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FACING FACELESS FACES

EXPLORING THE NECESSITY OF NEW COMPETENCES FOR E-MAIL AND WEB COMMUNICATION

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FACELESS COMMUNICATION

Wellman (2001) introduced a description of the social relationships and communities from old times until 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. The big increase in role-to-role communities in the past few years is caused by mobile technologies or technologies where people, who know each other, as well as strangers, communicate and thereby enter into "relationships [which] are between fragments of selves, rather than between whole selves" (Wellman, 2001)—as roles. The same technologies cause a similar increase in person-to-person communication, making adults and young people communicate and maintain social relationships via faceless technologies along with their physical encounters.

This kind of communities and relationships clearly bring along many benefits, comprising permeable interfaces and boundaries; project teams that rapidly form, reorganize, and dissolve (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999), 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), spaces where effective learning occurs (Gee, 2005), and so on.

> 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, that is, 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).

Not much research is 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, and so forth (Drolet & Morris, 2000; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Turkle, 1995). Such work often sums up a number of challenges and at times mentions some important competences of online communicators, as well as suggests some organizational principles of online communication. This chapter suggests that a more thorough understanding of challenges and appropriate competences to meet these challenges are needed.

The challenges described in this chapter are to be learned somehow. Some of them can be learned (by someone) by participating in the practice of communicating in faceless relationships, but some aspects must be taught in school. As a consequence of this, this chapter also introduces a method of curriculum development. It consists of four steps: (a) Investigation of challenges on the individual and group level in prototypical situations in contemporary and near-future society in preparation for (b) description of competences 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 competences. 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.). This chapter elaborates on points a, b and d, but leaves point c aside.

DESIGN FOR SOCIAL FUTURES:
HOLISTIC COMPETENCES

In this chapter it is argued that there are a number of competences related to faceless communication that are requisite in modern life, and that people are not necessarily likely to develop these competences 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. Therefore, the increased use of faceless communication technologies needs to result in some consequences for the education of the rising generations—and maybe the grown-ups as well.

In both policy and academic literature the concept competence is used and defined in a number of diverse ways. In this chapter it is used in a sense inspired by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) framework on competences: *DeSeCo* (Definition and Selection of Competencies).[1] 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 the model shown in Fig. 4.1.

Figure 4.1 shows that a competence consists of seven dimensions from knowledge to motivation, and it accentuates that a person's competence is related to the demands in the situation and the broader context. The model of a competence implies several important insights. First of all, a competence always is situated. Competences are not abstract abilities
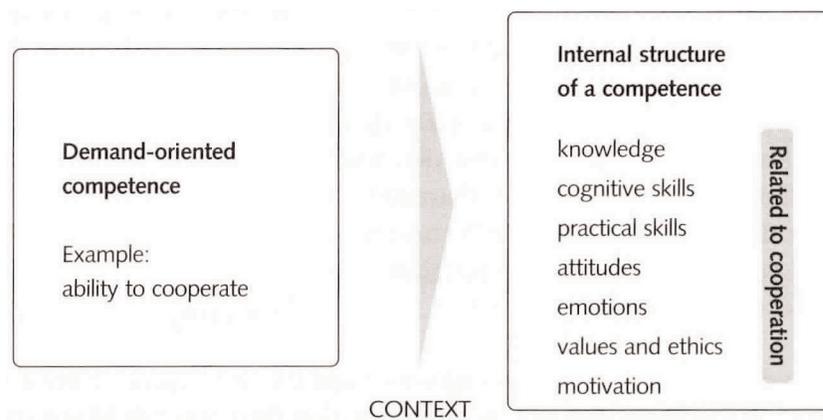

Figure 4.1. The demand defines the internal structure of a competence (Rychen & Salganik, 2003, p. 44).

that can be acquired in laboratory settings or as a few context-free rules. Competences 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 expressions of attitude and motivation are included in the drawing up of competences presented here.

The *competence* approach of this chapter is compatible with the multi-literacies approach of the New London Group (1996) which argues that the goal and mission of education is to ensure that all students become able to "participate fully in public, community, and economic life" (p. 60), and express that "*curriculum is a design for social futures*" (p. 71), which leads the group to argue that curriculum has to be changed according to the social futures. The New London Group presents a multiliteracies approach to literacy that focus on modes of representation much broader than language alone (among others visual meaning, gestural meaning, and multimodal meaning), on the cultural and situational contexts, and on the multiplicity of communication channels and media. This chapter can be viewed as taking up the invitation of the New London Group to participate in "developing and testing curriculum and revising the theoretical propositions of the project" (p. 86). The competence approach in this chapter is chosen for both pragmatic and factual reasons. It continues the work done so far by the author, and it functions as a corrective to the more skill-oriented approaches of competence that are seen in policy papers and educational regulations of many countries (cf. Bundsgaard, 2006a). A competence approach also promotes the situational perspective of what is to be learned, and clarifies the task of education as a task of supporting students who are preparing for their futures. Finally, the competence approach has an advantage in the productivity and operationability of the word *competence*. It promotes indication of partial competences comprising together the ideal or holistic competence, which could be called *action competence* (Schnack, 2003; Weinert, 2001). Thus, one easily can talk of critical communicative competence and emphatic competence, but not so easily of critical communicative literacy and emphatic literacy. In this way, multiliteracies is an ideal goal like action competence, but harder to operationalize.

COMMUNICATING WITH FRIENDS
AND ACQUAINTANCES

The term *face* is used in the common way (you can lose face and win face), and along the lines of the investigations of facework done by Ervin Goffman. Goffman (1955) defines face as "the positive social value a per-

son effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p. 213). In this interpretation, a person possesses or carries a face, which can be threatened, maintained, respected, and so on. When a person's face is threatened, he or she must carry out facework in order to reestablish his or her face. Face is an appropriate metaphor because facework is very easily observed in the face of the participants (we redden, cry, look scared, etc.). But facework is not only done in face-to-face relationships, and this is why a number of highly formalized genres related to written communication in private, public, and economic relations has developed.

We are witnessing the development of a number of new communication technologies, and we communicate with writing and other nonbodily modes of representation in still new situations and relations. Examples of "new" genres of written communication produced and consumed[2] using computer-based communication technologies are e-mail, chat, and posts in forum discussions and virtual communities, and the like. Each of these genres can be subdivided into more or less well-defined and stable genres; to provide an example, e-mails can be very formal, such as business letters on paper, more socializing like the utterance of a face-to-face conversation, or more formalized like an envelope for internal mail (the text in the e-mail then might just consist of the acronym FYI [for your information]; cf. Skovholt & Svennevig, 2008). As it appears, these genres are not unprecedented. But the number of contexts and types of situations in which we are communicating by e-mail, in forums, and in communities are growing. A common feature of these new genres is that they are faceless in the sense that the producer and the consumer cannot see the (gestural, mimetic, proxemic, etc.) actions and reactions of their fellow dialogue participants. These new ways of communicating do look like the well-known written communication of personal letters, business letters, and so on, but we still haven't developed the formal cues and communicative competences to avoid or soften the conflicts often seen in these types of communication. The conflicts are connected among other things to the new situations in which we communicate with writing, and to the fast flow of the written interactions. This is why it is even more important to consider and take care of each other's faces in these contexts. We are facing faceless faces.

To clarify and exemplify the phenomena with which we are concerned an example that is constructed on the basis of an actual e-mail is presented. 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 younger collaborator, John, is in line with Eric's ideology, he realizes that he has to learn more about the field by consulting different views. Through e-mail, he

asks Eric about his thoughts on the work of a central person in the field (Sonya), and tells Eric that he has begun reading some of Sonya's work, as well as the work of others. Eric, who is normally very painstaking and thorough in his e-mails, responds to this idea in a comparably short message 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 I 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 number of ways. Eric might be busy and wants 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 because John is taking his 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. Finally, he maybe testing to see if it is John who wants to break away. John might choose to read the tidemetaphor as a face-threatening insinuation of himself being the one who swims with the tide. This innuendo is not apparent, and John might re-read this and previous e-mails from Eric 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 participant's common history, John's knowledge of Eric's mood and character, and so on (i.e., it depends on the context).

The example gives rise to a number of points. First of all, Eric has written an ambiguous text. Either his intentions are bad or he has not considered which interpretations are open to the consumer of the e-mail. Texts always are ambiguous and open to interpretation, and this always has been a challenge for readers. But, there has been a heavy increase in the number and types of situations in which written communication is used for organizing, socializing, networking, and so on. In other words, writing is used instead of spoken communication in many situations, and in even more cases it is used in contexts that did not exist just a few years ago.

MODALITIES, TECHNOLOGIES, AND MEDIA

Writing surely is not a new modality, but we are producing and consuming writing in new contexts that have become possible for a number of reasons. One is connected to the developments in technology and media,[3] so it is now possible and common practice to communicate in writing when organizing, collaborating, socializing, and so on. Technologies have made it easy to produce messages in writing, pictures, sound, and the like, all in the same message, and to communicate by choice of layout, colors, and so forth. These developments have led researchers in communication to introduce the concepts of *modality* and *multimodality* (Carlsson Løvland, & Malmgren, 2005; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). Modality depicts what is common to a certain type of marks regardless of the medium in which they are set, and regardless of the technology used for setting 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, whereas marks of the image modality (where the marks may be set 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, whereas 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 new contexts and therefore demands new competences (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 generalized understanding of what kind of challenges we will face.

Writing generally is the production of marks on a surface (i.e., a medium) that retains the marks (or they are transformed and set on a memory medium for later automatic reproduction by computer technologies, e.g., on a plastic[4] 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 effort it takes to handle the tools (pencil or keyboard) and because of the expectations toward 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 thus: The consumer can skim the message, jump forward and back, read it in his or her own pace, return

and read again. Correspondingly, the producer can read what he or she has already written, can return and rectify or get inspired to further the writing, can change the sequence of the message, and has the text to him or herself until it is handed over to reading (cf. Bundsgaard, 2005)

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 (i.e., when speaking) the consumer is consuming the marks as they are produced. The producer of a written text has the manifested text in front of him or her until the decision is made 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 or she is "talking" about. In comparison to facing the consumer, the producer knows the consumer's background and conditions for understanding this specific way of expressing him or herself to a lesser extent. And finally the producer has a limited knowledge of the consumer's attitude to what is said (i.e., he or she does not see if the consumer gets insulted, angry, happy, etc., by reading the message).

The challenge in e-mail, forums, and other kinds 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 technologies for consumption, production, revision, and transport are closely connected. 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 or she just presses the reply button, and after writing using the keyboard to produce marks showing on a plastic medium (the screen), hits the send button. The technology (keyboard, computer, network, etc.) and the medium (the screen), 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 or she still does not have access to bodily signs to test if the consumer understood what he or she was talking about, what was meant, and so on Although 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.

Thereby, the consumer might infer insults or ulterior motives that the producer did not intend, and might proceed along the same "wrong" interpretation on other parts of the text without the producer having the opportunity to correct the consumer (e.g., John's interpretation of Eric's e-mail, which might involve the impression that Eric disrespects him).

One difference between most of the e-mail text genres 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 the text carefully (and this often is followed by an editorial process). E-mailing most often is a few-to-few-communication situation, and as mentioned earlier 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 number of interpretations.

On the other hand, the increasing number of texts and the knowledge of their production circumstances might make the consumer less attentive to the messages he or she receives. The consumer might merely skim a message that is important from the producer's point of view, and for 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 often is fêted as the first writer on writing (Gee, 1996; Havelock, 1963; Ong, 1982). Plato's central points are (Plato, 1986) that writing cannot answer if the consumer has a "desire to learn" and that the consumer might dishonor 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 earlier. 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 or she meant or intended. For example, John 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, making it clear that he wants to take a personal position in 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 have one mode of communication, compared with face-to-face communication where a number of bodily (gestural, mimetic, proxemic, etc.) modes supplement, complement, or take the place of speech.

E-mail promotes mono-modal asynchronous, multitopian[5] 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 interpretation, aware of the contexts of the text, and ready to ask friendly questions on the basis of his or her interpretations.

The primary conclusion on these deliberations is that both producer and consumer have to be even more aware of their communication part-

ners: 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? What does he want me to do? Do I want to do what he wants me to do?

In short: The producer must exercise consumer attentiveness, and the consumer 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 that the producer and consumer reach the following competences:

1. Be able to perform textual analysis.
2. Be able to perform contextual analysis.
3. Be able to show empathy (as producer to imagine if the consumer might be hurt or angry because of the formulations, or how it could be misunderstood, and as consumer to aim at constructive interpretations and constructively imagining what the absent face could have displayed while expressing the words).
4. Value constructiveness and collaboration.
5. Be capable of conflict management.[6]

The first two points are related to the area of discourse analysis. In the textual analysis, important areas of attention are genre (What is the expected way of addressing the consumer?), style (wording: Is the text (in)formal enough?), and possible interpretations (modality: How can the text be (mis)understood?). In the contextual analysis, two important areas of attention are power relations (What is the other participant's understanding of his or her mutual relation and dependency?), and conditions for the production (stress, frame of mind, time pressure, fear, anger, etc.).

The last two 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 always is both dependent on whether the competent person is willing to do and capable of doing a certain act. In the example given earlier, John easily could escalate the conflict by answering in the same tone in which Eric composed the e-mail. Friedman and Currall (n.d.) argue that the technological characteristics of e-mail make it more likely that conflict escalates (caused by low feedback, reduced social cues, etc.). They suggest, "such risks [of conflict escalation] can be

reduced by greater self-awareness among those who use e-mail" (Friedman & Currall, n.d.). Furthermore, conflict management competence can be developed by acquisition of democratic principles of dialogue (Bundsgaard, 2005; Dawes, Mercer, & Wegerif, 2004). Having said that empathy is important, it also must be underlined that empathic identification does not always lead to the desired result—some times it might be regarded necessary to go more aggressively into a confrontation to solve or abate the conflict.

COMMUNICATING AS ROLES

One of the most often praised features of the Internet is its capacity to let strangers meet and discuss every aspect of their lives and hobbies, and thereby perhaps build friendships or even closer relationships (Turkle, 1995; Wellman, 2001). On communities like myspace.com, match.com, facebook.com, users publish images, stories of their every day life, thoughts and hopes for the future, and discuss everything from politics to popular culture. The positive side of this kind of virtual community 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 hasty solution to prevent access to such communities, despite all their downsides).

But online communities do have a number of seamy sides. The facelessness[7] 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, cyberbullying, 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; Wikipedia on cyberbullying[8]), and in research papers (Bundsgaard, 2005; Li, 2007).[9] But cyberbullying is only the most extreme expression of a wider movement.

In a mailing list of Danish users of an open source operating system, people ask questions and answers usually are 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 to be fed with a spoon. … Sorry the sour post, but hell, man! [quote from the original post] WHAT IS THE ERROR, MAN! ARE YOU AN IDIOT?[10]

After this telling-off, Jack asks, in a bit more friendly tone, about technical details, refers to a guide to asking questions in news groups, and then turns to the rest of the mailing list participatorparticipants 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 wonders 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 the subscribers to the mailing list, and he can be discussed in the semi-public forum. 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. 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 wigging is pretty common, but it might be caused exactly by the role character of the relationship: In a forum, participants are communicating with roles having names more than with persons having bodies and real faces.

The other subscribers (third persons) might have felt it very unpleasant to overhear a similar talking-to in a face-to-face situation, 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.

Chris has not been interviewed about his understanding and experience of the occurrences, but he must have felt a serious loss of face, and been very hurt and upset. In this situation, he would have nowhere to turn, no one from which to seek sympathy. In a face-to-face meeting, the participants would have taken part in *facework*. Chris would have *challenged* Jack (Goffman, 1967), which on his side under normal circum-

stances would have *offered* some kind of *compensation* or diminished the importance of the insult. As mentioned, Chris 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.

Although 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 facework are especially prevalent in face-to-face communication (Goffman, 1967). This suggestion is supported by research on the connection between rapport and face-to-face contact. Drolet and Morris (2000) have shown that people who meet face-to-face solve conflicts much easier than would be done over the telephone, and that this is caused by the development of rapport (i.e., close personal relationship) in the face-to-face contact. It can be expected that rapport is even harder to develop in written correspondence, and that the lack of rapport makes it easier for the participants to regard the others as unworthy of decent treatment.

In short: *The faceless relationships in semi-public spaces seem to partly abolish the face-to-face practice of facework, make defacing even worse by the silent presence of third persons, and facilitate complete defacing through disregard.*[11] *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 himself lose face in the process of defacement.*

One of these points is made in many other connections, namely that nonanswering—being caused by lack of time, disregard, or other reasons—is hard to bear: "Because computer mediated communication entails greater uncertainty than face-to-face communication, there tends to be an 'intense need for response'" (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999, p. 811).

In his important work on motivation, Martin Ford (1992) coined the term *personal agency belief* (PAB), which refers to the person's own sense of his or her competences in relation to the tasks at hand (*Capability beliefs*), and evaluation of what others think of his or her competences (*Context beliefs*). Ford argues that PAB, in a complex relationship with *Goals* and *Emotions,* constitutes motivation. Thus, an explanation of the observations done in the example by Javenpaa and 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 (Bundsgaard, 2007).

As argued, faceless written communication confronts the participants with added challenges in relation to facework, or in competence terms: Faceless communication requires participants 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. It consists of (a) being able to intentionally put one self

in the other person's 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 participants feeling noticed, recognized, and taken care of, and (c) being willing to take the necessary steps to participate constructively and to take care of that the other participants 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. … 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)[12]

Jack's reply to Chris could be viewed as cyberbullying, intended to break 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). Such a strategy might be a solution if the facelessness does in fact lead to less responsibility and more disagreeableness. Thus 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 latency.[13] That is, when a message is posted in a forum or a profile created in an online community, it might be read by somebody on the other side of the earth, maybe by a stranger, and exist for years.[14] 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, and so on, in another time and/or place.

Turkle (1995) argues that life on the screen provides a great space for practicing the multiplicity of identities that is a condition of modern life. This point is very important, and extendable to other areas of life. Online gaming sites, virtual communities, and so on, 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 favorable story of oneself, and so on. The benefits are important to be aware of, but so are the challenges that need consideration in educational contexts.

When communication and acting in a virtual community, it seems as if people easily develop a kind of familiarity that entails a sense of confidence that makes them communicate in an even more cozy 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 adults often get embarrassed about young girls' and boys' provocative outfits (or lack of such) or their self-assured or self-staging appearances on their profile pages. Adults are not the intended consumers of the pictures or presentations. 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, and so on.

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. The needed competences can be summarized thus: Participants need to develop: (a) ways to consider the communication situation in question—and possible future situations where the text could appear, (b) a strategy of intentional consideration of the implications of publishing a certain text, image, video, and so on (i.e., to be able to analyze possible scenarios), and (c) a sense of empathy with one's own future self.

CONCLUSION

In times of a still-increasing proportion of faceless communication, our social relations are faced with new opportunities and challenges. In this chapter, three types of social relations mediated by technologies for faceless communication are presented and discussed: communicating via e-mail, as roles, and across time and space.

All three types of social relations are made possible by technology. But they are not solely determined by the technology. The cultural tech-

niques developed in relation to other genres of faceless communication (e.g., personal letters, telephone conversations, etc.) function as a background for how we develop our way of communicating with new technologies. But some aspects of the new genres leave us unprepared, possibly giving rise to misunderstandings and even conflicts. This chapter focuses on the challenges of these new genres of faceless communication in order to propose a set of competences that help avoid or settle conflicts and build flourishing social relationships across time and place. The analysis shows that reading and writing in digital times not only is connected to conveying information, but at least as much connected to creating, maintaining, and developing social relations, and that this makes education face the difficult task of providing the opportunities for the students to develop the necessary new competences for faceless and semi-public social communication.

NOTES

1. In everyday talk and in research literature, the terms *competence*, *competency*, *competences,* and *competencies* are used in various combinations. In this chapter, the terms *competence* in the singular and *competences* in the plural are used.
2. The term *consumer* is used instead of receiver or recipient in order to underline the active process of consuming a message, whereas the postal metaphor gives the impression that the receiver is a passive container to be filled with information.
3. *Medium* is defined as the physical substance on (or in) which the *marks* are set (or formed), and *technology* as the tools and the social, bodily, and mental competences used to set the marks (Bundsgaard, 2005, 2007). In the following, a number of terms discussed further in Bundsgaard (2005) is used to characterize media, technologies, and modalities.
4. A medium can be more or less viscous from the more static to the more plastic. Air is a prototypical plastic medium, and stone is a prototypical static medium. In combination with a memory medium, the screen has the traditional characteristics of paper: It can hold the written marks for as long as the power is switched on. But in addition, the marks can be replaced with no time lag.
5. Multitopian is a neologism meaning that something (a message) exists in different places at the same time or through time (a web page, an e-mail, two copies of the same book).
6. E-mailing also rests on more basic skills of reading and writing, handling the technical equipment and the e-mail software. In this chapter, the focus is on the more advanced competences that are called for when e-mailing.
7. Even though pictures published in the profiles and posts show that the participants do have a face, they do not show the mood, for example, of a harassed participant.

8. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyber-bullying. Retrieved May 22, 2007.
9. 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).
10. My translation from the Danish: "Da jeg så din mail tænkte jeg (igen) AAAAAARRRGGGGGHHHH FOR FANDEN DA! Nu skal vi igen have en tråd hvor den blinde, døvstumme og ubehjælpsomme Chris skal mades med en ske ... Sorry, for det sure indlæg men for fanden mand! "når jeg kigger i /var/log/maillog får jeg en SQL fejl" HVAD ER FEJLEN MAND! ER DU IDIOT!"
11. Of course, this is not a simple picture; it will be easy to find discussions, where other participants correct the person doing the attacking.
12. See also Bundsgaard, 2005.
13. The term *latency* is used 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 (e.g., when a button is pressed). Latency comes from Latin and means "to lie hidden." In this chapter, latency is the time the message lies hidden until it is actualized. Thus, latency is the time from production a to consumption b.
14. 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.

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