discuss meta-communication for reflective online conversations to provide digital people with models for distance education. The unique approach of the publication brings together meta-communication, distance education, and models as well as reflective online conversations at the same time.

This book, consisting of 17 chapters, is divided into four sections: Meta-communicative knowledge building and online communications, dynamic models of meta-communication and reflective conversations, designing online messages for reflections, and meta-communicative assessments and reflective communication skills.

Chapter 1 focuses on how online discussion has become one of the most effective teaching tools in recent years in terms of its power to promote students’ critical thinking skills in educational contexts. This chapter aims at presenting an overview of recently conducted research studies on critical thinking and online discussions, explaining online discussion as a pedagogical vehicle for maximizing language learning and teaching, identifying problems related to online discussions as well as some suggested solutions, describing application activities that promote critical thinking skills, illustrating how language teachers and learners can use meta-communication in creating successful online discussions, and stressing the importance of the teacher’s role in designing an effective online discussion environment for students.

Chapter 2 focuses on how to build a dynamic theoretical background of distance education as a source of meta-communication, and how this affects the use of online learning for reflective meaning making to construct a knowledge society. Based on the main purpose of this study, the virtual world can provide online learners with an interactive milieu for problem solving, critical thinking, and personalized/group discussion, multimedia presentation of global resources, connectivity, and visualization of social aspects of discussion and communication. In this context, distance education can respond to concerns and issues to create digital self-representations through a communication theory and learning theory together. Furthermore, discussing the main features of the cross-cultural implications of reflective conversations can construct a very powerful paradigm shift to establish public interests encompassing the reflections of every aspect of social networking with the enthusiasms, persuasions, as well as judgments.

Chapter 3 takes a contrary view of the “meta” aspect of meta-communication (where meta is defined as “behind” or “beneath”) in the online multicultural teacher education classroom, arguing that such communication inhibits learning about (content) and through (pedagogy) sociopolitically-located multicultural teacher education by enabling e-racism, e-classism, and e-sexism to operate in largely covert manners in the distance education context. Accordingly, this chapter contends that digital meta-communication on issues of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and sex/gender needs to be “de-meta-ed” or made explicit in order for the kind of liberatory reflective conversation on these topics to occur that is foundational to the adequate preparation of PK-12 teachers to effectively educate all students.
Chapter 4 is based on the online conversation that transpired among faculty members of higher educational institutions from four Southeast Asian countries who were in the process of designing a proposed regional graduate program on natural resources knowledge management. Knowledge management is synonymous to the sharing and reuse of intellectual capital. In other words knowledge management is engaged in what Habermas calls the communicative act. This communicative act being the subject of the online conversation has transformed the online discussion for the proposed program into meta communication, i.e., communication on communication or discourse (online discussion threads) on knowledge management (communication). The researchers documented the online conversation to test the efficacy of the platform used. In the process, however, they have uncovered certain oppressive factors peculiar to this setting that hindered the communicative act (i.e., knowledge management) and meta-communication (i.e., the online conversation) itself.

Chapter 5 describes a meta-communication model and illustrates its applicability. The model integrates previous discursive approaches to reflective practice and extends them with additional relevant concepts. The concepts of the meta-communication model are mainly based on Avatar Manager and Student Reflective Conversations pedagogical theory. By means of case examples, this chapter also illustrates how the model can be used for making meaning in experiential and theoretical based online educational courses and collective sense-making, i.e. the articulation and contesting the meaning and relevance of ideas. This chapter argues that the model provides a way for systematically and meaningfully structuring and organizing meta-level conversations in virtual classroom. The use of reflective pedagogies has long been considered critical to facilitating meaningful learning through experientially based curricula; however, the use of such methods has not been extensively explored as implemented in virtual environments. The study reviewed utilizes a combination of survey research and individual interviews to examine student perceptions of the meaningful learning which occurred as a result of their participation in two Web-based courses that utilized reflective pedagogies. One course focuses on topics related to service-learning and the second on placement-based internships. Both were instructed using online coursework based in reflective pedagogies to compliment on-site placements within local communities. Thus, created software of Meta-Communication Model applicable for using in virtual education process and in virtual research collaboration works at Astrakhan State University (Russian Federation) and at All Armenian Internet University (Australian Federation and Republic of Armenia) for the development of avatars has significant potential to enhance realism, automation capability, and effectiveness across a variety of training environments.

Chapter 6 ensures that the discipline of science is accessible to all individuals. By many organizations this has been termed “Science for All,” and those who promote this idea also advocate the connection to science literacy. Teaching science in the online environment has been one way to offer science content to many different individuals who do not necessarily need to be in the same location. Discourse in the science classroom is framed under situated cognition theory, whereby interactions between individuals are part of the normal culture of the classroom. For science knowledge to be adequately constructed by a student, these interactions must be meaningful ones. This is especially important in an online science course where typically learning occurs through interactions between the students and the instructor, the students with one another, and within the individual themselves. As part of these online interactions, good reflective practice includes the different forms of feedback and the quality of this feedback. However, even with quality reflective interactions, there are barriers to science concept construction in an online environment. These barriers are discussed, and future research directions are suggested based on this review.
Chapter 7 includes information about communication patterns and organizational discourse at an online university, which utilizes a mentoring model to educate students. The mentoring approach involves the assignment of individual students to work one-to-one with a faculty mentor for each course of the degree or certificate program in which the student is enrolled. To address the types of communication inherent in this virtual education model, a mentor, a doctoral dissertation committee member, and a student shed light on their experiences of communication at the university. These diverse prospective experiences serve as a meta-communication model that can be implemented to enhance the effectiveness of discourse at other institutions—particularly those seeking to implement a one-to-one mentoring approach.

Chapter 8 focuses on knowledge building through interactivity, social engagement, and communication technologies in a distance learning environment. Emphasis is placed on online collaboration and community building to encourage collaborative learning and ultimately knowledge acquisition. Theoretical constructs surrounding social constructivism and practical application to instruction are provided to the reader to enhance a distance learning course using meta-communication strategies. Sharing knowledge through collaboration and community using distance learning tools is an important component of today's 21st century education. Distance learning is growing in educational institutions worldwide, and instructors are developing enhanced teaching strategies focused on incorporating meta-communication that engages and empowers students in their quest for understanding.

Chapter 9 addresses the evolving strategies that have been used in the deployment of publicly viewable assignments used on asynchronous message boards for freshman and sophomore writing classes since 1997 through the consortium WashingtonOnline (WAOL), which consists of 32 community colleges in Washington State. Asynchronous message boards provide a critical space for university students to learn collaboratively, support each other, and develop critical thinking skills in freshman and sophomore composition and research writing classes. How asynchronous message board assignments - icebreakers, discussion questions, summaries, reading analyses, lead-up assignments (research topic proposals, source evaluations, outlines, and drafts), and cumulative projects - all work towards building reflective online conversations and deep learning.

Chapter 10 is based on the claim that the metaphors used as a new and powerful tool in different sciences, especially including Information Systems and a number of sociological disciplines such as linguistics, education, and sociology, can be used for the implementation and sustainability of the components of meta-communication for distance education. The meta-communication aims to move the intercultural components of metaphors to the distance education and its applications. Thereby, metaphors serve to the basic mission of distance education creating cross-cultural educational environments. In order to use metaphors with the meaning put forward by this claim, restructuring of metaphors with the contemporary metaphor theory, use of metaphors in computer systems and user interfaces, the intersection of metaphors and meta-communication, and finally, the power of metaphors in digital meta-communication for distance education are discussed below.

Chapter 11 builds on the insights of educators regarding the relationship between culture and online learning. In this chapter, the author sheds light on the ways in which culture has a significant influence on online education and vice versa. The chapter is based on primary data drawn from undergraduate female students' responses regarding how online education is changing their learning culture and how their culture is influencing online education. Sixty undergraduate Saudi female students participated in the survey in order to identify how using the Internet, online education, and online discussion forums is challenging cultural norms. The literature in the field of online and distance education is also explored
to help answer these questions. Students indicated that online education helped them to challenge some cultural norms, enhance their learning culture, and improve their communication skills.

Chapter 12 explores the technology perceptions and preparedness of pre-service and in-service teachers from three different countries. Twenty-one students in the Republic of Korea, twelve students in the United Arab Emirates, and thirty-five students in the United States of America were virtually connected through the BlackBoard communication system. They participated in weekly online discussion forums for six weeks and shared how well prepared they felt about using technology in their content areas and how they would effectively use technology in their future classrooms. This study can serve as a good model for facilitating a global conversation and supporting a reflective online conversation across geographic distances and cultural barriers.

Chapter 13 discusses some common points of Distance Education and photography in the context of meta-communication. Distance Education is a system. Therefore, it has a peculiar structure like all other systems; it is composed for heterogeneous student masses, but is accounted as having an individualistic quality. Distance Education is an intact system with no room for discrepancy, hesitation, disagreement, intellectual fantasies, et cetera. It perfectly represents the humanistic tradition in postmodern times. Distance Education is a meta–communication problem. Everything can be taught by Distance Education, because there are innumerable programs ranging from business administration to literature. But to what extent can it be taught? There are the heteronyms of this problem such as Polanyi’s “tacit knowledge” or Hegel’s / Agamben’s Eleusinian Mystery.

Chapter 14 focuses on defining assessment in the context of technology enhanced learning, analyzes global trends regarding assessment of students by using technology, discusses possible technology supported assessment, offers useful strategies for teachers to use technology for assessment, and predicts the future of technology supported assessments in different educational contexts. Educators at any stage of their career or dealing with any discipline of knowledge are required to delve into number of tasks like presenting and constructing assessment tasks, making valid judgments of the student progress in learning, facilitating the provision of feedback, and supporting the production and delivery of marks/grades to assess their students. Assessing students is a cumbersome task, and technologies offer a number of possibilities and opportunities for educators to make this task more enjoyable and meaningful.

Chapter 15 acknowledges knowledge as a mental activity is to define external factors which have a direct impact on the content of e-learning, which is a sort of distance learning at the same time. By this way, this study also tries to contribute to the exactness of such a learning act. Initially the study focuses on the concept of knowledge; after defining the nature, types, and features of knowledge, communicational conformation of mass media is emphasized in the chapter. Then, within the dialectic context of mind and tool, types of mass media interactions, linear and bidirectional interactions are investigated. Consequently, within the reference of previous chapters, construction of knowledge through mass media as a type of learning is discussed in the final part. In conclusion, some suggestions relating to external factors to be refrained for the sake of exactness of e-learning are made.

Chapter 16 examines the role of digital poster sessions in contemporary online conferences and highlights some basic production-quality issues in the creation of digital posters. In recent years, pre-recorded digital poster sessions have become more widely used as parts of real-time face-to-face conferences and as complements to online conferences and colloquiums. The multimedia-enriched building of various types of digital poster sessions offers high potential for conference organizers to be more inclusive of a variety of topics, and it helps conference participants gain more value from the shared synchronous time and virtual experiences.
Chapter 17 discusses and examines online learning in distance education context. It seeks to argue how learners cope up with online education and becomes successful online learners. Further, while learning through online mode, how does communication skills assist them to prevent barriers in their learning activities? A critical reflection on communication skills of online learners are summarized and highlighted. The online learners’ reactions and responses are mentioned in many occasions in this chapter which are documented in a few case studies available at different journals and Web portals.

One of the ways which distance education is capable of reaching online learners is the basis and method of meta-communication. Therefore, it is important to understand how to design reflective online conversations and how to implement a diverse milieu for prospective online learners so that they are able to transfer their information, knowledge, and learning from theoretical forms to real life experiences. The chapter author(s) explain these issues and subjects with the models they build. Not only the frameworks, but also the case studies can be used for explaining the online transformative ideas radically. Finally, this book gathers professionals from across disciplines, from all levels of education and from multicultural communities to design and implement lifelong learning practices with meta-communicative models which encourage high-quality reflective online conversations for the entire global society in distance education.

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