In Pursuit of Communicative Competence:

From Information-based to Transformation-based Training

By

Philip Thomas

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Nasruddin became prime minister to the king. Once, while he wandered through the palace, he saw a royal falcon.

Now Nasruddin had never seen this kind of a ***pigeon*** before. So he got out a pair of scissors and trimmed the claws, the wings, and the beak of the falcon.

"Now you look like a decent bird," he said. "Your keeper had evidently been neglecting you."

<div align="center">(de Mello 1982)</div>

Introduction

In this paper I argue for the need to position educational initiatives aimed at developing and strengthening communicative competencies that favor a culture of dialogue within the framework of Transformative Learning Theory and then discuss how program designs based on blended models of dialogic and collaborative learning best serve the ends of transformation.   I use the term "communicative competencies" to collectively refer to the sets of skills often associated with processes of conflict resolution, negotiation, mediation, dialogue and consensual decision-making because these processes are essentially "communicative actions" (Habermas 1984) that have as their ultimate purpose reaching mutual understanding and successfully coordinating actions.

Habermas' (Habermas 1984) distinction between *instrumental learning* and *communicative learning* has been helpful for me in understanding my own intuitive sense of what has been a weakness in many skill-based training programs in communicative competence with which I am familiar, including ones for which I have been responsible.   Instrumental learning involves "how to" technical learning based on empirically validated knowledge that serves the purpose of increasing one's ability to manage and control the environment or other people. Communicative learning, on the other hand involves "learning what somebody means or the process by which others understand what you mean" (Mezirow 1995).   Reaching an understanding is the inherent purpose of human linguistic communication and is not based on empirically validated or instrumental knowledge, but rather is based on knowledge that is consensually validated through what Habermas refers to as rational discourse.   The kind of communication or "communicative competence" required to achieve understanding or social consensus through rational discourse depends upon the certain optimal conditions.   Under these conditions, Mezirow (Mezirow 1991) states that participants will:

- have accurate and complete information

- be free from coercion and distorting self-deception
- be able to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively
- be open to alternative perspectives
- be able to become critically reflective upon presuppositions and their consequences
- have equal opportunity to participate (including the chance to challenge, question, refute, and reflect and to hear others do the same), and
- be able to accept an informed, objective, and rational consensus as a legitimate test of validity.

I contend that training that seeks to develop and strengthen communicative competency (skills associated with conflict transformation, dialogue, negotiation and consensus building) is ultimately a task of communicative learning that must aim at developing critical reflection skills individuals need in order to effectively participate within the context of these conditions that permit the possibility of rational discourse. Communicative competence, or reaching understanding through rational discourse requires skillful negotiation and co-construction of meaning which itself presupposes consciousness of and the ability to critically reflect upon what various literatures refer to as *paradigms* (Kuhn 1996), *mental models* (Senge 1994), *language games* (Wittgenstein 1969), *narratives* (Sarbin and Scheibe 1983), *habitus* (Bourdieu), *worldviews*, *frames of reference* or *meaning perspectives* which Mezirow defines as "the structure of assumptions within which one's past experience assimilates and transforms new experience. A meaning perspective is a habitual set of expectations that constitutes an orienting frame of reference that we use in projecting our symbolic models and that serves as a (usually tacit) belief system for interpreting and evaluating the meaning of experience" (Mezirow 1991). Herein lies one of the major transformations I think adult education and training in communicative competence needs to bring about, namely an epistemological shift from a positivist view of the world to understanding the world as socially constructed (Gergen 1999) through intersubjective processes of linguistic communication. To achieve this, training programs must seek ways of helping learners learn what they want to learn in a way that also allows them to acquire developmentally advanced meaning perspectives that Mezirow describes as (Mezirow 1990):

- More inclusive, discriminating, and integrative of experience
- Based upon full information
- Free from both internal and external coercion
- Open to other perspectives and points of view
- Accepting of others as equal participants in discourse
- Objective and rational in assessing contending arguments and evidence
- Critically reflective of presuppositions and their source and consequences, and
- Able to accept an informed and rational consensus as the authority for judging conflicting validity claims.

Many training programs, including ones for which I have been responsible, too often fall short of this fundamental goal, erring on the side of being based more on the transmission of information

characteristic of instrumental learning rather than seeking the kind of transformation often required in order to achieve communicative competence.   These training programs are guilty of a certain myopia that is based on the assumption that in order to resolve conflict, or participate more effectively in dialogue or negotiation processes, participants need instrumental knowledge and "how-to" skill building that is based more on "what" they need to know than on critically reflecting on "how" they know.   For instance, contents of these training programs often include information and skills related to how to develop an agenda, how to listen actively, how to move beyond positions to interests, steps in the negotiation process, how to facilitate, how to convene a meeting, etc.   Though all these contents are essentially communicative actions, they are too often taught with an approach more characteristic of instrumental learning.

Kegan's distinction between information-based and transformation-based learning is germane here. He states that "learning aimed at increasing our fund of knowledge, at increasing our repertoire of skills, at extending already established cognitive capacities into new terrain serve the absolutely crucial purpose of deepening the resources available to an existing frame of reference. Such learning is literally in-*form*-ative because it seeks to bring valuable new contents into the existing form of our way of knowing." He then goes on to say "learning aimed at changes not only in *what* we know but changes in *how* we know has an almost opposite rhythm about it and comes closer to the etymological meaning of *education* ("leading out"). "Informative" learning involves a kind of leading in, or filling of the form. Trans-*form-ative* learning puts the form itself at risk of change" (Kegan 2000).

I do not mean to suggest there is no place for information-based or instrumental learning in trainings seeking to promote communicative competence.   As Kegan says, this kind of learning can at times be absolutely crucial.   My argument is that the development of communicative skills such as those mentioned above require that we focus not only on "what" learners know, but also on the "form" itself or "how" they know.   Without the ability to make explicit and reflect critically upon the underlying norms, rules, logics that govern our habits of expectation and how we make sense of the world, our ability to "reach understanding" about the meaning of an experience so that we may coordinate our actions in pursuing our respective aims is diminished. Without this ability, participants in a dialogue or negotiation are likely to experience difficulties in coordinating their "conversational turns" (Pearce 1994) or communicative actions much like two players who, though seated at the same game board fail to achieve coordination because one is playing chess while the other is playing checkers: one game board, and two very different games governed by very different norms, rules and logics.   What Nasruddin needed in the story

at the beginning of the paper was not instrumental knowledge or increase skill in how to care for the falcon, but rather learning which allowed him to penetrate through to his underlying assumptions and framework that wrongly mistakened a pigeon for a falcon.

Before explaining how Transformative Learning Theory and blended program designs based on dialogic and collaborative learning help us move from more instrumental or information-based learning to a more transformative learning experience, I first want to mention some of the reasons why I think many training designs have often erred on the side of being more information-based and instrumental in nature[1]. These are the "real world" challenges or difficulties that any design based on communicative learning must somehow address and overcome.

1. *Time constraints*: Requests for training are often requests for concrete, specific and quick assistance ("instrumental" tips, tools and skills in communicative competence) due to certain problems or crisis that are occurring. Often, participants or organizations requesting the training are very interested and committed to the importance of training, but do not have the luxury of time available to participate in longer extended programs. Their busy schedules, multiple commitments and limited budgets require that these training programs consume the least amount of time possible. The desire for quick and distilled trainings often results in instrumental learning designs that locate the immediate and specific knowledge and skills that participants need to learn, and thus tend to neglect the deeper transformations required for communicative competence.

2. *Primacy of the product*: Because of the urgency or importance of the specific context from which the need for training arises, organizations requesting training (and donors who finance them) are often more focused on the end result or product (successful negotiations or mediation, quality of decisions or accords, etc) than on the learning acquired or transformation experienced by the participants. This short-sighted emphasis that places more importance on the product or result to be achieve by the participants than on the participants themselves again often results in pragmatic instrumental "how-to" designs that seek to "fill in" what participants need to know in order to act more effectively in the situation.

3. *Immediacy*: Related to the previous two difficulties mentioned, while participants may not be opposed to the possibility of deeper epistemological transformation, they do not come to

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[1] These observations are based on my own critical reflection regarding my experiences with designing training courses during the past 10 years in Central America where I most recently served as Director of Training for a program of the Organization of American States.

trainings requesting or looking for this, but rather want tips and instrumental knowledge they consider relevant and important for achieving their immediate goals. They often do not perceive an explicit need to question "how they know" but rather focus more immediately on "what" they need to know.

4. *Expert knows best*: While in theory many would agree with one of the core principles of adult education that privileges the experiences and knowledge that participants bring into a learning context, often this is not highly valued by the participants themselves. Many are operating out of what Kitchener and King (Mezirow 2000) would refer to as stage II or III in terms of human development where truth exists and is possessed by recognized authorities. At this stage, experts really do know best and thus, participants tend to resist more collaborative designs that seek to mobilize their own resources and insist on learning from the "expert."

5. *Conceptual distortion of "participation:"* The goal of making learning more participatory has resulted in training designs that incorporate more interactive and participatory exercises that actively engage learners in the learning process. While this is a move in the right direction, away from passive and lecture-centered designs, it is a kind of "monologic" participation that engages learners more externally as they respond to the directions or dictates of the trainer. That learners are engaged actively in "doing" things is not enough. Transformative learning requires "dialogic" participation where exercises are used that seek to engage learners internally in critical reflection and discursive practices.

Transformative Learning Theory

Moving from instrumental or information-based learning programs to transformation-based programs represents a shift how one understands the deeper learning goals to be accomplished. Rather than introducing new knowledge, refining or introducing new techniques or skills in order to improve one's ability and behavior in negotiation, dialogue, decision-making, etc., transformation learning theory recognizes the need to move beyond this instrumental focus and helps learners become more cognizant and aware of the deeper underlying assumptions and premises, or frames of reference that condition how they perceive and make sense of their life experiences. Metaphorically, while instrumental learning seeks to improve one's knowledge and skill for playing a game, transformation learning helps individuals first reflect upon and make explicit the nature of the game itself in order to then decide whether or not they want to continue

playing that game, or choose or construct another more appropriate for their goals.

Kegan's example exploring dynamics between parents and teens is useful for illustrating how transformation theory places more emphasis on the underlying epistemological structure that supports and sustains behavior to be learned or acquired than on the desired behavior itself (Kegan 2000).

> Consider as an example parents' wish that their children be trustworthy and hold up their end of family agreements, such as abiding by a curfew on Saturday night. What appears to be a call for a specific behavior ("Be home by midnight or phone us") or the acquisition of a specific knowledge ("Know that it is important to us that you do what you say you will") actually turns out to be something more epistemological. Parents do not simply want their kids to get themselves home by midnight on Saturday night; they want them to do it for a specific reason. If their kids abide by a curfew only because the parents have an effective enough monitoring system to detect if they do not and a sufficiently noxious set of consequences to impose when they do not, the parents would ultimately be disappointed even though the kids are behaving correctly. Parents of teens want to resign from the role of "parent police." They want their kids to hold up their end of the agreement, not simply because they can frighten them into doing so but because the kids have begun to intrinsically prioritize the importance of being trustworthy. This is not first of all a claim on their kids' behavior; it is a claim on their minds. Nor will the mere acquisition of the knowledge content ("It is important to my parents that I do what I say I will") be sufficient to bring the child home by midnight. Many nonbehaving teens know precisely what their parents value. They just do not themselves hold these values! They hold them extrinsically, as land mines they need to take account of, to maneuver around so they do not explode.
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> What the parents are really hoping for from their teens is a transformation, a shift away from an epistemology oriented to self-interest, the short term, and others-as-supplies-to-the-self... Rather they need to relativize or subordinate their own immediate interests on behalf of the interests of a social relationship, the continued participation in which they value more highly than the gratification of an immediate need. When they make this epistemological shift, sustaining a mutual bond of trust with their parents becomes more important than partying till dawn.

Though I use the example of parenting here, the same example could apply to any set of interdependent actors that need to negotiate acceptable patterns of behavior in order to sustain a healthy and peaceful relationship. Consider for example what happens in a political negotiation between a government and revolutionary forces mediated by an international third party such as the United Nations or the Organization of American States. Often, such processes will include training in negotiations to develop greater communicative competence in each of the parties. In these trainings and the mediation process itself, behaviors such as transparency, honesty,

compliance with agreements made will be encouraged.   However, like teens in the above example, while the parties quickly recognize the importance of these behaviors, compliance with them may or may not occur because of deeper underlying mental structures and assumptions about how the world is ordered and how best to achieve one's own goals.   Too often, instrumental learning emphasizes behavior and specific knowledge or information, where communicative learning based on transformative theory will help move the parties to critically reflect on these underlying frames of reference or ways of ordering and knowing the world that ultimately inform and condition behavior.

The conditions for transformative learning occur as learners are invited to make more explicit and critically reflected upon what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as one's "habitus" or one's "embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history" (Bourdieu 1990, quoted in (Taug 2003).   Bourdieu argues that what seems to us as "common sense" or the natural ways of understanding our experiences that emerge from our habitus are actually internalized dimensions of ideology (Mezirow 2000).   Brookfield, known for his concern for ideology critique and the importance of fostering critical reflection that makes transformation possible, understands ideology in a broader sense as that which "frames our moral reasoning, our interpersonal relationships, and our ways of knowing, experiencing, and judging what is real and true." Ideologies in this sense "are manifest in language, social habits, and cultural forms. They legitimize certain political structures and educational practices so that these come to be accepted as representing the *normal order of things*" (emphasis added) (Brookfield 2000).

These taken-for-granted assumptions and ideas about the "normal order of things" that make up our frames of reference shape and condition what we learn and experience in life.   That which comfortably fits our frame of reference is more easily accepted and integrated, while other learnings and experiences that do not fit are either discounted and forgotten, or altered and distorted in order to achieve a comfortable fit (Bruner 1990).   Mezirow suggests that these frames of reference are composed of two dimensions: a habit of mind, which he often refers as our "meaning perspective"; and the resulting points of view or "meaning schemes."   Habits of mind, or meaning perspectives, are the uncritically assimilated habits of expectations which filter our sense impressions and shape how we "make sense" of things, events and happenings in the world.   These habits of expectation are then expressed in more specific points of view or meaning schemes that he describes as "specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, and judgments— that tacitly direct and shape a specific interpretation and determine how we judge, typify objects, and attribute causality."   Commonly operating outside of awareness, "they arbitrarily determine

what we see and how we see it—cause-effect relationships, scenarios of sequences of events, what others will be like, and our idealized self image. They suggest a line of action that we tend to follow automatically unless brought into critical reflection." (Mezirow 2000)

To illustrate, consider contexts where social relationships are deeply polarized (union/management, government/opposition, liberal/conservative, etc). Parties often have a very well defined (albeit implicit) concept or "habit of mind" pertaining to Other with marked points of view about who Other is, what motivates Other's behavior, what Other seeks, etc. As mentioned earlier, making sense of one's experience with Other requires making the necessary distortions so that these experiences conform to one's own frame of reference. In these contexts where the need for communicative competence is greatly felt, improving negotiation or communication skills through instrumental learning will often yield limited or unsatisfactory or short-lasting results because the very frame or meaning perspective that houses this learning remains in tact and continues to shape patterns of behavior that continue to perpetuate one's own concept of Other that maintains the system of polarization.

Mezirow concisely states the central idea behind transformational learning theory in the following quote:

> "The idea that uncritically assimilated habits of expectation or meaning perspectives serve as schemes and as perceptual and interpretive codes in the construal of meaning constitutes the central dynamic and fundamental postulate of a constructivist transformation theory of adult learning. These meaning schemes and meaning perspectives constitute our "boundary structures" for perceiving and comprehending new data. Experience strengthens our personal meaning system by refocusing or extending our expectations about how things are supposed to be. We allow our meaning system to diminish our awareness of how things really are in order to avoid anxiety, creating a zone of blocked attention and self-deception. Overcoming limited, distorted, and arbitrarily selective modes of perception and cognition through reflection on assumptions that formerly have been accepted uncritically is central to development in adulthood" (Mezirow 1991).

Using the concepts of meaning schemes and meaning perspectives, Mezirow identifies four forms of adult learning in transformation learning theory (Mezirow 1991):

1. *Learning through meaning schemes*: Refers to learning that differentiates and further elaborates the previously acquired meaning schemes that we take for granted, or learning within the structure of our acquired and often uncritically accepted frames of reference.

2. *Learning new meaning schemes:* Learning that introduces new categories of meanings that

are sufficiently consistent and compatible with existing meaning perspectives to complement them by extending their scope.

3. *Learning through transformation of meaning schemes*: Learning here involves reflection on assumptions regarding our taken-for-granted or "common sense" of the normal order of things, and leads to a growing sense of the inadequacy of these old ways of understanding and constructing the meaning of things and happenings in life.

4. *Learning through transformation of meaning perspectives:* This is where one becomes aware, through reflection and critique, of specific presuppositions upon which a distorted or incomplete meaning perspective is based and then transforms that perspective through a reorganization of meaning. It begins when we encounter experiences, often in an emotionally charged situation, that fail to fit our expectations and consequently lack meaning for us, or we encounter an anomaly that cannot be given coherence either by learning within existing schemes or by learning new schemes.

While the first two forms of learning are more characteristic of instrumental or information-based learning, the last two refer to learning that results from a transformation-based learning framework.

Consider the following experience from El Salvador as a way illustrating these different forms of learning. In the latter years of the war, prior to the signing of the Peace Accords, an initiative to improve conditions for dialogue between government, the private sector and union leadership was undertaken as a way of addressing the high level of polarization between these sectors that frequently led to manifestations and protests often resulting in violence. Training programs were offered to the leadership of these sectors with the goal of developing greater communicative competence in order to strengthen negotiations taking place around core labor issues that were at the root of some of the grievances that precipitated the war in the first place.   These trainings were successful to the extent that specific instrumental learning characteristic of the first two forms identified occurred in the participants.   For instance, they learned how to distinguish interest-based from position-based negotiation and frameworks that permitted them to deepen their analysis of the issues being discussed at the table.   Exercises were used to highlight ways of improving communication skills and managing emotional content often hindering communications. Techniques and methodologies were introduced to help the parties develop a process design in which they could trust since they could not and would not trust in each other.

They also gained insights into how each other was viewing the issues being discussed.   As important and crucial as these instrumental learnings are, the results were limited due to the lack of more critical reflection into the core presuppositions and meaning perspectives that each party brought to the table.

The design of this initiative, however, was not limited to these limited spaces of training, but was much broader in scope.   A series of informal spaces were also contemplated in which the parties would come together in the more hospitable space of a home where the learning process continued.   In the informal dialogues that occurred as parties sat in the living room and shared coffee and hors d'oeuvres, the parties or "learners" were invited to share and listen to each other's stories.   In this story telling and the occasional humor that accompanied it, relationships softened and that parties started to know each other as human beings, each with stories of pain and suffering that created a point of commonality that permitted further and deeper dialogue.   This dialogic aspect of the learning process allowed the learners to become what Brookfield refers to as "phenomenological detectives" where the "purpose is to enter another's frame of reference so that that person's structures of understanding and interpretive filters can be experienced and understood….immersing ourselves in learner's worldviews and assumptive clusters, as a first step in exploring how to encourage them to move outside their comfortable paradigms" (Brookfield 1990).

For each, the concept of "Other" underwent a process of deconstruction where core assumptions or presuppositions were no longer as comfortable or sufficient for adequately understanding the context that brought them to the negotiation table.   Upon more critical reflection through dialogic interaction, their meaning schemes became more explicit, increasingly more inadequate, and finally experienced the kind of transformation mentioned in the third form of learning.

One anecdote of this experience cogently illustrates this transformation.   A prominent leader from the private sector was watching the evening news when a segment appeared broadcasting a union strike where the police had intervened. They showed the police brutally beating on of the union leaders that had been participating in these dialogues.   He immediately picked up the phone and called another member of this dialogue group and expressed his outrage at the abusive treatment of this man.   Days following, he reflected on this situation and commented that one year earlier, had he seen this same episode, he would have said to himself, "the bastard is getting just what he deserves."   This marked for him a significant transformation that had taken place within him. The way he understood and made sense of reality was no longer the same.

Consequently the world in which he lives is no longer the same, it is much more complex and gray, where simplistic categories of black and white, right and wrong, Right and Left are no longer adequate.   Specific changes in this immediate context regarding his sense of Other, or his meaning schemes pertaining to labor issues, are likely to bleed into other areas of life, leading to perspective transformation referred to in the fourth form of learning mentioned above. Experiencing these transformations contributes to greater communicative competence and the ability to reach deeper understanding.   The idea of transformation points further than achieving deeper, more nuanced understanding of assumptions to what Brookfield refers to as an "epiphany, or apocalyptic, cognitive event--a shift in the tectonic plates of one's assumptive clusters... a fundamental questioning and reordering of how one thinks or acts (2000).

I would also say that the goals of transformative education, identified in Shor and Freire as "critical curiosity, increased political awareness, democratic participation, habits of intellectual scrutiny, and interest in social change" were partly realized in this learning process (1987).

Constructivist and situated learning theory emphasizes that "learning is necessarily a social, dialogical process in which communities of practitioners socially negotiate the meaning of phenomena" (Lapadat 2000).   If this is true of learning in general, than it is even more important that learning processes aimed at developing communicative competence or the learners' ability to reach understanding in order to better coordinate their actions together be essentially dialogic in nature where learners actively engage in and improve their discursive practices.   Hence, the importance of moving from designs based on instrumental learning to designs that encourage communicative learning.   An important goal for communicative learning in this context is the establishment of the ideal conditions for rational discourse mentioned earlier.   More specifically, learning that fosters developmentally more advanced meaning perspectives and deepens communicative competence takes place when learners are assisted to do the following (Mezirow):

- Decontextualize

- Become more aware of the history, contexts (norms, codes, reaction patterns, perceptual filters), and consequences of their beliefs

- Become more reflective and critical in their assessment of both the content and the process of problem solving and of their own ways of participating in this process

- "bracket" preconceived ideas and openly examine evidence and assess arguments

- Make better inferences, more appropriate generalizations, and more logically coherent arguments

- Be more open to the perspectives of others

- Rely less on the psychological defense mechanisms and be more willing to accept the authority of provisional consensual validation of expressed ideas.

With these general goals or tasks of learning based on transformation theory in mind, Schapiro's description of a learning model based on collaborative critical pedagogy is helpful for describing more specifically the kind learning processes that carry the greatest potential for transformative learning (Schapiro 2003). Such processes tend to be more:

- *learner-centered than teacher-centered*: beginning with learners' needs, purposes and goals, not with teachers' agendas, ideas, and methods;

- *problem-focused than subject focused*: building the learning process around situations and problems that learners confront in their own lives, not around learning particular subject matter out of context and for its own sake;

- *inquiry-directed than answer-directed*: using learners' questions to drive the learning process rather than learners' acquisition of others' predetermined answers;

- *wholistic than purely cognitive and rational*: recognizing the emotional, kinesthetic, and spiritual dimensions of learning;

- *experiential than purely didactic*: helping students to learn not only from books and lectures but also from experience and reflection on and in experience;

- *collaborative than competitive*: enabling learners to use one another as colleagues, resources, and co-learners, not as competitors for teachers' approval and for the highest grades;

- *integrated than discipline-based*: approaching problems and topics from a multi-disciplinary perspective;

- *constructivist than transmission-based*: enabling learners to construct their own meaning and knowledge rather than transmitting to them others' ideas of the truth;

- *person-centered rather than role-centered*: enabling learners and teachers to engage one another as authentic persons who are colleagues in the learning process, each with their won wisdom and expertise, not solely as expert and protégé, fount of knowledge and vessel to be filled. (Schapiro, 2003)

Implications for program design: A case for blended programs

In this final section I offer some considerations for the design of transformative training programs or learning processes that recognize the value of helping learners acquire more developmentally advanced meaning perspectives as a key part of deepening and strengthening communicative competence.   Specifically, I discuss the advantages of moving towards blended learning designs where the technology of computer mediated communication (CMC) is incorporated into the learning process, in addition to the use of the more traditional face-to-face (f2f) classroom learning context.   While I believe that face-to-face learning offers many advantages and should continue to play an important role in the design of the kind of training programs discussed in this paper, my intent here is to introduce and foreground the advantages of CMC as a way of expanding the kinds of resources that are available for enriching how we think about how best to design such learning endeavors.

Current research suggests that "discursive interaction in asynchronous, text-based, online courses may be uniquely suited to fostering higher order thinking, social construction of meaning, and shifts in perspective" (Lapadat 2000).   Some studies comparing discursive practices in face-to-face contexts with those that take place in computer mediated environments suggest that the kind of deep discussion that leads to transformative learning is more difficult in f2f environments than in CMC environments (Lapadat, Schallert, etc). Cooper and Selfe, quoted in Lapadat (2000), suggest that one of the advantages of CMC is that it offers a discussion forum that "allows interaction patterns disruptive of a teacher-centered hegemony….[enabling students] to create internally persuasive discourse as well as adopt discourse validated by external authority."

Some indicators that seem to support this claim that CMC fosters higher order thinking and deeper discussion among learners include the number and depth of students' contributions, the depth of discussion, the quality of the assignments turned in, and their satisfaction level expressed in student evaluations of the learning experience (Lapadat, 2000).

Drawing heavily on Warschauer's article in which he reviews a number of studies on the power of CMC to encourage collaborative learning, I discuss the following dimensions specific to CMC that he identifies which serve to highlight how CMC can be used as an integral tool in promoting communicative learning:

Text based interaction:

Text-based conversation or discussion using CMC is uniquely different than oral or spoken conversation because all that is said is captured in writing and offers the possibility to revisit previous "turns" or "threads" in the conversation, as well as greater time to think, reflect and more deliberately participate in the conversation. A permanent record remains in print which allows the possibility to come back time and again to benefit from the richness of the discussion, and perhaps learn or make sense of what was said in different ways. This is not possible in spoken conversation since no record of the discussion exists. Text-based conversation is also different from more traditional forms of written communication. It tends to be less formal and more spontaneous since conversational turns can happen much more quickly in CMC than more formal kinds of writing where arguments or comments are to be more well thought out. In this sense, CMC conversations come closer to reflecting the kind of more reflective writing one might find in a journal where spontaneity and uncompleted thoughts or thinking out loud is more the norm. Regarding text-based interaction via CMC, Warschauer writes:

"The historical divide between speech and writing has been overcome with the interactional and reflective aspects of language merged in a single medium: CMC. For the first time in history, human interaction now takes place in a text-based form—moreover, a computer-mediated form that is easily transmitted, stored, archived, reevaluated, edited, and rewritten. The opportunities to freeze a single frame and focus attention on it are greatly expanded by CMC. Students' own interactions can now become a basis for epistemic engagement. Such features led one prominent scientist to describe the Internet as bringing about the 'forth revolution in the means of production of knowledge,' on a par with the 'three prior revolutions in the evolution of human communication and cognition: language, writing and print" (Warschauer 1997).

Many to many:

CMC offers the possibility of many-to-many communication where members of a discussion group are able to communicate with any or all of the members of the group much like what occurs in group discussions in f2f environments. However, interestingly enough, it seems as the CMC offers a unique environment that permits or fosters a social dynamic in communication that approximates what Habermas refers to as the "ideal speech situation" for achieving rational discourse, which as mentioned earlier is the ultimate goal of communicative competence. According to Warschauer, "the social dynamics of CMC have proven to be different from those of face-to-face discussion in regard to turn-taking, interruption, balance, equality, consensus, and decision-making." In the following quote he elaborates further on this by referring to a number of different studies on CMC that suggest that:

"communication is more equal in participation that f2f discussion, with those who are

traditionally shut out of discussions benefiting most from increased participation. For example, Sproull and Kiesler (1991), using meta-analysis of published research, found that electronic discussion groups of people of different status show approximately twice as much equality (measured by a balanced quantity of participation) as do f2f discussion groups. McGuire, Kiesler, and Siegel (1987) found that in discussions held electronically, women made the first proposal of a solution to a problem as often as men, whereas in f2f discussions men make the first proposal five times more often. Huff and King (1988) discovered that proposals by higher status people (graduate students compared to undergraduates) were invariably favored during in-person discussion groups, whereas proposals by lower status and higher status people were selected equally as often in electronic discussion groups. Why does greater equality occur? CMC a) reduces social context clues related to race, gender, handicap, accent, and status (Sproull & Kaisler 1991); b) reduces nonverbal cues, such as frowning and hesitating, which can intimidate people, especially those with less power and authority (Finholt, Kiesler, & Sproull 1986) and c) allows individuals to contribute at their own time and pace" (Warschauer 1997).

A main obstacle to collaborative learning is the teacher-centered nature of discussion – a problem that is exacerbated by one of the difficulties I identified earlier where learners often enter the learning process with the mindset that "expert knows best." Consequently, all discussion tends to be initiated by or directed towards the "expert" or teacher/trainer. Integrating CMC as a tool for discussion is one way of addressing this challenge and empirical studies suggest that doing so results in a "greater amount of student participation according to three measures: (a) percentage of student talk versus teacher talk, (b) directional focus of student talk (toward other students or toward the teacher), and (c) equality of student participation" (p5).

Time & Space independent:

One of the real challenges I mentioned earlier in designing transformative learning processes pertains to the limited time available to adult learners. Adult learners are often very busy people with multiple commitments and feel restricted in terms of the kind of time they can give to learning programs. An advantage of CMC is that it returns some control over to adult learners in that it is a medium that is largely time and space independent. Rather than requiring large blocks of time away from work and other commitments, learners can write and receive messages and participate at any time and on any computer that offers access to the Internet. This flexibility extends the potential for effective collaboration in that it allows learners time for more in-depth analysis and critical reflection in order to respond more deliberately to others' contributions. Avoiding the need to respond immediately in real time in f2f or synchronous online communication, increased reflection and deliberation in asynchronous communication often yields greater depth and quality in discussions. Warschauer refers to an unpublished dissertation by Wang that "compared dialogue journals written via email with dialogue journals written on paper. Compared with the paper-and-pencil group, the email group wrote more per session,

asked and answered more questions, used a greater variety of language functions, applied these functions more frequently, and was less formal and more conversational with the teacher." ( ).

Long distance exchanges:

CMC technology offers to possibility of connecting and engaging individuals from very different contexts and cultures, literally extending the possibility of communication to all corners of the globe. This becomes a rich tool for enriching the "meaning-making" function of linguistic communication as Bakhtin (quoted in Warschauer) notes:

"A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures. We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depths."

Facilitating the possibility of active engagement that is time and space independent with others across great distances also increases the range of possibilities for situated learning, where learners remain in and draw from their specific contexts the resources that serve to make their learning more relevant. Finally, CMC offers a vehicle by which the formation and constant interaction within extended communities of practice become possible. Such communities that form during a learning experience are enabled to continue living on well after the specific learning experience since they are left with the knowledge and experience of sustaining communication at great distances.

Hypermedia links:

Hypermedia is a resource available to CMC where access to readily available, up-to-date information can be offered via the Internet and used for collaborative activities. For example, the use of case studies or simulations can be enriched by offering participants links to local newspapers, websites of organizations relevant to the case, etc. where participants can access real information specific to the context being studies. Materials used for a course can be more readily updated and posted for immediate access without having to take the time or use additional resources for copying and distributing them. Finally, effective use of hypermedia links offers the possibility of designing a well defined course with a coherent focus while at the same time offering links that allow students to branch out at will to other perhaps indirectly related areas or content themes. Links facilitate for the learner the possibility of "browsing" and meandering outside the specific confines of the course, offering them greater control over what they

incorporate into and take from their learning experience. Used effectively, this can be a valuable tool for facilitating learning that seeks to be more learner-centered than teacher-centered, more problem-focused than subject focused, inquiry-directed than answer-directed, integrated than discipline-based, and more constructivist than transmission-based by facilitating for the learner the possibility to "branch out" at will, via hypermedia links, and explore more deeply and integrate that which for the learner makes sense and is more relevant to his or her on context and needs.

While transformational learning can certainly occur in more traditional face-to-face contexts, moving towards blended programs that incorporate the technology available for online learning and computer mediated communication into the learning design offers rich opportunities for a more dialogic and collaborative learning experience. However, the effectiveness of CMC, as with any tool, depends on how it is used. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to enter into more specific details about ways of structuring the use of CMC in learning designs, I would like to offer some helpful guidelines to consider when choosing to use CMC as an online tool for learning. For example, collaborative participation in CMC should be required rather than optional; otherwise, participation in collaborative discussions tends to be less consistent due to other demands on learners' time. Clear deadlines, evaluations or grading based on the quality of participation can be effective ways of motivating collaborative engagement among learners. Clear and efficient procedures and support for communication with students prior to and during course as well as intentional strategies to address fears about the use of technology are also important to consider.   Finally, in the interest of promoting dialogic and collaborative learner-centered learning experiences (as opposed to teacher-centered), the role of the teacher or trainer shifts from more of an expert role or "sage on the stage" to a facilitation role, or "guide on the side." The teacher uses CMC as tool for creating the conditions for learners to dialogue among themselves and with the teacher. While part of the role of the teacher may involve serving as a content expert, the larger role involves facilitating learners in dialogic processes of critical reflection characteristic of transformative learning described above.

Conclusion

In this paper I have offered a critique of the kind of training and educational programs for which I have be responsible that have as a goal the development and strengthening of communicative competence. I have suggested that many skill-building training programs have too often erred on the side of instrumental or information-based learning. Developing and deepening

communicative competence is ultimately a task of communicative learning that must aim at developing critical reflection skills individuals need in order to effectively participate within the context of these conditions that permit the possibility of rational discourse.   I then discuss transformation learning theory and the importance of its centrality in communicative learning processes that enable learners to acquire developmentally advance meaning perspectives. Finally, I suggest that the incorporation of computer-mediated communication in learning designs can offer a powerful way of engaging learners more dialogically and collaboratively in the learning process.   I discuss some of the specific advantages CMC offers as a discussion forum that distinguishes it from the type of discussions that take place in face-to-face environments.   By offering an environment that appears to promote more equal and balanced participation, more deliberate turn-taking, deeper analysis and more critical reflection, yielding higher quality of discussions, CMC seems to be uniquely suited for transformative learning, especially for learning processes aimed at developing "communicative competence."

I end this paper with another story that illustrates that learning processes that fail to promote dialogic and collaborative engagement that leads to critical reflection of one's underlying meaning perspectives that shape how one views the world, important and critical transformations are unlikely to occur.

> A man found an eagle's egg and put it in the nest of a backyard hen. The eaglet hatched with the brood of chicks and grew up with them.
>
> All his life the eagle did what the backyard chickens did, thinking he was a backyard chicken. He scratched the earth for worms and insects. He clocked and cackled. And he would thrash his wings and fly a few feet into the air.
>
> Years passed and the eagle grew very old. One day he saw a magnificent bird far above him in the cloudless sky. It glided in graceful majesty among the powerful wind currents, with scarcely a beat of its strong golden wings.
>
> The old eagle looked up in awe. "Who's that?" he said.
>
> "That's the eagle, the king of the birds," said his neighbor. "He belongs to the sky. We belong to the earth—we're chickens."
>
> So the eagle lived and died a chicken, for that's what he thought he was.
>
> (de Mello 1982)

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