

Facing Faceless Faces

Competencies of Faceless and Semi Public Social Communication

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Faceless communication

Wellman (2001) has introduced a description of the social relationships and communities from old times till today as a development from door-to-door via place-to-place, to person-to-person and role-to-role communities, where the last two types are rather new, and the big increase in the past few years is caused by mobile technologies or technologies where strangers communicate and thereby enter into “relationships [which] are between fragments of selves, rather than between whole selves” (Wellman, 2001) – as roles. This kind of communities and relationships clearly bring along many benefits:

The concept of virtual implies permeable interfaces and boundaries; project teams that rapidly form, reorganize, and dissolve when the needs of a dynamic marketplace change (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999).

The formation of virtual teams facilitate the incorporation of a wide range of knowledge and expertise possessed by individual members into a collective body of knowledge needed to conduct effective group problem-solving activities (Andres, 2002, p. 39).

Affinity spaces are an important form of social affiliation today, places where effective learning occurs (Gee, 2005, p. 231)¹.

¹ Affinity spaces is a term coined by Gee to describe a type of Social Semiotic Spaces that among other things are characterized by being a space where people come together with a common endeavour, newbies and masters share common space, knowledge of many types (intensive, extensive, individual, distributed, tacit) are encouraged and used, where there are many forms and routes to participation, different routes to status, and where the leadership is porous (Gee, 2005, p. 225ff.). Examples of affinity spaces are fan websites, gaming sites, customer websites etc., and global movements like MoveOn.org, Attac etc. (Keyne, 2003).

In short, it [living in networks] has reduced the identity and pressures of belonging to groups while increasing opportunity, contingency, globalization, and uncertainty through participation in social networks (Wellman, 1999).

Despite the benefits, faceless communication, i.e. communication where the participants cannot see (or hear) each other, also confronts the participants with a number of challenges in the shape of conflict escalation (Friedman & Currall, n.d), lack of trust (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999), social isolation, challenges of handling the multiplicities of the self (Turkle, 1995), increased negative communicative tone, assertive and hostile language and an increased sense of depersonalization (Andres, 2002, p. 41).

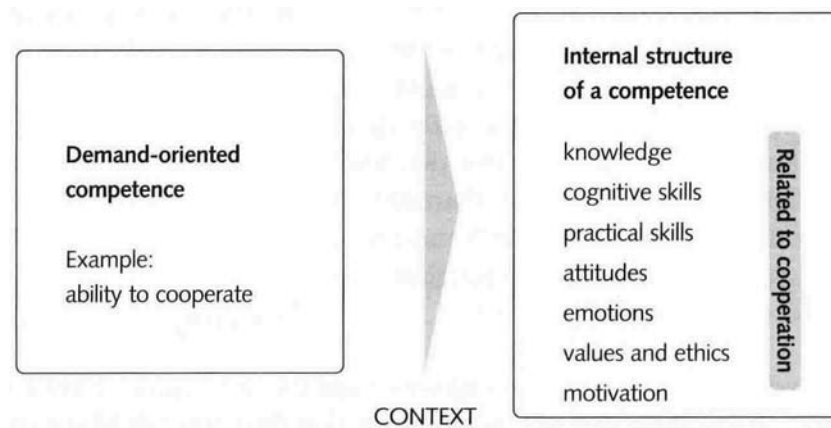
It is difficult to find research articles aimed at understanding the concrete challenges in the practice of communicating in faceless relationships. Most research is done to describe the psychological consequences of communicating via e-mail, online communities etc. (Turkle, 1995; Drolet & Morris, 2000; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999). Such work often sums up a number of challenges and at times mentions some important competencies of online communicators, as well as suggests some organizational principles of online communication. I suggest that a more thorough understanding of challenges and appropriate competencies to meet these challenges are needed.

Competencies as the “third way”

I argue that there are a number of competencies related to faceless communication that are requisite in modern life. And I argue that people are not necessarily likely to develop these competencies by themselves, among other reasons because they involve a special kind of emphatic identification with the other, they involve sophisticated textual analysis, and they demand conflict solving experience and skills. These are the reasons why I propose some consequences for the education of the rising generations – and maybe the grown-ups as well.

I use the term *competence* in a sense that is inspired by the OECD framework on competencies: *DeSeCo* (Definition and Selection of Competencies). The working group was led by Dominique Rychen and Laura Salganik and was concluded in a final report (Rychen & Salganik, 2003) in which a competence was defined by this model:

Figure 1. "The demand defines the internal structure of a competence" (Rychen & Salganik, 2003, p. 44).



This model of a competence implies several important insights. First of all a competence is always situated. Competencies are not abstract abilities that can be acquired in laboratory settings or as a few context-free rules. Competencies are in contrast a holistic whole of knowledge, skills and attitudes; that is, it is not enough to be able to do something, one must also *want* to do so and be ready to put the energy and work needed into the process. This is why I include expressions of attitude and motivation in the drawing up of competencies below.

As it appears I use the term *competence* in somewhat the same way as some scholars would use the term *literacy*. I have chosen to use the term competence to avoid the connotations of *litera*, letter, that is inherit in the term literacy, and to avoid both extremes of literacy definitions: In the one end: To be able to decode letters as words, and in the other end: To be able to participate in a social praxis interacting through signs of all modes. The one extreme fails to recognize that reading is connected to understanding not only of words but also of worlds, and the other makes it a poor tool to use to describe what has to be taught in school.

There is an ongoing discussion among educational theorists about whether educational theory should be normative/prescriptive or descriptive (Nielsen, 2006; Hetmar, 2004). This discussion is also touched upon in the introductory chapter of this book (Gentikov, p. XX). I think this opposition is an unconstructive one, and I agree with Gentikov's wish for a "third way" beyond these two approaches. Educational theory cannot fulfil its goals without being both one and the other. A competence approach is such a third way.

As I will show educational theory can be descriptive when examining what the challenges are when living in the contemporary and expected near-future world. Such challenges imply that the rising generations must possess abilities that make them capable of, engaged in and motivated for meeting the challenges. In the specification of what this means more explicit, we still are in a descriptive domain. But to choose which challenges are the most important to meet one has to make some normative assessments, and one has to choose between an infinite number of larger and smaller challenges. Thus of course educational scholars are normative through their choice of objects and contexts for examination.

In the end the work done by educational scholars to select and define competencies, is a preliminary work, which should function as a basis for democratic and in nature normative decision: What shall be the contents of the education of the rising generations?

Thus what I also present in this paper is a method of curriculum development:

- a) Investigation of challenges on the individual and group level in typical situations in contemporary and near-future society in preparation for
- b) description of competencies that the individuals need to participate in handling the situations. This description forms a basis for
- c) an analysis of the academic methods and knowledge that may support development of these competencies. In the end
- d) these analyses may form an informed basis for normative decision-making on curriculum (contents and methods) by decision-makers on all levels (politicians, Government and local officials, teachers etc.).

In this paper I sketch out points a, b and d, while I leave point c aside (cf. the conclusion).

Communicating with friends and acquaintances

A common feature of written communication in genres like e-mail, chat, and posts in forum discussions and virtual communities etc. which all are produced and consumed using computer based communication technologies, is that it is faceless in the sense that the producer and the consumer does not see the reactions of their fellow dialogue participants. But exactly because they cannot read and react instantly to the other's emotions and other

non-verbal communication, the faces in the Goffman-sense (1967) of the word might be even more important to considerate and take care of. We are facing faceless faces.

Two persons are collaborating on a project. The older one, Eric, is well-known in the field, more knowledgeable, and has strong opinions on other experts in the same field. Even though the young collaborator, Jones, are in line with the ideology of Eric, he realizes that he has to get more into the field by consulting different views. He asks Eric by e-mail about his thoughts on the work of a central person in the field, and tells that he has begun reading some of her and other people's work. Eric, who is normally very painstaking and thorough in his mails, responds to this idea in a comparably short e-mail by writing:

I am not sure I understand your interest in Sonya's work. Sonya pretends to mediate and combine viewpoints of different positions, but she really does nothing but swim with the tide, and when the tide seems to flood the ground, she is always swimming alongside the right people. Of course that is the easiest and most safe way to swim. But / don't swim with her.

I look forward to hear what you think of the articles I sent you. I hope we are not drifting apart.

Eric

This e-mail can be read in a lot of ways. Eric might be busy and want to answer right away to get the job done and get on with other things, telling what he thinks of a colleague in a few well-chosen words. He might be angry with Jones taking own initiatives, or he might be afraid of being betrayed. Another possibility is that Eric in fact seeks the confrontation, and wants to "drift apart" from his collaborator, or, finally, that he tests if that is what Jones wants. Jones might choose to read the tide-metaphor as an insinuation of he himself being one that swims with the tide. This innuendo is not apparent, and Jones might read this and previous e-mails from Eric over and over again to find out if that is what Eric insinuates – and in this case how deep the inherent disrespect is rooted.

The way the e-mail is read of course depends on the participator's common history, Jones' knowledge of Eric's mood and character etc., i.e. it depends on the context.

The example gives rise to a number of points that I will make in this paper. First of all Eric has done a bad job in writing such an ambiguous text. Either his intentions are bad or he has not considered which interpretations which are open to the consumer of the e-mail.

Texts are always ambiguous and open to interpretations, and this has always been a challenge for readers. But one thing has changed. Today written communication is used not primarily for referential communication but also as a means for organizing, socializing, networking etc. In other words it is used instead of spoken communication in many situations, and in even more cases it is used in contexts which did not exist few years ago.

Modality of Writing, Computer and Network Technologies, Screen Media

Writing is surely not a new modality, but we are producing and consuming writing in new contexts. These contexts have become possible for a number of reasons, one of them being developments in technology and media², so it is now possible and common practice to communicate in writing when organising, collaborating, socializing etc. The technologies have made it easy to produce messages in writing, pictures, sound etc. all in the same message, and to communicate by choice of layout, colours etc. These developments have led researchers in communication to introduce the concepts of modality and multimodality (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Carlsson *et. al.*, 2005). Modality depicts what is common to a certain type of marks regardless of the medium they are marked in, and regardless of the technology used for marking the marks. Writing is for instance to be consumed as signs for sound, and therefore should be 'translated' into sound. Thus the modality of writing has to be consumed in a certain way to be understood, while marks of the image modality (where the marks may be marked in the same medium and with the same technology as writing) have to be consumed in a different way and so on. So to be able to read one has to learn to 'decode' writing. This has made teaching in reading and writing necessary while teaching to read an image is not necessary to the same extent. Teaching in reading has been concerned primarily with texts of literary or more formal factual genres. What is new is that writing is used in still new contexts and therefore demands still new competencies (cf. Bundsgaard, 2006b). Some of the challenges are seen in Eric's e-mail cited earlier. An analysis of the modality of writing, typical technologies used for the production of written text and media marked with text, can lead to a more generalised understanding of what kind of challenges we will face.

Writing generally is production of marks on a surface (i.e. a medium) that retains the marks (or they are transformed and marked on a memory medium for later automatic

² I define *medium* as the physical substance on (or in) which the marks are marked (or formed), and technology as the tools and the social and bodily and mental competencies used to mark the marks (Bundsgaard, 2005, ch. 4.1.3.4, cf. Bundsgaard, 2007). In the following I will use a number of terms discussed further in Bundsgaard (2005: 4.1) to characterize media, technologies and modalities.

reproduction by computer technologies for example on a plastic medium like the screen). Moreover writing is a “slow” modality in comparison to speech; it takes time to produce it both for the reason of the efforts it takes to handle the technologies (pencil or keyboard) and because of the expectations towards a written message (that it is explicit, unfolded, unified, well structured and finished, cf. Bundsgaard, 2007). The characteristics of the technologies and media used for writing have a number of consequences for the production and consumption of writing. Some of them are summarized in the following overview:

The consumer can:

- skim the message,
- jump forward and back,
- read it in his own pace,
- return and read all over.

And correspondingly the producer:

- can read what he has already written,
- can return and rectify or get inspired to the further writing,
- can change the sequence of the message, and he
- has the text to himself until it is handed over to reading (cf. Bundsgaard, 2005, ch. 5.3.2.2)

These characteristics do only to a very limited extent characterize speech. Writing is most often used when the communicating persons are not in the same room. Usually when producing marks (as sound waves in the air-medium) of the speech-modality (that is, when speaking) the consumer is consuming the marks as they are produced. The producer of a written text has got the manifested text in front of him until he decides to hand it over, for instance by e-mailing it. This means that:

- The producer has to produce the text as a coherent whole and not in an ongoing dialogue; and in continuation of this
- the producer cannot point with the body to what he is ‘talking’ about, and
- in comparison to facing the consumer he knows her background and conditions for understanding this specific way of expressing himself to a lesser extent, and finally
- he has a limited knowledge of the consumers attitude to what is said (that is, he does not see if the consumer gets insulted, angry, happy etc. by reading the message).

The challenge in e-mail, forum and other kind of Internet communication is that there are a number of technological possibilities that change some parts of the context of the production of written messages. The technology for consumption, production, revision, and transport is one and the same. The producer does not have to open an envelope, read the text, find a paper and a pen, write, put the paper in an envelope, and finally walk to the mailbox. He just presses the reply button, and after writing using the keyboard to produce marks showing on a plastic³ medium (the screen), he hits the send button. The technology and the medium in other words have removed a number of natural 'thinking pauses' in written communication, and have minimized the prestige of the written message. But it has not changed the characteristics of the modality of writing. The producer still does not see how the consumer reacts. He still does not have access to bodily signs to test if she understood what he were talking about, meant etc. While the technologies promote faster production of written messages, the consumer can still study the text in detail, return to the beginning, and re-interpret it.

She thereby might infer insults or ulterior motives that the producer did not intend, and she might proceed along the same "wrong" interpretation on other parts of the text without the producer having the opportunity to correct her – cf. Jones' interpretation of Eric's e-mail, that it conveys the impression that Eric disrespects him.

One difference between the e-mail text genre and literary or formal genres is one of communication situation. When writing a literary or a factual prose text the producer has a larger public in mind and therefore prepares his text carefully (and this is even often followed by an editorial process). E-mailing most often is a few-to-few-communication situation, and as mentioned above it is a rapid technology. This makes it less important for most producers to produce completely well-formed and thoroughly prepared e-mails, again possibly leading to more or less obscure texts open to a lot of interpretations.

On the other side the increasing number of texts and the knowledge of their production circumstances might make the consumer less attentive to the messages she receives. She might merely skim a message which is important from the producer's point of view, and for

³ A plastic medium is a medium that changes easily. We are used to that from speech: The air is a plastic medium to. But in combination with a memory medium the screen have the traditional characteristics of paper: It can hold the written marks for as long as the consumer and producer like. And in addition can be replaced whenever they like.

that reason not notice the undertones or forget to answer more or less important parts of the message.

In the academic literature on literacy Plato is often fêted as the first writer on writing (Ong, 1982; Gee, 1996; Havelock, 1963), one of the often quoted statements being this one:

Socrates: Yes, Phaedrus, because I think writing has this strange feature, which makes it like painting. The offspring of painting stand there as if alive, but, if you ask them something, they preserve a quite solemn silence. Similarly with written words: you might think that they spoke as if they had some thought in their heads, but if you ever ask them about any of the things they say out of a desire to learn, they point to just one thing, the same each time. And when once it is written, every composition is trundled about everywhere in the same way, in the presence both of those who know about the subject and of those who have nothing to do with it, and it does not know how to address those it should address and not those it should not. When it is ill-treated and unjustly abused, it always needs its father to help it; for it is incapable of defending or helping itself (Plato, 1986, p. 275 d4-e6).

This quotation has at least two central points to it. The first is that writing cannot answer if the consumer has a “desire to learn”. And the second point is that the consumer might do violence to the intentions of the writer by misinterpreting the text.

Plato’s second point might be truer than ever, because of the more or less sloppy reading of e-mails explained above. But the first point is not completely viable in the context of e-mail (and chat, forum posts etc.), because the consumer in fact pretty easily *can* ask the producer what he meant or intended. For example, Jones may bypass some of his misgivings of Eric’s mood by sending him an e-mail answering in a friendly manner that he is not interested in drifting apart, make it clear that he wants to take a personal position on the matter in hand, and ask if Eric conceives of him as an unreliable swimmer of tides. Written near-synchronous communication with computer technology therefore does leave room for questioning and answering, but it does so in a mono-modal manner, and this might be the problem with written e-mail-communication: The producer and consumer only has one mode of communication, compared to face-to-face communication where a number of bodily modes supplement, complement or take the place of speech.

E-mail promote mono-modal asynchronous, multitopical⁴ communication, and thereby requires the producer to be explicit and aware of the different possible interpretations of the text, and the consumer to be constructive in her interpretation, aware of the contexts of the text, and ready to ask friendly questions on the basis of her interpretations.

The primary conclusion on these deliberations is that both producer and consumer have to be even more aware of their communication partners: What will she think of this text? In which ways can it be read? How can she misunderstand it? Should I choose another technology, modality and/or medium? etc. And the consumer: Are there less negative interpretations of this text? What could be the reasons for the producer to write what he has done? What does he want me to do? Do I want to do what he wants?

In short: The producer must exercise *consumer attentiveness*, and the consumer on her side has to be *aware of the context of the production* of the e-mail.

This can be formulated in competence terms: To participate with success in e-mail communication, it is important to:

- a) be able to perform textual analysis
- b) be able to perform contextual analysis
- c) be able to show empathy
 - o Producer: to imagine if the consumer might be hurt or angry because of the formulations, or how it could be misunderstood.
 - o Consumer: to aim at constructive interpretations and constructively imagining what the absent face could have displayed while expressing the words.
- d) value constructiveness and collaboration
- e) be capable of conflict management

The two last points are both related directly to conflict solving or management. On the one hand it does not make sense to be capable of conflict management if one is not interested in or does not feel like participating, and on the other hand conflict management is a complex practice. Thus a competence is always both dependent on whether the competent person is willing to do and capable of doing a certain act. In the above example

⁴ Multitopical is a neologism meaning that something (a message) exists in different places at the same time or through time (a webpage, an email, two copies of the same book).

Jones easily could escalate the conflict by answering in the same tone as Eric. Friedman & Currall (n.d.) argues that the technological characteristics of e-mail make it more likely that conflict escalates (caused by low feedback, reduced social cues etc.). Friedman & Currall suggest that “such risks [of conflict escalation] can be reduced by greater self-awareness among those who use e-mail”. I agree and would like to add that conflict management competence can be developed by acquisition of democratic principles of dialogue (Dawes, Mercer & Wegerif, 2004; Bundsgaard, 2005, ch. 5.3.2.5.2).

Communicating as roles

One of the much praised features of the Internet is its capacity to let strangers meet and discuss every aspect of their life and hobbies, and thereby maybe build friendship or even closer relationships (Turkle, 1995; Welmann, 2001). On affinity spaces like myspace.com, match.com, arto.com users publish images, stories of their every day life, thoughts and hopes for the future, and they discuss everything from politics to popular culture etc. The positive side of this kind of affinity spaces or “virtual communities” is that it surely offers interesting ways of meeting people from all over the world and next door, it makes it possible to play with and explore identity, and it functions as a field of practice for future collaboration online (which is one of the reasons schools should not choose the easy but unpremeditated solution to prevent access to such affinity spaces, in spite of all their downsides).

But affinity spaces online does have a number of seamy sides. The facelessness⁵ caused by the asynchronous distribution and the written mode of the messages seems to minimize the psychic barriers which would hinder harassments, bullying and hard talk in face-to-face meetings resulting in what seems to be a serious increase in online communication of harassments, cyber-bullying and hard talk in comparison to face-to-face relationships. These increases are heavily documented in anxious news reports as well as in anti-bullying-initiatives (cf. Belsey, 2005; and Wikipedia on cyber-bullying⁶), and in research papers (Li, 2007)⁷. But cyber-bullying is only the most extreme expression of a wider movement.

⁵ Even though pictures published in the profiles and posts show that the participators do have a face, they do not show the mood for example of a harassed participator.

⁶ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyber-bullying. Retrieved May 22, 2007.

⁷ As participator in the organization of a number of educational online communities, I myself have witnessed different kinds of bullying and harassments (cf. Bundsgaard, 2005, ch. 5.3.2.5).

In a mailing list of Danish users of an open source operating system people ask questions, and when answering people are usually being helpful and kind. But sometimes people lose their head, like in this reply by Jack to a somewhat unclear question from Chris:

[...] When I saw your mail I thought (again) AAAAARRGGGHHH HELL, NO [...]
Now we are going to have another thread where the blind, deaf-mute and awkward Chris needs feeding by spoon [...] Sorry the sour post, but hell, man!
[quote from the original post] WHAT IS THE ERROR, MAN! ARE YOU AN IDIOT?

After this telling-off Jack asks a bit more friendly about technical details, refers to a guide to asking questions in news groups, and then turns to the rest of the mailing list participants and tells them that of course everyone is allowed to ask questions, even simple ones, but that people have to do the spadework themselves providing information on their system, and checking that the question has not been asked and answered already. After this he refers to Chris in third person and wonder why his questions often end up “going round in circles”.

This reply is very defacing. Chris did not only ask an unclear question, but this is what he always does – he has no right to be among us. The final address to the rest of the community makes it even clearer that Chris is unwanted – the telling-off has been overheard by everybody, and he can be discussed in the full daylight of publicity. People communicating in a mailing list often get an identity, get to “know” each other as roles (Wellman, 2001), and therefore communicate in a more personal manner than people communicate in public genres (as in news papers, radio, and television). Therefore it might be surprising that more or less destructive wiggling is pretty common. I suggest it is caused exactly by the role-character of the relationship: In a forum participants are communicating with roles with names more than with persons with bodies and real faces.

It is one of the characteristics of mailing list communication that it is semi-public. Mailing list communication is not intended for everybody, and everybody surely is not participating, but in principle everybody *could* participate. I expect that these third persons would have felt it very unpleasant to overhear a similar talking-to in a face-to-face situation (and maybe they felt a twinge of regret as I did when I first read the reply), but in this faceless relation of written communication, where a lot of people listen, but only a few participate (most

mailing list members write a post from time to time, but read more regularly), nobody seemed to express such regret. Chris tried to reply in a similar negative manner – to uphold his face by counterattacking – but ended up receiving quite a few reformulations of the first post, some of the more friendly ones stating agreement in substance but not in form.

I have not interviewed Chris about his understanding and experience of the occurrences, but I assume that he felt a serious loss of face, very hurt, and upset. In the situation he would have nowhere to turn to, no one to seek sympathy from. In a face-to-face meeting the participators would have taken part in *face work*. Chris would have *challenged* Jack (Goffman, 1967, p. XX), which on his side under normal circumstances would have *offered* some kind of *compensation* or diminished the importance of the insult. In the faceless relationship Chris as already mentioned tries to pay Jack back in the same tone, but Jack follows a typical online strategy by not answering, leaving Chris with a double defacement: First torn down, then ignored.

While Goffman uses the word ‘face’ in a metaphoric sense, it surely rests solidly on our experience with face-to-face meetings, and he also points out that face work are especially prevalent in face-to-face communication (Goffman, 1967, p. XX). This suggestion is supported by research on the connection between rapport and face-to-face contact. Drolet & Morris (2000) have shown that people that meet face-to-face solve conflicts much easier than via telephone, and that this is caused by the development of rapport in the face-to-face contact. I suggest that rapport is even harder to develop in written contact, and that the lack of rapport makes it easier for the participators to regard the others as non-humans or not worthy of decent treatment.

In short: *The faceless relationships in semi public spaces seem to partly abolish the face-to-face practice of face work, make defacing even worse by the silent presence of third persons, and facilitate complete defacing through disregard. And it seems that the person doing the defacement does not feel the same urge for re-establishing equilibrium as in face-to-face relations, and does not him self lose face in the process of defacement.*

One of these points is made in many other connections, namely that non-answering – being caused by lack of time, disregard or other reasons – is hard to bear.

Another finding of the study that might be endemic to virtually communicating temporal teams was the role of response. Our data supports the view of Meyerson et al. (1996) that initiatives (e.g., volunteering to complete tasks) appear to strengthen and unify the team, but the case data also suggest that the responses to the initiatives might be even more important. Because computer mediated communication entails greater uncertainty than face-to-face communication, there tends to be an "intense need for response" (Hawisher and Moran, 1993) (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999, p. 811).

Martin Ford has in his important work on motivation coined the term *Personal Agency Belief*, abbreviated PAB (Ford, 1992, p. 80), which refers to the persons own sense of his or her competencies in relation to the tasks at hand (*Capability beliefs*), and evaluation of what others think of his or her competencies (*Context beliefs*). Ford argues that PAB in a complex relationship with *Goals* and *Emotions* constitute motivation. Thus an explanation of the observations done in the above example, by Javenpaa & Leidner, and by others is that lack of response is subversive to the initiator's context beliefs and thereby to his motivation for participation in the collaboration or socializing (cf. Bundsgaard, 2007).

As I have argued faceless written communication confronts the participators with added challenges in relation to face work, or in competence terms: Faceless communication requires participators to be competent in displaying empathy. This empathy is "un-natural" in the sense that it does not seem to be so prevalent in faceless communication, and therefore needs special attention. I suggest that it consists of

- a) being able to intentionally put one self in the other persons place, considering what this person might feel, infer and interpret from a given e-mail or post – or the absence of such
- b) knowing the importance of participators feeling noticed, recognised and taken care of, and
- c) willing to take the necessary steps to participate constructively and to take care of that the other participators feel comfortable with the situation.

This also means that communication in collaborative working or learning environments should not only be of subject related kind, but also social.

In summary, the results of the study suggest that in global virtual teams, trust might take on a form of swift trust with some variations. Trust might be imported, but is more likely created via a communication behavior established in the first few keystrokes. Communication that rallies around the project and tasks appears to be necessary to maintain trust. Social communication that complements rather than substitutes for task communication may strengthen trust. Finally, responding behaviors are as critical as initiating behaviors, and members have to explicitly verbalize their commitment, excitement, and optimism (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999, p. 811, cf. Bundsgaard, 2005, ch. 4.2.1).

Jack's reply to Chris could be viewed as cyber-bullying, intended to destroy him, and Chris seems to react in a way that gives other participants a reason to participate in the bullying. Goffman writes about how people of higher status might not take up a face threatening act from people lower on the social ladder (Goffman, 1967, p. XX). Such a strategy might be a solution if the facelessness does in fact lead to less responsibility and more disagreeableness. Thus I propose that part of a competence in faceless communication is

- d) to develop the attitude that it is not always necessary to let one's face get threatened even if other participants intend to harm it.

Communicating across time and space

Three very characteristic features of communication via the Internet are the possibility to communicate over large distances, with strangers, and with a very long latency⁸. That is, when a message is posted in a forum or a profile created in an affinity space, it might be read by somebody on the other side of the earth, maybe by a stranger, and exist for years⁹. This means that dialogues meant to reach a small audience in a specific time and place might reach people with completely different agendas, for example a potential employer, collaborators etc. in another time and/or place.

⁸ I use the term latency in a way that differs slightly from its use in engineering. In engineering it is a measure of how long it takes a signal to get from phase *a* to phase *b* (for instance, when a button is pressed). Latency comes from Latin and means "to lie hidden". It is in this sense I use the word: latency in this context is the time the message lies hidden until it is actualized. Thus, latency is the time from production *a* to consumption *b*.

⁹ Or in principle for ever without the producer being able to correct or delete it – even if home pages are deleted, they are preserved in internet archives like the *Wayback Machine*, www.archive.org.

Turkle argues that life on the screen provides a great space for practicing the multiplicity of identities that is a condition of modern life (Turkle, 1995, p. 255f.). I find this point very important, and extendable to other areas of life. Online affinity spaces, virtual communities etc. all provide a playground, let alone it can be a very serious one, for living in the modern world: Communicating in writing with strangers, managing conflict, telling a favourable story of oneself etc. I will leave this point here and turn to an outline of some challenges that needs considerations in educational contexts.

When communication and acting in an affinity space or a virtual community, it seems as if people easily develop a kind of familiarity that entails a sense of confidence which makes them communicate in an even more cosy manner, not being afraid of telling intimate stories and showing weakness. On dating-sites and online communities where users have profile-pages it is common to provide one or more pictures of oneself. These pictures are very important in the identity narrative, and that might be why I often get embarrassed about young girls and boys provocative outfit (or lack of such) or their self-assured or self-staging appearance in their profile-pages. I guess that I am frequently not the intended consumer of the pictures or presentations, and surely there are other people that are not intended consumers either. But most often the producers and subjects of the pictures are not aware of who is visiting their profile, looking at image galleries, reading their posts etc.

This personal, and sometimes intimate, *semi public social communication* with unknown and unperceived strangers is an innovation, for which we have not developed strategies of attention and approach. I suggest that it is important to

- a) develop ways to consider the communication situation in question – and possible future situations where the text could appear
- b) develop a strategy of intentional consideration of the implications of publishing a certain text, image, video etc., that is analyses of possible scenarios
- c) develop a sense of empathy with one's own future self.

Conclusion

In this paper some of the core challenges meeting people when communicating via e-mail, communicating as roles and communicating across time and space are investigated. These analyses follow the lines of a competence oriented method of curriculum development. This method takes the stance that curriculum in schools should be selected

to promote the students possibilities of living the good life and participating in developing the well-functioning society.

The analyses lead me to propose that it is important for the students to develop the following competencies.

To participate with success in *e-mail communication*, it is important to:

- a) be able to perform textual analysis
- b) be able to perform contextual analysis
- c) be able to show empathy
 - a. Producer: to imagine if the consumer might be hurt or angry because of the formulations, or how it could be misunderstood.
 - b. Consumer: to aim at constructive interpretations and constructively imagining what the absent face could have displayed while expressing the words.
- d) value constructiveness and collaboration
- e) be capable of conflict management.

Faceless communication (*Communicating as roles*) requires participators to be competent in displaying empathy. I suggest that it consists of

- a) being able to intentionally put one self in the other persons place, considering what this person might feel, infer and interpret from a given e-mail or post – or the absence of such
- b) knowing the importance of participators feeling noticed, recognised and taken care of, and
- c) willing to take the necessary steps to participate constructively and to take care of that the other participators feel comfortable with the situation.
- d) to develop the attitude that it is not always necessary to let one's face get threatened even if other participators intend to harm it.

Semi public social communication with unknown and unperceived strangers (*Communicating across time and space*) is an innovation, for which we have not developed strategies of attention and approach. I suggest that it is important to

- a) develop ways to consider the communication situation in question – and possible future situations where the text could appear

- b) develop a strategy of intentional consideration of the implications of publishing a certain text, image, video etc., that is analyses of possible scenarios
- c) develop a sense of empathy with one's own future self.

The description of these competencies is only a part of the method of curriculum development I introduce. I leave the closer analysis of the academic methods and knowledge that may support development of these competencies, aside. It would have been comprised for example of deliberations on how to perform textual analysis, which kinds of textual analysis methods and approaches that would be suitable to get a more thorough understanding of an e-mail, forum post etc. Such analysis would also function as an argument for the relevance of integrating activities to help the students develop the proposed competencies into school subjects.

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