Chapter 15

Meta Communication Concept and the Role of Mass Media in Knowledge Building Process for Distance Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines and focuses on some issues and questions relating to how the use of meta communication concept should be functional and how it could influence knowledge building process. In addition to this, the role of mass communication and the mass communication tools which can be regarded as vital for distance learning, primarily the Internet, television, printed materials, and the categories by which media tools interact are also investigated. The ways mass media interacts with imply the interaction taking place between communicational tools and human mind are quite similar; that’s why mental building process of knowledge is dealt with likewise. Mind-tool interaction can be categorized into four sections: interaction through reading, interaction through listening, interaction through seeing-listening, and mutual interaction.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61350-071-2.ch015
INTRODUCTION

Verbal communication is supported by a raft of non-verbal signs and cues that reinforce what we are saying or clear up any ambiguities. For example, we may cross our arms when we feel threatened by what somebody else is saying, or we nod our heads when we agree with what they are saying.

“Meta Communication” is the process between message designers when they are talking about the learning process, as distinguished from their articulation of the “substantive” learning, itself. The hope is to increase the focus on the substantive knowledge and understanding being developed, by providing a separate channel for the support communication, and to do it in an easy, focused, and context aware manner. This may be particularly useful when the opportunity for face-to-face meta-communication is missing, as in much distance learning. (McLean, 2005)

To understand knowledge building it is essential to distinguish learning--”the process through which the cultural capital of a society is made available to successive generations” from knowledge building--the deliberate effort to increase the cultural capital. This, in turn, requires distinguishing knowledge building from a broad range of activities that share its constructivist underpinnings, but not its focus on the creation of new knowledge. These include collaborative learning, guided discovery, project-based learning, communities of learners, communities of practice, and anchored instruction.

Dynamics of knowledge building could be summarized as working on the creation and improvement of ideas. The dynamic is social, resulting in the creation of public knowledge. In contrast to knowledge situated within the individual mind (the traditional concern of education) and knowledge situated in the practice of groups (the concern of situated cognition and communities of practice), public knowledge has an out-in-the-world character. What makes knowledge building a realistic approach to education is the discovery that children as early as grade one can engage in it. Thus, there is a clear developmental link running from childhood education on into advanced education and adult knowledge work, in which the same process is carried out at increasingly high levels (http://www.ikit.org/kb.html).

Researchers from multiple disciplines (such as cultural studies, intercultural studies, linguistics, sociology, education, human-computer interaction, distance learning, learning technologies, philosophy and others) have initiated studies to examine virtual intercultural communication. The interdisciplinary of the field, however, offers distinct challenges: in addition to embracing different definitions of ‘culture’, investigators lack a common literature or vocabulary. Communicative encounters between groups and individuals from different cultures are variously described as cross-cultural, intercultural, multicultural or even transcultural. Researchers use terms such as the Internet, the World Wide Web, cyberspace, and virtual (learning) environments (VLE) to denote overlapping though slightly different perspectives on the world of networked digital communications. Others focus on CMC (computer-mediated communication), ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), HCI (human computer interaction), CHI (computer-human interaction) or CSCW (computer-supported cooperative work) in explorations of technologies at the communicative interface.

NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

The concept of knowledge has been comprehensively defined by some disciplines such as philosophy, sociology and psychology up to the present time. Philosophers agree in distinguishing between knowledge in the first of these senses, and belief. But they differ in their accounts of how they are to be distinguished: