

# Communication

## Meta-communication

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*Richard:* Communications have long been a feature of FLM. In the transition issue between their two editorships, David Pimm and Laurinda Brown (2003, p. 3) touched on their role:

*David:* ... I had been intrigued from [FLM's] outset by the space for writing of certain sorts that David Wheeler had created and nurtured through this journal.

*Laurinda:* ... David Wheeler had also wanted to encourage discussion in the pages of the journal, though he never thought the results he achieved in this regard were that successful.

The continued presence of communications seems to me to suggest some kind of success! The heading covers quite a range of contributions, including comments on recently published articles, brief stand-alone pieces, observations on FLM in general and input from the editor. The words *communication* and *community* have a common root. What do the communications in FLM imply about our community?

*Brent:* As long as I've been associated with FLM, it seems that one of the never-ending projects of the editorial team has been to 'name' what it is that FLM publishes. It turns out that it's much easier to say what we don't include. For instance, our most common reason for rejecting a manuscript is that "we do not normally publish research articles" – and, as Carolyn Kieran noted in a recent commentary,

In those articles that have touched upon research and which have been published in FLM, one could always find a greater emphasis on the theoretical or epistemological issues at play. The research in fact seemed quite secondary to, even if supportive of, the main ideas being discussed in the article.

FLM communications have always seemed to me to be amplifications of this point. They're more than opportunities for quick responses and brief reportings; they're places to clarify, emphasize, extend, or critique the theoretical or epistemological issues at play. And that's how I'd begin to answer Richard's question. We're a group of people with a keen interest in the beliefs and commitments that infuse our actions.

*Luis:* Communications are fluid informal spaces to express concerns or reactions to previous ideas. Communications are also a space to open a dialogue and to voice emerging ideas that cannot be fully articulated yet that, by being addressed to someone else, start acquiring a more definite shape.

*Richard:* A recent communication by David Reid (2004), in around 400 words, describes his noticing a juxtaposition of the pages of two different articles through photocopying

and the resulting connections he then made. This kind of thing could seem frivolous. But the connections are thought-provoking, critical and interesting, despite (perhaps because of) their brevity. I could have picked other examples. So what is the 'meta' here? Perhaps that we read FLM rather than read individual articles; that we are responsive and open to the connections; that, from time to time, we are moved, as Luis puts it, to address our responses to someone and so contribute to the discussion.

*Brent:* Perhaps a pithy way to describe FLM communications is to say that they're more about the play of insights than the display of insights – a description that, once again, can probably be extended to the journal itself. Suddenly I find myself really appreciating Richard's suggestion to foreground the 'meta' in this exchange. As I leaf through past issues and glance across previous communications, I'm struck by how they seem to bring out who we are, who we're talking to, and what we're up to.

*Luis:* In its most common sense, the prefix *meta-* refers to something 'beyond', something 'higher'. From what both of you have said, the idea of *meta-communication* should not be understood here as something achieved at a higher level of discourse. *Meta-communication* could better be conceptualized as an attempt made by a voice to reach another voice. The Greek etymology of *meta* seems to convey, in a better way, what we are trying to accomplish through this section in FLM. Used as a preposition, *meta* for the ancient Greeks meant 'in the midst of, among, with'. *Meta-communication* would then be communicating 'with', as opposed to a mere abstract communication addressed to a reified Other. It might be that this *souci de l'autre*, this engaged intention of telling something to a concrete being, is one of the distinctive features of this section and, as Brent noted, of the journal itself.

*Richard:* I love the idea of 'communicating in the midst of'; it reminds me that I particularly like communications that respond to or connect more than one article or idea from the journal. I don't agree, however, with a choice between saying something to a concrete being and addressing a reified other; I think it's both. And furthermore, based on my own experience of writing the occasional communication, they are also about authors developing their own thinking in relation to that of others: a case of 'thinking in the midst of', much as in this communication, in fact.

*Brent:* I like to be reminded of the origins of words. I see these as opportunities to imagine what our intellectual forebears might have been noticing when terms were invented and/or co-opted for new purposes (and both processes seem to have been at work here around the notion of *meta-communication*).

This is a fitting place to end this conversation – that is, with the recognition that we regard FLM communications as more than opportunities to exchange insights. There's a decidedly 'meta' intent, a co-participation in the production of knowledge. That's one of the reasons we work to ensure a quick turn-around with communications. I look forward to upcoming submissions from members of the FLM community.

## References

- Pimm, D. and Brown, L. (2003) 'Transforming', *For the Learning of Mathematics* 23(3) 2–4.  
Reid, D. (2004) 'Juxtapositions', *For the Learning of Mathematics* 25(2), 33.