

Chapter 5

Meta Communication Concept and Knowledge Building Process in Distance Education: From Point of Meta Cognitive Structural Collaborated Model

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ABSTRACT

“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. 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. These include collaborative learning, guided discovery, project-based learning, communities of learners, communities of practice, and anchored instruction. 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, WWW, VLE, CMC, ICTs, HCI, CHI or CSCW in explorations of technologies at the communicative interface. This chapter examines and focuses on some issues and questions relating to how the use of meta communication concept should be functional and influences for knowledge building process in Distance education.

META-COMMUNICATION CONCEPT

The prefix can have various meanings but as used in communication, philosophy and psychology its meaning is best recognized as *about*. Thus, *meta-communication* is communication about communi-

cation; *meta-language* is language about language; *meta-message* is a message about a message. Take it this way! You can communicate about the world - about the desk you’re sitting at, the computer you are using, or the passage you’re reading right now. We refer to this as *object communication*; because you are talking about objects. And the language you are using is called an *object language*. But notice

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that you are not limited to talking about objects; you can also talk about your talk; you can communicate about your communication. And this is referred to as meta-communication. In the same way, you can use language (i.e., meta-language) to talk about language (i.e., object language). And you can talk about your messages with meta-messages.

The distinction between object communication and meta-communication is not merely academic; it's extremely practical, and it is recognized that the difference between these two forms of communication is essential in untangling lots of conflicts and understanding a wide variety of interpersonal communication interactions. Actually, you use this distinction every day, perhaps without realizing it. For example, when you send someone an e-mail with a seemingly sarcastic comment and then put a smiley at the end, the smiley communicates about your communication; it says something like "this message is not to be taken literally; I'm trying to be humorous." The smiley is a meta-message; it's a message about a message. When you say, in preface to some comment, "I'm not sure about this but...." you're communicating a message about a message; you're commenting on the message and asking that it be understood with the qualification that you may be wrong. When you conclude a comment with "I'm only kidding" you're meta-communicating; you're communicating about the communication.

In relationship communication you often talk in meta-language and say things like, "we really need to talk about the way we communicate when we're out with company" or "you're too critical" or "I love when you tell me how much you love me." In fact, it might be argued that relationship or couples therapy is largely (though not entirely) a process of exploring your communication patterns through communication, through talking about the way you talk to and about each other. And, of course, you can use nonverbal messages to meta-communicate. You can wink at someone to indicate that you're only kidding, look longingly

into another eyes when you say "I love you" to show that you really mean it, or sneer after saying "Yeah, that was great," with the sneer contradicting the literal meaning of the verbal message.

All non-verbal elements of communication are sometimes called 'meta-communication', from the Greek word 'meta' meaning 'beyond' or 'in addition to'. 'Meta-communication' is therefore something 'in addition to the communication' and we must always be aware of its existence. It is essential to remember that the meta-communication which accompanies any message is very powerful. The receiver will use these clues to help them to interpret what you mean, but more importantly they will often take the meaning from the meta-communication rather than from the words themselves, particularly when what you are saying conflicts with what you are doing. If, for example, you are angry but trying to hide your anger you must be aware of your body posture, the way you use your eyes, gestures and facial expressions, and the tone of your voice, which may well give you away. Similarly, in writing, the 'tone of your voice' may show.

The verbalization of attributions between partners could lead into the process of "intentional meta-communication" as described by Perlmutter and Hatfield (1980). These authors claim that while meta-communication accompanies all messages and is often unconscious, intentional meta-communication occurs when people talk consciously about the relational context of their messages.

The possibilities for actual change in the relationship begin at the level of intentional meta-communication. Newman (1981) claims, "To what extent intentional meta-communication actually occurs, and actually facilitates relational change, is a subject in need of further investigation" (Newman, 1981, p. 129).

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