On new Types of Knowledge

Abstract
In this paper I present the results of a search in the literature with the formulation of a working model for the channelling of key aspects into an articulated plan. In addition I will present the results of a research study in which I implemented the different steps of the working model arrived at. I looked at the dialogues held around research and analyzed the contents of the ensuing mind-maps in order to uncover new directions for the new globalizing learning economy (Archibugi/Lundvall 2002) and at the same time keep in mind the management of cultural differences (Harris/ Moran 1989).

Many voices are participating in interpretation in the context of a given audience. Diverse modalities come into play. Researchers noted that the ‘I-experience’ conjugated with the ‘we-experience’ should ultimately lead to a person identifying the ‘self-experience’. To achieve that level of understanding in a socio-semantic sense requires ‘learning how to mean’. In the new knowledge economy this component in communication is key as sought attributes are innovation, community and feelings.

A rigid gap exists between approaches at the basis for communication and the audience’s apprehension and internalization of the contents to be communicated, a bridge between theoretical research knowledge and the knowledge base brought to receivers is required (Bennis/Biederman 1997). The words need to be situated in what constitutes a border zone between the researcher’s knowledge base and that of the audience (Rose/Kasper 2001). Complexity theory tries to address these issues.

No gap should exist between the themes and meanings presented and active understanding. Social evaluation has to be included in the evaluative orientation taken in the specific context concerned. We need to look at where boundaries meet (Myers 2004).

The above threads will be drawn together in an effort to seek coherence among diversified views.

1. Introduction
Instructors in professional courses need to, at the same time, adjust the teaching of the course content to the needs of the students in their classes and also get the students’ groups to build-up the knowledge gained into an articulated whole in such a way as to include as much content as possible. Given the various complex aspects coming into play in a professional training course, one cannot achieve the necessary preparedness without strategizing. In this study we look at how this was achieved through a simulation activity resulting in a group product in the form of a mind-map.

The necessary building blocks have to be put into place. It is necessary to teach openness, a positive attitude, to get the students to put effort into understanding, and other such ways towards successful communication need to become the foundations if one is to build a solid basis.

Dialogue and interactive ways of developing awareness and contact with others hopefully promote the understanding of the richness different cultural backgrounds can bring to the fore. In the past, some of my students had been very intolerant to different levels of linguistic ability in French, their teaching subject, as well as the “different ways of doing and being” by those not from the “main stream”, which sometimes brought about “othering” and a type of marginalization of those deemed to be different. Interaction is set in the course with the purpose of all com-

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ing to an understanding and acceptance, while at the same time aiming at an integration of course contents and a transformation of beliefs, in a deconstructing of habits of mind.

These actions cannot be limited to a syntagmatic level but rather require a multi-faceted paradigmatic articulation. Key in communication is not limited to identifying the differences and difficulties but going beyond in the exploration to find the elements that are hard to internalize.

I always tried very hard to bring all the students together through group activities and dialogue. The group activity was an attempt at solidifying integration of content and at the same time a group effort in negotiating meaning both at declarative and procedural knowledge levels.

2. Theoretical background

In researching the relative importance of interpretive processes one has to acknowledge that they have to be seen as been always only tentative, with constant fluidity and flux surrounding any situation. The teachers in training have to come to grasp the different degrees of difficulty and the different amounts of detail involved in acquiring professional know-how and at the same time understand that these have to be weighted accurately.

There are questions related to the facilitation of communication as a coming together of cultures. There are those related to strategies for the development of an increased understanding and awareness-raising around the fleeting nature of our cultures. These issues make it necessary to address professionalization in a new light. Our cultures direct us in a certain way in meaning-making yet at the same time they provide us with a capacity for interpretation. We propose that training is necessary to get out of the pre-set selectivity which constrains us culturally and also because of the interconnectedness in the cultural semiotic order that governs each person.

Not only are the students expected to interact in French but they are working in groups with peers from very different cultural backgrounds. In addition in Canada, a country of immigrants, these students will be faced with intercultural issues in their classrooms.

Communication in the second language of specialty is key in this course for future language teachers. In communication across cultures dealing with the way macrosemiotics and microsemiotics come into play at the same time is even more demanding than in one’s own culture. Through macrosemiotics, we are able to understand the interconnectedness of meanings in a given culture because acts of meaning are part of the whole system that shapes worldview in that culture. Microsemiotics on the other hand helps us understand the cultural structuring of text, including oral text, through projected meanings and helps establish interpretation as plausible (Danesi/Perron 1999). In this case one has to learn to weight the different elements in order to reach a balance in an unfamiliar situation. Not only is this not easy but it could certainly present a number of real challenges across cultures. I initiated small scale simulation activities on such issues to progressively shed more light on strategies and hence on awareness-raising.

In assigned group simulations it is crucial for the students to make attempts at reaching an understanding. That may not be natural and might have to be learned. It may require innovative ways to understand learning and meta-learning challenges. Higgins/Bargh (1987) think that we can avoid selection of the information given that fits into our culturally influenced expectations. Cultural semiotic analysis catalogues and analyzes parts of social life such as bodily schemas, language forms, myths, art, rituals, performances, artefacts etc. and helps guide us toward a better understanding of differences in meaning-making. Although we did not look at these specific aspects in this study, by the students working in groups or with partners, some of the above elements were brought to awareness during interactions.

Our attitude toward a situation will depend on our perception of the situation. There are cultural and personal constraints in place that make us see what we expect to see through the selection of information that fits our expectations. So in a way I try to have the students in my course put on “new lenses” and have them try to accommodate in their minds’ eye. A frame of mind to value difference may have to be taught. For example, the ritual used to initiate communication
differs according to the level of the system of which we are a member (Berger 1972) down to our participation in different groups in that system. Multiplying such complexity with multifarious ways of interacting as in my course presents in addition the real danger of persons being left out.

3. Description of the study
The students were simply asked to represent key components of their understanding of second language classroom communication and handed a sheet of paper, the size of a Bristol Board or paper from a flip-chart, on which to draw and write their comments. They all had access to coloured markers.

For the analysis we looked at all the contributions and noted overall characteristics. We will carry out the discussion around those elements below.

The overall comparison of the students' group contributions yields the following findings.

The class of 29 decided to get together in 5 groups and the groups were assigned a number from one to five. All five contributions exhibit some innovative aspects, from slightly creative to very creative. Three of the groups (Groups 2, 3 and 4) adopted the general format of mind-maps. For the other two, at one extreme (Group 1) the representation looked more like columns under the heading communication, although the arrangements under the four themes: listening, speaking, reading and writing were not divided by straight lines but rather by artistic squiggles. In addition there were a number of small drawings each corresponding to a symbol attached to one of the columns, e.g. lips and the words “I like French” written in a bubble below the column with the heading “speaking”; Group 1 chose the colours blue, yellow and red. At the other extreme (group 5) the information was summarized and attached to a human head with at the level of the forehead, thinking and a question mark, a heart and open windows; at eye level one can see reflections in the eyes: of a book and a computer screen on one side, with a text and pictures on the other side; at ear level, on one side there is a small radio with Radio-Canada written next to it, a translation machine and sounds in syllables and as well a question mark in addition to a list of things to listen to. The mouth is inscribed with the words pronunciation and vocabulary with in addition the list of a number of principles I tried to inculcate into my students around communication “learning from your mistakes” “risk taking” etc. Finally on the right side below the head there is a hand drawn holding a pencil next to which the words, creativity, imagination free expression were written with a separate entry from it and in a sort of medallion they wrote “word” with hooks around it as in an indication that there is movement attached to a “word”. The use of colour by Group 5 was also indicative of their reflexivity. The hair on the head had the colours of a rainbow perhaps indicative of happiness, the ears were blue and red, perhaps indicative of both listening with effort and listening for enjoyment (effortless), whereas the remainder of the drawing and text were in black, maybe intended to mean more serious work overall.

Groups 2, 3 and 4 all organized their mind-map around a central element and several ideas branching off to the different sides or clustered around the centre.

Interestingly enough only Groups 1 and 3 used the word “communication” as an anchor, as if it were implicitly included for the others. Did the instructor’s message regarding the overarching importance of communication get infused into the students to the point of them already having taken ownership of it and having embraced it to the point of no longer having to say it? It would appear so by the fact that all their developments are around communication. Group 2 chose two center pieces: the word “Fun” surrounded by signs used for lightning, and the word “motivation” in a rectangle below. Group 4’s work centers around the expression “Make it real” with arrows pointing to six other groupings.

Groups 2 and 3, although their work is different in layout, both also identified their work around the four language skills groupings around listening, speaking, reading, writing;

Group 4’s work on the other hand shows six arrows shooting out from the centre pointing to the important aspects that they perhaps have mostly felt were missing in second language classrooms
and found to be the leads for communication. This group highlighted critical areas that have to continually come under scrutiny.

The colours used by these three groups vary: Group 2 used very bright colours, red, orange and purple; Group 3 used green and red only; Group 5 wrote the central message in blue and the remainder of the information is written in red with purple arrows pointing from the centre to the periphery.

All uses of colour were very effective in conveying the relative importance students placed on various aspects of knowledge covered. All in all the colours conveyed the powerful impact they intended for some aspects of their professionalization to have.

4. Conclusion
The overall analysis shows that students have deeply taken ownership of the multifaceted aspects deemed to be desirable in second language classroom communication.

Additional findings gleaned from that first analysis are expanded upon below during the discussion on the identification of the crucial components around I (innovation), C (community) and F (feelings), in order to avoid being too repetitive.

The cumulative work conducted throughout the course was around improving classroom communication for second language learners, looking at a variety of aspects in formative ways first through simulation activities. In the summative products students presented at the end of the course the students demonstrated surprising effectiveness at pulling together all these main elements, evidence that the desired changes in the students’ beliefs had taken place in all cases although in various degrees. Despite a great number of differences in the students’ comprehensive presentations the important elements were included and contents were indicative of the students’ accommodation to the three key components for the new knowledge economy namely, innovation, community and feeling.

Using group discussions to arrive at a comprehensive mind-map facilitated the sharing of the intuitive knowledge the future teachers have gained through their experience of working with students and colleagues as well as from the classroom interactions with their instructor. The greatest gain is through the sharing of diverse interpretations with new meanings arrived at and entered in the synthesis exercise showing professional development and learning.

I tried to make sense of the complexity of the issues involved as an instructor in this training course for these teachers of French as a second language and so did my students. We realize that there were limitations to the approaches used.

An overarching umbrella structure could be used as the recording mechanism of aspects of group decision making and aiming at providing better ways to make operational a “meeting of minds” (Olson 2003) process in cross-cultural communication. All the different aspects coming into play could be noted in detail with many aspects of successful interactions collated as to record the strategies used. Filming or note-taking of each groups’ work would be valuable. This could be useful in providing data for a meta-analysis of the transformation in the group/class.

Nonetheless we have to ask ourselves how to keep up the pace with the new signs of our constantly evolving cultures corresponding to humans’ new ideas and new needs and find a way to prepare teachers for the upcoming challenges. Not only do we have the ability to convey cultural meanings we have learned but we are constantly attaching new meanings to the words we use. We can only look at what the mind produces and hope to gain insight into how we are recreating ourselves in cultural terms. However all this does not mean that the groupthink that our culture provides does not give us resources to help us seek new meanings on our own. I believe that through the innovative ways of devising the activities in the professional training course, if nothing else was achieved for the long term, I can say at least that I helped my students develop more resources to seek new meanings on their own as well as establish strong connections with peers.
so as to enable them to seek peer support for solving some of the difficult problems that they will face in their future career.

I also believe that by trying to get my students to gain an understanding of how different cultures equip them with ways to make meaning, they have been brought together in shared competencies, to some extent through closeness by using the French language and culture and certainly to a greater degree through the powers of their imagination.

References