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Distance Education Students' "Metaphors"

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Abstract

Metaphors have an important place in education. In order to arrange curriculums more efficiently, one has to be aware of metaphors in those subjects. Students' have several metaphors about distance education, where most of them have no relevance with the exact meaning of the distance education. In order to reveal the common misconceptions and in order to be aware of students' metaphors; a research study with 12 distance education students was carried out. "Ocean" was the most common metaphor for distance education and blended distance education was taken as "an education for girls and boys". This research study is the first steps of a more detailed future project of the authors.7 key questions are also presented, as recommendations for further researches.

Keywords: Students; distance education; metaphors; interview; questionnaire.

1. Introduction

Metaphors are words that show how two things that are not alike in most ways are similar in one important way. Learners have different ways of learning and they issues such as instructional support, faculty motivation and enthusiasm, and technology problems have been raised as problems in developing online instruction in many institutions for a long time (Barr and Tag, 1995). There are lots of students who learn by metaphors. Metaphors are a way to describe something and are a way to learn something. There may be several issues effecting learners' perceptions about online learning: Instructor, Website, Computer Skills, Pedagogical Issues and English Language. These differences in perceptions of students, result in their having different metaphors. If learners are not satisfied with the design of the course website, they may have negative perceptions of the effectiveness their online courses (Brush, 2001). Polloff and Pratt (2001) found that learners are most satisfied with courses in which the instructors facilitate frequent contact between themselves and learners, use active learning techniques, convey high expectations, emphasize of time spent on specific tasks, and provide prompt feedback. Findings from a mixed-methods analysis revealed that native language was a factor in distinguishing among the learning opportunities. Metaphors have proven to be a highly useful tool in the development of theories in the social sciences.(Hartzell,

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2004; Kendall & Kendall, 1993; Levassuer, 2004; Wang, 2004). At a minimum,they provide a convenient means by which to create a taxonomy; the first step towards description,then prediction and finally to understanding (Kerssens-van-Drongelen, 2001; Lewis &Grimes, 1999; Lynham, 2000).

At a practical level, metaphors become essential elements that comprise the everyday language among specialists (Cook-Sather, 2003). For example the statement, "The computer is down," indicates the functional or operational status of a computer (including its programs or software) as opposed to a spatial relationship or orientation. Those familiar with the jargon share this common understanding (Gozzi, 2000). Working together with other learners increases involvement in learning and deepens understanding (Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996). According to Anderson and Joerg (1996), learners perceived online courses as a valuable delivery tool, and they reported that online courses changed the dynamics of access to class materials to any time from different locations. The online learning environment can help build a community of learners who cooperatively share ideas, knowledge, and opinions. Learning theory prominently recognizes the value of learning communities and the importance of cooperative learning for long-term relation of information (Dansereau, 1988; Phillips & Soltis, 2004). Researchers showed that a lack of belonging sense to learning communities keeps learners from developing shared feelings and emotional comfort in online environments (Oh & Lim, 2005, Rovai and Jordan, 2004). To address this in distance education environments, delivering vivid learning experiences, clear directions and enhancing social presence is crucial. Metaphors are like using a different language for communication purposes. This language helps us better understand the changes happening around us, by defining the less concrete by means of reference to a more concrete concept (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). For every metaphor highlights one aspect of the concept, just as it hides another; Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call this ''metaphorical systematicity''. In his analysis of McLuhan's impact, Levinson (2001) regrets that McLuhan's statements have fueled ''the fire of worry that bad things are happening that we can't know or understand''. And while McLuhan proposed that the ''medium has an impact above and beyond what we do with it'' (Levinson 2001), there is no firm evidence as yet that the worriers are correct (Meyer 2002). Students methaphors play an important role in their learning. Teachers must be aware of their students metafors, in order to carry out their courses as student oriented. "Distance Education" is a much more different education than the traditional education, and students have much more different metaphors for this. Although there were research studies like common metaphors and their impact on distance education (Meyer, 2005), there were not any studies in the literature about distance educations metaphors.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to drive out the distance education students' metaphors about distance education.

2.Method

2.1 Population

The population of the survey is Computer Education and Instructional Technology (CEIT) students in Near East University (NEU). The sample choosen consist of 12 students which are involved in various distance education courses. These students students in NEU were choosen randomly: 3 first form students, 3 second form students, 3 third form students and 3fourth form students . On the other hand, the students are assured that their responses would not affect their grades.

2.2 Instrument

An 20 item questionnaire " Distance Education Metaphor Analysis Survey" was designed by the authors (see Appendix A). Content validity is maintained by experts evaluation (n = 17) . Experts group from education technologist evaluated the data gathering scale both individually and collaboratively. Hence, the content validity was maintained by the help of the educational technologist experts. The survey was done with 12 "randomly chosen students" from CEIT department in NEU. The interviews with the students were done in one-to-one communication with the students by the authors. In the interviews as well as filling the questionnaires, the voice records are kept. Later all this information from the questionnaires and voice records are interpreted and used as data for this survey.

2.3. Data Analysis

For data analysis SPSS 16 was used. Frequencies and perceptions of each data item are calculated. The answers of the questions (see Appendix A) with the frequencies above 6 are listed (see Table 1).

3. Results and Discussion

According to the interviews with the students, results were driven. The metaphors of distance education students, which have frequency greater than 6, are listed in ascending order in Table1. According to these; *Blended Distance Education* is a distance education course, where some courses are asynchronous and some courses are synchronous. However, %100 of the students have answered that a "Blended Distance Education" was recalled them "Boy and Girl" and explained as it contained "Students from different sexes." %91.7 of the students, said that when Traditional Education was mentioned, it recalled them "Class ". They explained it as "There is always a class in traditional education". Here, it is seen that the other facilities and differences of the traditional education are omitted by the students. %83.3 of the students, have said that they think "Internet" when somebody says Online Education, since "It needs internet". %83.3 of the students said that it is "Water" which comes first in their mind, when someone says "Technology" and their reason was that: "It's in our life, everywhere"

% 75 of the students said that it is "Freedom" which comes to their mind when "Asynchronous Education" is mentioned and their reasoning was: "You are free to study whenever you like". This reasoning must be related to the students having part-time jobs, besides their school work. Thus, having *freedom* of study at the hours, when they are available to do. Similarly, %75 of the students has said it was "Internet" came to them when Videoconference is mentioned. Students' metaphors are great clues about their way of life. Hence, %75 of the students said "E-mail" is "MSN". % 75 of the students said that WWW is same as "Internet". Only % 25 percent said that it is "World Wide Web".

It was interesting that the %66.7 of the students answered Mobil-Education as "rich students' education" and the term recalled them the metaphor "richness". Their reasoning was: "You need to be rich to have education via mobile phone". On the other hand, %66.7 of the students answered that Virtual Class recalled them "Computer". Their reason for this was: "In computers we see, virtual classes". The students reasoning of their choosing "Ocean" metaphor (%50), for "Distance Education" was that, they felt a little afraid of the new education type and they taught they would sunk in. %66.7 of the students has answered "electricity" for E-education as expectedly. Another unexpected result was "Morning Classes" metaphor for Synchronous Education. "At the same time, people can meet only in the mornings" %50 of the students answered that Virtual Student's are "Computer Hero's". Their reasoning was: "I have several virtual students in my computer game". %58.33 of the students' has said that Internet was their "Life" (see Table 1).

Table 1. Metaphors in Distance Education

Keyword	Metaphor	Common Reason	Frequency of Answer	Percentage of the Answer
Blended Distance Education	*"Boy and Girl"*	"Students from the different sexes"	12	%100
Traditional Education	*"Class"*	"There is always a class"	11	%91.7
Virtual Student	*"Computer Hero's"*	"I have several virtual students in my computer game"	7	%58.33
Online Education	*"Internet"*	"It needs internet"	10	%83.3
Technology	*"Water*	"It's in our life, everywhere…"	10	%83.3
Asynchronous Education	*"Freedom"*	"You are free to study whenever you like"	9	%75
Videoconference	*"Internet"*	"It's in Internet"	9	%75
E-mail	*"MSN"*	"I use MSN"	9	%75
WWW	*"Internet"*	"Because its internet"	9	%75
Mobil-Education	*"Richness"*	"You need to be rich to have education via mobile phone"	8	%66.7
Virtual Class	*"Computer"*	"In computers we see, virtual classes"	8	%66.7
E-education	*"electricity"*	"Electronic Education"	8	%66.7
Distance Education	*"Ocean"*	"It's so deep. You can even get drowned."	6	%50
Synchronous Education	*"Morning Classes"*	"At the same time, people can meet only in the mornings"	6	%50
Internet	*"Life"*	"I do not think a life, without internet"	6	%50

Learners had various different answers but all too valuable for educators to shape-up their education. What's more, the students' answers also showed that they have chosen metaphors according to their way of life, their personal characteristics, their educational background and their feelings. Hence, the metaphors sometimes talk by themselves, what the students cannot talk about!

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper proposed that students have different metaphors for distance education keywords. Firstly, this has involve naturalistic processes that are embedded in the same milieu: Cyberspace, the digital world, and the human mind. Secondly, methaphors are expressions or manifestations of the same philosophical foundations: Constructivism and its underlying

foundations as well as pragmatism and instrumentalism. This paper recommends that metaphors in distance education be more fully explored.

That exploration should focus upon open source as a metaphor for instructional practices – design and delivery, instructional platforms - technologies, and instructional philosophy of distance education. The key questions that deserve attention in the area of instructional practices - design and delivery are:

1.Is distance education essentially a heuristic experience within the context of a shared repertoire of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artifacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.) that members have developed over time?

2.What does this suggest as regards to the design of distance education?

3.What does this suggest as regards to the provision or the delivery of distance education?

4. What if distance education essentially occurs in the human mind? And if so, is the delivery platform a private or public good?

5. To what extent should distance education involve automated processes that reduce access to, manipulation of, and capability to absorb knowledge/learning objects?

6. To what extent should distance education adopt automated processes that increase access to, manipulation of, and capability to absorb knowledge/learning objects?

7.In addition to the key questions posed for researchers, the metaphors for distance education assumes transparency of knowledge/learning objects, processes, technology and participants. Are those transparencies analogous? Should they be? Those are questions that require attention from a social, historical,educational and philosophical perspective. This paper has presented only a few of the potentially beneficial questions raised by distance education students metaphors. These distance education metaphors have great promise and in addition to the questions; there remains the work of constructing comprehensive or tentative working models including clearly defined and delineated components and synergies.

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APPENDIX A. Questionarrie Items.

1. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**Distance Education**" ? Why you have chosen these?
2. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**E- Education**" ? Why you have chosen these?
3. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**Online Education**" ? Why you have chosen these?
4. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**Mobile Education**" ? Why you have chosen these?
5. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about " **Blended Distance Education**"? Why you have chosen these?
6. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about " **Asynchronous Distance Education**" ? Why you have chosen these?
7. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**Synchronous Distance Education**" ? Why you have chosen these?
8. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**Internet**" ? Why you have chosen these?
9. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**WWW**" ? Why you have chosen these?
10. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**E-mail**" ? Why you have chosen these?
11. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**Videoconferance**" ? Why you have chosen these?
12. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**Audiotext**" ? Why you have chosen these?
13. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about " **E-book**" ? Why you have chosen these?
14. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**Technology**" ? Why you have chosen these?
15. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**Virtual Library**" ? Why you have chosen these?
16. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**Search Engine**" ? Why you have chosen these?
17. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**Home Page** " ? Why you have chosen these?
18. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**URL**" ? Why you have chosen these?
19. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**Teleconferencing**" ? Why you have chosen these?
20. What are the 3 words that comes first in your mind, when somebody mentions about "**Computer**" ? Why you have chosen these?