



**UNIVERSIDAD DE QUINTANA ROO**

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**División de Estudios Internacionales  
y Humanidades**

**Departamento de Lengua Inglesa**

**"The Use of e-mail in Teaching  
English as a Foreign Language"**

**Trabajo Monográfico**

Para obtener el grado de

*Licenciado en Lengua Inglesa*

**Presenta**

Aarón Israel Barquet López

**Supervisoras:**

M.A María Isabel Hernández Romero

Dr. Caridad Macola Rojo

MC. María de Rosario Reyes Cruz

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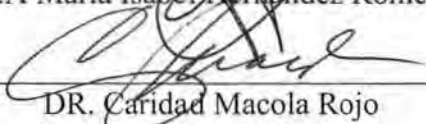
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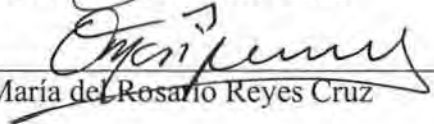
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#### COMITÉ:

SUPERVISORA :   
M.A. María Isabel Hernández Romero

SUPERVISORA:   
DR. Caridad Macola Rojo

SUPERVISORA:   
María del Rosario Reyes Cruz

Chetumal, Quintana Roo, a 22 de noviembre de 2000

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## I Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role that e-mail could take in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).

EFL teachers are well known for their innovation and creativity. When a new method or approach comes along, EFL teachers explore and discuss it, and sometimes adopt it, partially or completely. It is probably safe to say that most EFL teachers integrate the best elements of several approaches in order to reach their goals.

For the past several years teachers have been talking about computers. The discussion first centered on the use of computers as word processors, asking such questions as, “should students use the computer for writing assignments?” The debate is over now with teachers accepting the computer as a valuable tool for developing students writing skills, a clear example of that is the computer assisted language learning (CALL). However, “much of the discussion about the interactivity of computers and multimedia in language teaching has actually been about interaction between learners and a software program, not about the interaction between learners or learners and target language speakers via networked computers” (Holliday, L. 1999).

Now the discussion is focused on the internet. The debate over the value of the internet for EFL teachers and students is far from over. Most teachers who have ventured into cyberspace are enthusiastic about the wonderful learning opportunities offered to EFL teachers, as well as the valuable resources for students. Alike some teachers, many students love computers, but many do not. Those students who feel comfortable using computers are very receptive to any learning activities that involve the use of computers, like e-mail or doing research on-line

When a language activity is truly communicative, such as e-mail projects, the language is authentic, in this way the students are no longer going through the motions of an

artificial communication exercise, like writing a letter to their teacher or sending a postcard to a classmate. When they are communicating because they want to, and not as a duty, the students want to communicate a real emotion or thought to a real pen friend in another country or city, who will receive this message in a matter of seconds. This person may reply with a real answer to his words and this is real communication, which is the basis of language teaching.

Research has shown that by using computers, students become better problem solvers and communicators. Over a network, using e-mail and sharing files, students have the chance to collaborate and work together with other classmates, peers and teachers. Networking electronically can help learners create, analyze and produce information and ideas more easily and efficiently.

Networking people “puts an inspiring, enticing and usable set of tools within reach of the mass of computer users, empowering them to go beyond simply processing information to design, publish and express” (Mello,1996).

All student need interaction with a real people who can respond to and comment on the learner’s use of the target language he/she is studying. Networking frees them from the limitations of traditional writing tools that often inhibit and restrict writing processes. Learning is then transformed from a traditional passive-listening exercise to an experience of discovery, exploration and excitement. Students can begin to realize their full potential when they are empowered to contribute and collaborate as a team to accomplish their writing tasks more effectively.

Over the past few years, the Internet has emerged as a prominent new technology. The influence of such a powerful technological tool has pervaded all aspects of the educational, sector of our world. Regardless of whether the Internet is used or not, it is important to be clear about the fact that the human kind has entered a new information age and the Internet is here to stay.



Because of the wide use of the Internet fields and domains, without a doubt, it also carries great potential for educational use, specifically in Second or Foreign Language education. This paper will therefore focus on the following question: How has the electronic-mail been used in Teaching English as a Foreign Language?

I strongly believe that e-mail provides students with an excellent opportunity for real and natural communication, it also empowers students for independent learning, and the use of e-mail enriches our experiences as teachers.

Having entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century our society has also gone deeper into the information age, technology has an impact on society unparalleled since the industrial revolution. In fact, the impact of the internet- has been compared to that of the printing press 500 years ago.

While access to and interest on the internet grows, traditional concepts of work, home, human relationships and education are being dissected and revised as we move into a paradigm shift across all facets of life.

As a result of the widespread effects of technology throughout the world, it is no surprise that educators are being challenged to rethink and revise their approaches and goals in teaching in order to prepare students for what will be expected of them in the real world.

Technology should be used across the curriculum to facilitate a student-centered learning environment. This will require computers, communication networking, and multimedia equipment. This will provide tools for effectively presenting course materials, as well as resources for helping students learn how to access, analyze, and interpret information, and how to communicate their findings.

If we accept that educational technology can be beneficial for our EFL students and us, then the next logical step is to determine how to incorporate it into our current activities,

such as class preparation, adapting the existing curricula, and using it as part of our class.

This study can help EFL instructors to focus their efforts and objectives in curriculum design and development involving the use of e-mail as an educational tool. This paper can help EFL teachers learn about the integration of e-mail and language teaching, to implement its use to the maximum potential in their EFL classes, maximizing the benefits and minimizing the limitations of traditional teaching.

The field of Foreign Language Teaching has undergone many fluctuations and dramatic shifts over the years. Many influences have affected language teaching. Reasons for learning languages have been different according to the periods. In some eras, languages were mainly taught for the purpose of reading, in others they were taught to people who needed to use them orally. These differences influenced how languages were taught. Also, theories about the nature of language and the nature of learning have changed. However, many of the current issues in language teaching have been considered off and on throughout history (Kitao, S.K. & K. Kitao n.d./1998).

The consideration of foreign language teaching goes back at least to the ancient Greeks and Romans, These two social groups were probably the first to study a foreign language formally.

Since this paper is focused more on the use of the internet to teach English as a Foreign Language, I will limit this section just to name these approaches as important information for the reader, but not crucial for the development of the paper.

There has been a disillusionment with the whole methods debate, partly due to inconclusiveness of research on methods, and calls for a deeper understanding of the process language learning itself. Finally, there has been a greater stress on authenticity in language learning, meaning that the activities involved in language learning reflect real world uses of the language.



Computers have been used in language teaching since the mid-sixties, their development was for several decades hindered by the fact that they could only display text or block graphics. Since the early nineties, however, even low-cost personal computers have been "multimedia ready" -able to handle not only text, but sound and, high-quality graphics and video (Eastment, 1998).

The combination of text, audio, and pictures on a single platform, seems to hold great potential for language teaching. It should combine the benefits of conventional Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), text reconstruction exercises, text, games etc., with those of video, together with the advantage of being able to jump instantly to the desired frame rather than having to rely on the rewind or fast forward keys. Multimedia has been available for many years, chiefly on laser disk, but the high cost of software and hardware restricted its use to commerce and industry. In the last few years prices have tumbled, and titles have multiplied.

Multimedia is interactive, in contrast to video, which can be watched passively, nothing happens with a multimedia package until the user makes it happen. This may involve inputting as answers for the computer to check, or merely moving to the next page or screen. But the user constantly has to make choices, and is therefore involved to a degree not achievable with other kinds of educational technology.

The multimedia format allows language to be presented not just as text, but with sounds and pictures. This multisensory input enriches and reinforces learning. A multimedia package can provide a rich, fully-contextualized learning environment. Developments in artificial intelligence and natural language-processing will allow the computers to be used for more sophisticated assessment of language produced by users, and will allow more sophisticated exploration of language by learners ( Hardisty & Windeatt, 1990).

If language is communication, then any technology which links together computers so that learners can talk to each other must be worth it.

Electronic-mail was started in the late 1960s by the U.S. military. Military officers were looking for a way that communicators could be carried out in the event of a large-scale nuclear war. They needed a system that would be very decentralized, reliable, and fast in case central institutions were destroyed. They came up with e-mail.

E-mail is a way of sending a message from one computer to one or more other computers around the world. First, you write down the e-mail address of the other person you are sending the message to. Then you compose the message either by writing it directly in a special e-mail software program or by writing it first in a word processing program and then transferring it into the mail e-mail software.

Electronic mail (e-mail) is a relatively new medium of communication that is experiencing an exploding growth around the world. E-mail messages can be sent across different kinds of networks, both locally and globally. Aside from the internet there are thousands of local area networks and wide area networks that send millions of messages daily across various kinds of transmission cables.

Using e-mail in the class makes students become familiar with a tool that is vital to their survival in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What was considered a luxury and privilege is now becoming the communication tool of choice of many white collar workers in industrialized and developing countries. In the world of business, education, politics, and technology, e-mail is quickly taking the place of voice, paper and fax communication. Employers will require this vital skill for their employees of today and tomorrow.

E-mail is both similar to and different from other means of communication. Compared with mail, for example, e-mail is a high speed method of transferring information that allows rapid exchanges. You can also communicate by phone. Unlike the telephone,

e-mail allows people to retrieve their messages at any time. E-mail allows easier data management than mail, fax and telephone because all communicators and documents arrive via computer and can easily be stored, altered, printed or forwarded. A major advantage of e-mail is that it allows one message to be sent to hundreds or even thousands of people all over the world in a very inexpensive way.

This paper is a literature review of articles and books about the use of e-mail in the process of Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

A one year extensive search for online articles was done previous to writing this paper, such articles were read and analyzed and finally evaluated to be able to proceed to take note from the relevant parts.

There are also printed materials that were read and evaluated to be taken into account for this paper. It was difficult to get printed sources or information, since the south of Mexico is far from the great centers of knowledge in central Mexico. It was necessary to go to the United States Of America to buy books, and also online shopping was done.

Both online and printed materials were deeply analyzed.

E-mail exchange boards and mail lists were used to obtain authentic information, in these exercise teachers of English as a Foreign Language from all over the world offered their opinions, comments and advice that were also considered in this paper.

## Chapter I E-mail for teachers collaboration

The easiest, fastest, and most direct way that teachers of English as a foreign language can use e-mail is as a tool for your own research, material gathering, and collaboration. All what is needed is a single computer, on campus, at home, place of work, or at cyber café. This computer can quickly and easily put you in touch with thousands of other EFL teachers around the world as well as with incredible banks of EFL materials, lesson plans, and even special EFL computer software. The only requirement is to be connected to the internet and to know how to use it.

### 1.1 TESL-L

The place to start is an absolutely fabulous resource called TESL-L. Joining it is almost like having access to the people, material, and resources of huge teachers' convention from the privacy of your own office.

TESL-L was founded in 1991 with the goal of providing educators with a fast, convenient, and topical electronic discussion forum that focuses on issues related to teaching ESL/EFL.

TESL-L is an e-mail discussion list, sometimes referred to as an e-mail mailing list, also called LISTSERV.

Imagine you are teaching a course for the first time, and you are not sure which book to use for that particular course and level. Perhaps you have questions about the advantages or disadvantages of particular approach, method, technique or particular type of language learner. Maybe you want to inquire about a new or old theory of second language acquisition. Who would you ask?

On TESL-L, you can ask questions about these or any related topics of several thousand EFL/ESL teachers around the world. In this place EFL/ESL teachers can share their

own ideas and experiences and actively collaborate with their colleagues around the world to collectively develop new answers to all types of questions.

TESL-L and other e-mail mailing lists work much the same way as a traditional mailing list run by a church, office, or professional organization. The thousands of TESL-L members have their names and e-mail addresses encoded in a computerized mailing list so that e-mail messages can be sent to all of them.

Whether traveling a few doors down or halfway around the world, the messages arrive within a matter of minutes rather than taking days or even weeks.

The members have access to the mailing list and can use it to generate their own messages to the entire list; what is more, any member can quickly or easily reply either to the individual or the entire list.

It is no wonder that TESL-L and other LISTSERV mailing lists have become enormously popular with academic, professional, and social organizations in recent years. If you are willing to participate in this kind of activity it is necessary to know a wide variety of passwords and protocols that need to be followed. This is the reason because in the beginning it could be a little frustrating to get what you need, but once you have understood how the system works there won't be any troubles to explore this vast resource.

## **1.2 TESL-L Branches**

Many EFL teachers have special interests that they would like to discuss in addition to, or instead of, the general topics. For this reason, special TESL-L branches have been set up, for example:

**TESLCA-L** Computer assisted language learning: In this branch you can talk about the use of computers for teaching. This listserv is very popular now, since more and



more EFL teachers are starting to use computers to improve their performance, I personally got some information from it.

**TESLFF-L** Fluency first and whole language pedagogy: Here you can share information about activities, literature and more all related to the fluency of the students in EFL.

**TESLJB-L** Jobs, employment, and working conditions in TESL/TESL: This is another very popular resource that EFL teacher use to share all kind of information related to EFL jobs, immigration paper work, visas, and all sort of information you could imagine about the topic.

**TESLIE-L** Intensive English programs, teaching and administration: In this branch users exchange information about specific English language programs as well as teaching tips, people also ask questions about administration. This is a branch that directors or principal teachers would use. I personally have not use it so much.

**TESLIT-L** Adult education and literacy: Here you can share information about working with adults. I have used this branch a little bit, since I work with young adults now.

To join any of these sub-branches, you must first become a member of TESL-L and then send an e-mail to the TESL-L LISTSERV.

### **1.3 TESL-L Archives**

Almost as valuable as the TESL-L discussion list is the TESL-L archives. They include a vast array of files and documents related to English teaching, contributed by TESL-L members around the world. TESL-L maintains archives on the following topics: Classroom practices and activities, testing and evaluation, computers in ESL, computer hardware and software, books, periodicals and other materials, net resources

and e-mail, organizations and conferences, English learners, countries, teacher education, and the English language.

TESL-L is only one of many electronic mailing lists that may be of the interest to ESL/EFL teachers. An additional list of these is recommended by Mark Warschauer (Warschauer, M.1995.p 26).

Being a member of TESL-L is a great opportunity for you as an EFL teacher. It is necessary to be patience and to try a lot to understand this way of communication. It is not difficult, but it could be frustrating in the beginning. I recommend you to print all of the codes and protocols that you need to master it if you want to get the best out of this electronic resource.

## Chapter II E-mail in a single classroom

Many EFL teachers understand the reason for using e-mail and electronic communication for long distance communication. After all, they can put English learners together with native speakers of English from across the world. What many teachers don't realize is that e-mail and electronic communication can be of great benefit for long distance exchanges but also for linking the students in a single classroom.

Three types of electronic communication are possible within a single class: teacher-student communication, out of class electronic discussion, and in class, real time electronic discussion.

### 2.1 Teacher-Student Communication

E-mail for teacher-student communication would most likely take place in higher education, where students have some independent access to e-mail out of class. Although now you can always go to a cyber-cafe and have access to an e-mail account, but it will depend on where your school district is located. For instance, there are not so many internet cafes in Chetumal, the opposite case of Cozumel or Cancun, lets not talk about bigger cities like Merida or Villahermosa.

Teacher-student communication via e-mail can take several forms, including formal and informal consultation, exchange of dialogue journals and writing conferencing.

For a student to consult a teacher or professor can be a difficult or even intimidating experience that is why many students do not take advantage of teachers' office hours besides that we should not forget students shyness, lack of confidence in English, or simply lack of time.

As an EFL teacher, Giving students your e-mail address and letting them know that questions and comments are welcome is one way of giving them more power to express themselves and communicate with you. If students have access to e-mail at their home or campus computer lab, or cyber-café, they can tell or ask you what they want, whenever they want, without having to interrupt your privacy with a telephone call or give you a written message that you may not see for days. Providing your students with your e-mail address is a way of leveling the playing field and overcoming the language and status difficulties EFL students often have in communicating with their teachers.

A busy adjunct teacher at the City University of New York started conducting informal office hours by e-mail a couple of years ago. He found that his students not only consulted him much more frequently but were much more open and communicative in their contacts (Tillyer,1993).

A very popular technique for fostering student reflection and writing practice is the teacher-student dialogue journal. Student turn in a weekly diary to teachers, who respond to each one with comments, questions, and answers.

Dialogue journals are no doubt effective. But any teacher who has used them can testify to an inherent problem that weakens their effectiveness. The disruptive nature of the collection cycle, with all students turning the journals in on one day and waiting anywhere from a day to a week for the teacher to read them, write on them, and return them to the students.

An alternative that maintains all the benefits if dialogue journals and overcomes this handicap is the electronic dialogue journal. In this kind of activity, students submit their dialogue journal by e-mail, and the teacher responds in the same form. A student can thus receive a response within a day or possible even less, and can more easily stagger the collection of journals, receiving them not only on one particular day of class but

anytime during the week, spreading out the work more evenly and avoiding handling all that paper.

Wang (1993) of the University of Oregon at Eugene did an extensive study comparing the discourse of ESL students' dialogue journals written in both e-mail and traditional paper format. She found that the students using e-mail journals wrote greater amounts of text, asked more questions, and used different language functions more frequently than did students writing on paper.

These last points are very important because ESL students often have problems expressing their ideas in writing. Using e-mail rather than paper for communication seems to create two advantages. 1) e-mail provides a wonderful sense of audience and, 2) e-mail seems to allow students to take risks and never avoid getting terrified of committing original thought to paper.

The two benefits mentioned for e-mail dialogue journals make e-mail a good tool not only for exchanging those journals, but for more general types of writing conferencing between teachers and students.

Modern theories of composition instruction emphasize the importance of developing writing as a process, not just as the creation of a product. The pedagogical emphasis is now focused on having students write multiple drafts and on having the teacher play the role of an interested reader rather than a judge or inquisitor.

The fact that composition have to be printed out, turned in on certain dates, and then handed back places a limit on the natural give and take that often takes place in more authentic forms of academic writing. Many teachers of composition find that students are more willing to submit multiple drafts and to make serious, global revisions when their work is submitted electronically rather than on paper. It seems that e-mail provides a perfect mechanism for students to submit drafts and for teachers to look them over at their convenience and send them back with comments. New ideas are shared when they



are fresh and can be answered quickly. Another advantage is that the teacher can easily store all drafts of a document for later review and analysis of the revision process.

Using e-mail for teacher student communication can give students more access to their teachers, provide a more convenient channel for sharing student writings, and assist students in developing a better sense of the writing process.

## **2.2 Out of class electronic discussion**

Another way to use e-mail in a single classroom is for out of class electronic discussion. Like e-mail for teacher student communication, electronic discussion can be set up wherever students have regular access to e-mail. The simplest way to hold on out of class electronic discussion is with a class mailing list.

The easiest way to create a list is to explain to your university's, or high school, computer center staff that you would like to set up an e-mail discussion list for your class. If the staff is hesitant explain the many advantages of using e-mail for English teaching and the reasons you want to set up the list.

## **2.3 Learning strategies**

One basic use of class mailing list is as a mechanism for the teacher to distribute information, handouts, and materials. This method can save considerable amount of time, paper work, and photocopying. Also students can print out the documents, store them electronically, and transfer them back and forth to each other. This process can overcome problems arising from students misplacing documents or never getting them in the first place because of absence.

The real power of learning through e-mail and computer networking lies not merely in more convenient distribution of information but in helping build socially collaborative communication in the classroom.

Once you have set up a class mailing list, it is important not to limit yourself to dialogue journals only. You can incorporate whatever content you consider appropriate for dialogue journal collective classes. For instance, if students are supposed to write one message a week regarding their experiences, or their thoughts on a particular language learning strategy, instead of sending that message just to you they could send it to the whole class via the class mailing list. Then all students would have the opportunity to interact and learn from each other, but in order to that you have to prepare your class specifically for that kind of activities. You also have to consider the age of your students, but the idea is good it just needs some previous preparation.

Another way of using class mailing lists or newsgroups is for pre-or post discussion on topics related to the class content. For example, if your EFL conversation class is going to be discussing ethnic relations in the U.S, before the class you could post some questions related to this topic to get students thinking. Or if your EFL reading class has had begun to discuss a short story by Tennessee Williams or William Shakespeare, why not continue the discussion electronically throughout the week?

What do students do when they have questions about grammar, spelling or punctuation? With a class mailing list, they can raise questions or problems about English usage with each other as soon as they come up. If the students can answer each other's questions, great, if not, you can always step in and assist them.

As an EFL teacher it is very important to encourage students to discuss topics all semester long on the class e-mail list, therefore changing topics every two weeks would bring something fresh to talk about.

Another way to use this resource would be that midway through the term, you assign students in groups to look through the e-mail archives and find 10 to 15 examples of correct and incorrect usage of particular grammatical structures. The small groups take

turns presenting mini review lessons on their particular grammar structure, using examples from the students' own writing to make their point.

The most common use of electronic discussion is for the teaching of writing. Students in general, and particularly foreign language students, often have fear of expressing their ideas in writing. To help them overcome this fear and give the students as much writing practice as possible, EFL teachers can conduct almost all of the course through electronic discussion. The more students write, the more comfortable they get with it, especially because their writing occurs in such communicative context. Every word they put down is not for purpose of being corrected by their teacher, but rather for the purpose of sharing ideas with their classmates.

Ask your students to write about the writing process, make them discuss electronically, things they have heard. Make them critique their own and other's work, and make them compose together, in this way you will contribute to the process as a facilitator and guide rather than as an all knowing expert.

Pratt and Sullivan (1994) conducted a semester-long study on the effects of computer networking on teaching ESL writing at the University of Puerto Rico. They compared two ESL writing classes taught with the same syllabus but under different conditions. One class met one to two times a week in a computer-networked classroom where virtually all class discussion was carried out electronically using Deadalus Interchange real time communication software. The other class was conducted in traditional class oral discussion.

Analysis of the transcripts of large group discussions showed strong differences in participation patterns. Whereas only 50% of the students spoke up even once during the oral discussion, 100% of the students participated in the electronic discussion. Furthermore, in the oral discussion the teacher took 65% of the conversation turns, whereas in the electronic discussion the teacher took only 15% of the turns.

Pratt and Sullivan found, that students in the computer-assisted class showed significantly greater gains in writing than did students in the traditional class.

Studies of native speaker composition classes have shown similar advantages for computer-networked writing instruction, particularly for students who come into a course less skilled or confident about their writing. Hartman et al. (1991) and Mabrito (1991) have found that less able and more apprehensive writing students not only communicate more during electronic discussions than during face to face ones, but also make more useful peer editing comments and incorporate more revisions in their own writing.

Cory Lund (1998) has done research into the rhetorical differences between traditional academic writing and e-mail exchange and has come up with some startling comments. Lund notes that when specific tasks were to be sent to the teacher the writing style differed from type of writing sent to their peers. Student writing to the teacher would typically rely on the third person, and further, there would be a complete absence of student's own voice in the composition. This kind of writing would be impersonal, voiceless, the kind of writing which states what the text means for some nameless and faceless person.

In a collaborative research study conducted by Weasenforth and Lucas (1997) about on-line and off-line texts of non-native speakers reference is made to an article by Tella (1992) who suggests that e-mail texts resemble oral communication. A very interesting finding by Weasenforth and Lucas is the observation made that the length of e-mail compositions differed for on-line (generally shorter) and off-line writing (generally longer). Their "findings show that there is in fact a distinct trend in the students' off-line writing for initial contextualization of information, unlike in their on-line writing. In contrast, in the on-line responses, writers tend to begin right away by providing their personal opinion; and in all cases the writers use explicit markers to

signal their intent, for example by writing in my opinion, I think, I agree with the author, or I disagree with the author".

According to by Lund (1998 *ibid*), who tongue-in-cheek refers to the task of the author of academic writing to "lead the ignorant with certainty to enlightenment and actualization, e-mail writing is not subjected to the degree of formality of academic writing. It could be itself a liberating experience for the student. This dynamic resists dialogue, insists on conflict, and assumes tension. One cannot state something without certainty, or waiver in his convictions because the jury of his readers will not find him persuasive, therefore, the writer is required to assume the pose of authority".

Electronic communication is a valuable teaching tool in a single classroom. Using e-mail and electronic communication within your classroom can be excellent training for your students before you launch them into e-mail communication with other students around the world.

I will, again, make an emphasis in the preparation of the class. E-mail by itself cannot improve your students skills, on the other hand it could damage them and destroy your class if you don't know how to use it properly. Further in this paper I will explain more of this in detail.

In my personal experience, when I tried to use e-mail to enhance the development of m students writing skills, I faced a lot of problems that I didn't imagine would exist. Finally I decided to drop out the idea and continue my class in a more traditional way, I eliminated the e-mail activities. As a tool it is great, but you cannot depend on it to succeed as a teacher. Using e-mail in the classroom demands a back up plan in case the activities or the technology are not working.



### III E-mail for cross-cultural exchange

#### 3.1 Pen pals

Perhaps the most common way to use e-mail for international exchanges is through pen pal exchanges. Writing to pen pals electronically can have many of the same advantages that traditional pen pal writing can have. For instance, using English for authentic purpose, making new friends, and learning about a new culture. Writing by e-mail has several additional advantages. It is fast, convenient, and either free or very inexpensive therefore, pen pal exchanges can occur at any age or level.

There are several ways to find partners for your students. One easy way is to send a message to TESL-L, TESLCA-L (computer assisted language learning sub-branch), announcing that you are looking for one or more classes to do pen pal exchanges with your class. Another excellent place to look for e-mail classroom connections is IECC, Intercultural classroom connections, a great resource for finding classroom partners, looking over announcements of mail.

It is not necessary to look far away to have a successful pen pal program. Language in the same city or region or time zone can hold very interesting exchanges.

Tillyer (1993) paired ESL/EFL students with native speakers in New York and found that the students discussed a wide range of issues. According to Tillyer, "The exchange gave the native speakers the opportunity to become experts on all sorts of issues and the ESL students had their chance to shine as international experts" (1993, p.68).

There are other resources that an EFL teacher could use to create a penpal activity. I thought about team teaching in the same university, using the university e-mail system, or working in the same institution, but in different campuses.

The most important thing is that you as a teacher don't give up the idea and look for the resources on your own, after all you are the responsible for the class and you should do all what it takes to reach your goals.

I suggest to check Dave's Sperlins eslcafe ([www.eslcafe.com](http://www.eslcafe.com)), it is a terrific and very popular website to post advertisements and find colleagues willing to work together.

### **3.2 Problems and limitations**

When using e-mail for pen pal exchanges, some problems arise. These problems are different to the kind of situations you are used to deal with in a traditional class. I will try to board the most important ones.

ESL teachers who have used pen pal exchanges have reported two major problems.

The absence of response is one major problem in pen pal exchange programs. There is nothing more frustrating for students than seeing their classmates enjoy spirited international discussion while they stare at an empty screen! There are several ways to prevent this problem:

- 1.- Instead of pairing each student from your class with just one member of another class, why not pair each person with as many partners as he or she wishes?
- 2.- Give your students a real international experience by arranging a number of pen pals in a several countries.
- 3.- With a class mailing list, each person can write to everybody else. You can also set up a class list so that one person in your class can write to everybody in the other class, or classes.
- 4.- Instead of pairing your students with individual partners, or even with another whole class, you might have them join international student discussion lists. In that way, there are always lots of readers and writers from around the world.

The absence of purpose is a second major problem with pen pal exchanges.

Writing by computer to people in other parts of the world can be a very exciting experience, especially in the beginning, but for many students the initial excitement can wear off. Experience has proven that international e-mail exchanges can become lackluster if they are not somehow integrated into the curriculum of the course. For pen pal exchanges, this might mean giving your students some assignments connected to their pen pals, for instance, to interview them on some specific topics and to write a report for the class based on the interview.

Last semester, I tried to use e-mail to enhance the development of my students writing skill and I failed for many different reasons. I will just point the most important ones here.

First of all, I had to obtain authorization from the administration to be able to use the computer lab two days a week. Besides that, I had to insert those two sessions of computer lab use into the current curriculum. Also it was necessary to write daily lesson plans and hand outs for the students. This work meant so many hours, I never thought it was going to take so long.

When I was in the classroom, I realized that not all my students had an e-mail account, also some of them had never used a computer, as a result I spent the first week training the students on how to use the computer and to use the e-mail, they obtained a yahoo e-mail account, because UQROO couldn't give them one so quick. The other students who knew how to use computers and the e-mail, were very frustrated and bored.

Once we all knew what to do, the internet service started to fail, so I was forced to run a traditional class in the computer lab. My students started to feel frustrated too. Since the internet service was not reliable I had to go back to the class room and just add some homework that included the use of e-mail.

As for pen pals I made the mistake to ask my friends in Appalachian State University to participate, they accepted, so my students choose a student from the list I gave them and

they started to exchange e-mails. The exchange was working very well, then I noticed a lack of purpose from my students therefore, I decided to use the theme of the week as a topic to exchange messages. As a conclusion the pen pal attempt failed and I finished my course in a traditional classroom setting.

I am sure that the main reason for my failure was the lack of knowledge about the topic. If I had known what I know today, things would have been different and I would have had more probabilities to succeed.

### **3.3 International e-mail discussion lists**

Another type of program for cultural exchange involves international e-mail student discussion lists. These lists are similar to other lists, such as TESL-L, but they have been set up specially for students.

The best known set of such lists is SLs, or Students Lists. They are composed of the following nine lists for cultural exchange and writing practice among college and university students of EFL all over the world.

CHAT-SL	Students general discussion list (lower level).
DISCUSS-SL	Students general discussion list (higher level).
BUSINESS-SL	Students discussion list about business and economics.
ENGL-SL	Students discussion list about using and learning English.
EVENT-SL	Students discussion list about current events.
MOVIE-SL	Students discussion list about the cinema.
MUSIC-SL	Students discussion list about music.
SCITECH-SL	Students discussion list about science, technology and computers.
SPORT-SL	Students discussion list about sports.

As a teacher this lists offer more possibilities to set up a successful pen pal project. It would not take you too long to learn how to use them, but once it is of your domain you will get a lot of benefits for you and your students

### **3.4 Team teaching projects**

Another type of cross-cultural e-mail arrangements is the electronic team-teaching project. This type of activity allows to have team teaching partnerships in different places that work together, not only that share information but that complete certain tasks or projects.

Sayers (1993) describes three types of curricular projects that form part of many successful exchanges.

1.- Shared student publications: Students gather information in their respective locales and then share it. The articles are published in each area's local publications, or the students establish a joint editorial board and plan to publish a joint newsletter.

2.- Comparative investigations: The partner classes pick a theme of common interest, such as homelessness, drug abuse, or deforestation. Students then develop joint community surveys and other methods of collecting data. The classes compose and share reports of their community's stand on the issue.

3.- Folklore compendia and oral histories: Students gather proverbs, fables, folktales, and songs from their culture, often based in interviews with their peers or elders. The folklore of different cultures is then shared and compared (Sayers, 1993, p.22).

Team-teaching projects can be organized in a wide variety of ways, ranging from simple projects involving two classes to very complex simulations involving numerous classes from many countries.

Research studies on cross-cultural exchanges via e-mail are difficult to carry out, as they involve assessing the impact of decentralized, autonomous communication that takes



place over the course of a semester or longer and that is often initiated outside the normal class place and time. Nevertheless, such studies are important if we are to understand the best ways to make use of this powerful new tool.

One of the most interesting studies was conducted by Tella of the university of Helsinki, who carried out a 2 semester investigation of e-mail exchanges between four Finnish high school classes and their partners in England. Students both countries exchanged e-mails several times a month on a wide variety of personal and social issues from November 1989 to May 1990. Topics, chosen by the students included holidays, hobbies, sports, pets, war, work, travel, music, television, poetry, literature, food, prices, refugees, and the environment.

Using an ethnographic approach that combined observations, interviews, and analysis of text messages, Tella carefully tracked all aspects of the cultural exchange. This included where the team-teaching partners were located, how the project was launched, what kind of messages the students sent and the students received, how the relationships changed and developed over time, and how the students felt about the process. Comparing the results with a traditional Finnish classroom, he concluded as follows:

“The emphasis switched from teacher-centered, large-group-sponsored teaching toward a more individualized and learner-centered working environment. Students particularly benefited from being able to select their own themes and topics for interactions rather than having to follow the topics and themes of the syllabus, the teacher, or the rest of the group” (Tella, 1992b, p.224).

The e-mail communication gives a good chance to a practice language in open-ended linguistic situations. A shift from form to content is achieved, a free flow of ideas-and with it, expressions, idioms, and vocabulary (Tella, 1992b, pp. 224-245).

“The whole writing process changed to some extent. Rather than writing their composition only once, as is the norm, the Finnish students naturally edited and revised

their compositions, poems, and other messages to make them appropriate for their English peers. Instead of writing most of their compositions and other works alone, they increasingly made use of peer tutoring and other collaborative methods in order to compose their e-mails together” (Tella, 1992b, pp.224-245).

The quality of writing improved as writing changed from teacher sponsored and led, only to be marked and graded, to real-purpose writing with genuine audiences around the world (Tella, 1992b, p. 245).

The modes of writing becomes more versatile, including not only the narrative and descriptive genres usually found in the regular class, but also personal, expressive, and argumentative uses of language (Tella, 1992b, p. 245).

Reading becomes more public and collaborative, with students actively assisting incoming messages. Students also use different reading styles to read the wide variety of messages, notices, and documents that came in (Tella, 1992b, p. 146).

“The Finnish girls, who had fewer computers at home and thus were often disadvantaged in their use of them, participated equally and helped overcome their traditional handicap with computers. On the other hand, the Finnish boys, who traditionally disliked writing, took to it very well; their enjoyment of computers and their comfort with informal registers of communication helped them overcome their traditional dislike of writing” (Tella, 1992<sup>a</sup>).

Tella recommends that teachers pay close attention to what boys and girls master best in computers and try to develop activities that put to many-sided use the varying types of students expertise. He also urges that computing activities be incorporated into the school curriculum as early as possible to prevent any computer inequity developing as a result of differential access to computers at home.

Although Tella was referring specifically to differential access in Finland based on gender, it seems reasonable to conclude that in other countries his suggestion might be

important for preventing inequities due to differential access based on factors such as race, nationality, language ethnic group, or economic status. For an interesting discussion of this issue from a North American perspective, see Cummings and Sayers (1990).

Another interesting study was conducted by Barson, Frommer and Schwartz (1993) of Stanford University, Harvard University, and the University of Pittsburgh, respectively. They analyzed several experiments between 1988 and 1993 in which two intermediate French Classes from different universities joined together via e-mail to accomplish a semester-long task, in most cases the publication of a student newspaper or magazine. The long-distance collaboration was but one aspect of general task-based orientation in their groups also actively working collaboratively within small work groups in their own class. The specifics varied from semester to semester, but the general steps were the same:

- 1.- Students were trained to use computer system. All tutorials and handouts were in the target language.
- 2.- Students sent out general e-mail messages discussing their interests until they could agree on and name a project. Editors and assistants were appointed and began to take charge of the project.
- 3.- Students on the two campuses divided up work and began researching and writing. Collaborative writing often involved students on each campus e-mail drafts back and forth to each others.
- 4.- With the assistance of the teachers, students conducted peer critiques of articles from both campuses, and the articles were then edited and revised. With all work being done on computer, original drafts were often rewritten four or five times.
- 5.- Final layout was done either separately- to give students at each site freer production reign-or collectively by sending the formatted document back and forth. Extra space

was filled in by last-minute extra contributions, such as surveys devised and carried out at one or both sites.

6.- The publication was distributed and a party was held to acknowledge the successful group effort.

Although the study involved no native speakers of French, the researchers found very positive language learning and effective results. Interestingly, most of their components are directed at how the project helped the speaking ability of the students. Their conclusions (Barson, Frommer, & Schwartz, 1993).

1.- Students experienced the exchanges, negotiations, management talk, and discussions as authentic rather than pedagogic. The context required a spontaneous use of French that was far more typical of everyday language in francophone country than anything taking place in a conventional classroom setting. As a result, students developed a facility for speaking not always flawlessly.

2.- The students experienced deep satisfaction at being able to "manage their life" (p. 582) in the target language with a fair measure of success. They became into a sense of their own responsibilities as leaders and contributors, learning how to carry on conversations that were often at challenging linguistic levels.

3.- Students benefited substantially from the increased opportunity to practice their French outside the classroom. Some even continued to correspond by e-mail with their partners, in French, after the semester ended.

4.- Success was not uniform. Some even tended to rely heavily on others, leaving all the computer operations and communication to a partner.

5.- Traditional achievements tests may not measure gains in communicative that can occur as a result of such an approach; it may be necessary to restructure test materials along communicative line analogous to the projects being accomplished in order to reliably assess the state of the students' interlanguage. At the same time, individual

grading is problematic for group projects in which there has been extensive collaboration and peer critique. In such cases, collective grading, though problematic, may be preferable so as to reinforce the importance of the project and the group effort.

In the above described projects, the paired classes were truly team taught as a single unit, thus allowing the assigning of collective grades for projects even to team members from different schools. In some situations, it may not be practical to assign a collective grade to students from different classes or even different countries. One alternative is to ask the students to write individual papers reporting on their e-mail experiences or making use of the information they have gathered via e-mail.

As a final note, one of the benefits described in the above two research studies could be achieved at least partially without the use of electronic communication. Language teachers successfully employed project oriented, task based, collaborative teaching approaches before e-mail was even invented, and they have organized successfully team teaching projects using mail, telephone, fax, and maybe even the pony express. Thus e-mail is not a magic wand that, once waved, replaces previous pedagogy. It is a powerful new tool that can help teachers implement good pedagogy, especially by facilitating collaborative cross-cultural exchanges.



## Chapter IV Suggestions for integrating e-mail in the current curricula

This chapter discusses some principles for implementing the ideas from this monography and some concrete models of instruction that integrate electronic communication into EFL teaching.

There are several possible reasons for using the e-mail in language teaching. One rationale is found in the belief that the linguistic nature of online communication is desirable for promoting language learning. It has been found, for example, that electronic discourse tends to be more lexically and syntactically more complex than oral discourse (Warschauer, 1996a) and features a broad range of linguistic functions beneficial for language learning (Chun, 1994; Kern, 1995; Wang, 1993). Another possible reason for using the Internet is that it creates optimal conditions for learning to write, since it provides an authentic audience for written communication (see, for example Janda, 1995). A third possible reason is that it can increase students' motivation (Warschauer, 1996c). A fourth possible reason is the belief that learning computer skills is essential to students' future success; this reason suggests that it is not only a matter of using the Internet to learn English but also of learning English to be able to function well on the Internet.

E-mail and other forms of electronic communication are a valuable tool for EFL teachers. Yet e-mail, like other forms of technology, will not itself solve problems. It will be up to you, the teacher, to develop the right ways of using e-mail based on your general goals, your teaching style and approach, an analysis of the needs of your students, and the technological tools you have at hand.

The array of tips and suggestions here comes from others who have used e-mail in their classrooms. The guidelines cover four interfaces: Student-machine, teacher-teacher, teacher-student, and student-student.

#### 4.1 Student-machine

Even for teachers, who are commonly excellent speakers of English, skilled typists, and experienced users of word processing and other computer applications, using e-mail can be a confusing experience at first. Therefore, don't underestimate the confusion that students can experience when first attempting to use this new tool. The point is not to avoid using e-mail but to set up the experiences so that it is empowering for students rather than frustrating.

Most English teachers, even those who consider themselves computer novices, have several relative advantages when learning to use the e-mail. They are, in most cases, skilled at English, experienced at typing or keyboarding, and have some basic computer literacy (i.e., they probably have at least used a computer for word processing). EFL students, on the other hand, may lack these basic prerequisites. Although we may have students who are quite experienced with computers, we may also have students who had seldom used a computer. Moreover this absence of basic knowledge on computers, added to the lack of the vocabulary, reading, and listening skills to follow instructions for using the computer, complicates the activities.

Beyond these issues of learner preparation, there are a number of other complexities in introducing e-mail-based activities in the EFL classroom. Activities in a single class may be dependent on scheduling the computer lab, and on students finding computers outside the class time to continue their activities. Hardware and software can malfunction and computer systems can be down. Students' schedules might not permit them to return to the computer lab at a time when computers are available to complete their assignments.

Exchanges between classes are even more complex. The partner class might have absent students, or might not meet in a particular week due to holidays or other activities in

that location. The partner teacher might not have the same understanding of the nature of the exchange, and working through differences can cause further delays. The students might have differences in background, language, and experience which can lead further complications.

None of these potential problems mean that e-mail based activities should not be used. But in attempting to integrate online teaching, it is best not to be overly ambitious in the beginning. A situation, which overwhelms both students and teacher in technical difficulties, is not likely to bring about the desired results. It is better to start small and to create the kinds of activities that have a direct purpose and are well-integrated into classroom goals. If these activities succeed, you can build from there and attempt a more ambitious plan for the following semester.

The goal should be to form autonomous learners. The more they can learn how to do by themselves, without having to always depend on the teacher, the more pleasure and satisfaction they will get out of the process. For more tips, see (Robb & Tillyer, 1994.)

Here are some tips that suggested to be taken into account.

Before the class meets:

- 1.- Try to work with the school to make sure that any computers are as accessible as possible. The more rewards they will get out of using e-mail.
- 2.- If you have any choice of either hardware or software, choose the ones that are most user-friendly. In educational settings, as easy to use system is usually preferable to a powerful but complicate one.
- 3.- Prepare a through and easy to read hand out for your students that coves all the basic instructions (see Robb & Tillyer, 1994).
- 4.-Try to arrange a couple of assistants the first time you introduce e-mail. It is hard to get around to many different terminals at the same time (see Robb & Tillyer, 1994).

5.- Send a message to your students before they log on the first time. That way, they will have something there waiting for them, which can really motivate them (see Robb & Tillyer, 1994).

6.- Do a sample training session with one or two students first, so you can see what problems arise before you try to retain a whole class (see Robb & Tillyer, 1994).

While training, teach your students how to (Robb & Tillyer, 1994):

1.- Send messages to each other as a first step.

2.- Send you a copy, at least at first.

3.- Send themselves a copy.

4.- forward messages to you or to others.

5.- Print out messages.

6.- Download messages that they receive.

7.- To prepare, save and upload messages from a word processing program (to do attachments).

On an ongoing basis:

1.- Include regular discussions about how the students are using the system, what problems they are having, what suggestions they might have, and so forth.

2.- Train the students how to use the more advanced features of the system.

#### **4.2 Teacher-teacher**

The following are some important steps to consider when engaging in a team-teaching project with one or more teachers.

1.- Choose a team-teaching partner who you know is reliable and dependable. Even if the person is a new contact that you met through a mailing list, make sure that person answers mail regularly and seems committed to the project (see Sayers, 1993).

2.- Discuss the goals that both of you have. It is not necessarily important that you have the same goals, but you should know what each other's goals are (see Sayers, 1993).

3.- If more than two teachers are working together on a project, set up a special mailing list so that the teachers can collectively discuss any ideas about how to best carry out the project.

#### **4.3 Teacher-student**

Many educators (Barson, Frommer, & Schwartz, 1993; Batson, 1998; DiMatteo, 1990, 1991; Faigley, 1990; Paramskas, 1993; Sussner, 1993; Warschauer, Turbee, & Roberts, 1994) have noted that electronic communication can help foster a new teacher-student relationship, with the students becoming more autonomous and the teacher becoming more a facilitator.

Here are some suggestions for making this:

1.- Decide ahead of time whether you will be reading your students' messages and let them know one way or other. It is best not to be surreptitious (see Robband & Tillyer, 1994).

2.- Encourage student autonomy and independence, but stay actively involved yourself. The students are depending on your advice, experience, and direction in many areas (Janangelo, 1991).

3.- Be a guide for your students not only on how to use the machines but on how to communicate effectively using e-mail. Discuss together some examples of effective and ineffective messages and what makes them so.

4.- As in any activity, pay attention to those who are quieter and participating less. Sometimes it is fine to lurk (read messages without posting), but if you would like quieter students to participate more, try to find out what is holding them back and encourage them.



5.- Be clear with the students about how their e-mail work will factor into their grades or evaluation. It is generally recommended that all students be required to send and receive e-mail as part of their assignment.

#### **4.4 Student-student**

In the end the purpose of e-mail in education is to promote and develop more effective student-student communication. Here are some suggestions to help make that happen.

1.- Help your students create a hospitable space and a sense of communication. In the beginning of any e-mail relationship, encourage the students to introduce themselves, discuss aspects of their personal interests, and use the friendly, informal language and greetings that are common in e-mail (Bruce Roberts, personal communication, August 1994).

2.- If you are doing a team-teaching project, arrange for the other types of communication besides e-mail. For example, before the electronic communication begins, consider exchanging cultural packages made up of student photos, artwork, school newspapers and other memorabilia (Sayers, 1993).

3.- As much as possible, try to include collaborative, task-based learning projects. Beyond having the students just talk to each other, get them working together on exciting, meaningful projects that will give them a sense of involvement and accomplishment (Barson et al., 1993).

Nearly all teachers who have used e-mail in the classroom emphasize that results are best when the e-mail activities are well integrated into the classroom process. Bruce Roberts, one of the coordinators of the Intercultural E-mail Classroom Connections program, explained, "There is a significant difference in educational outcome depending on whether a teacher chooses to incorporate e-mail classroom connections. These kind

of connections should be developed as: 1) An ADD-ON process, like one would include a guest speaker, or 2) an INTEGRATED process, in the way one would include a new textbook.

The e-mail classroom connection seems sufficiently complex and time consuming that if there are goals beyond merely having each student send a letter to a person at a distant school, the ADD-ON approach can lead to frustration and less-than expected academic results, the necessary time and resources come from other things that also need to be done. On the other hand, when the e-mail classroom connection processes are truly integrated into the ongoing structure of homework and student classroom interaction, then the results can be educationally transforming” (Bruce Roberts, posting on IECC-discussion@stolaf.edu, March 22, 1994).

The following is an example of a course based on an international multi-team project.

Ruth Vilmi teaches English at Helsinki University of Technology. She started a number of international team-teaching projects in order to create authentic writing situations for her students.

In fall 1994, her students worked on two international projects: a robot-design competition and an environmental design competition. Vilmi found partner teachers for these projects by posting notices on various international mailing lists such as TESLCA-L.

For the robot activity, Vilmi’s technical English Class was joined by university classes from Paris and Hong Kong. The classes were divided into teams made up of students from three universities.

The project kicked off with all the students worked together to design an award-winning robot for an international competition. Over the course of the semester they had collectively completed five writing assignments, including a definition of the problem and why it needed to be solved. Also a promotional brochure, including a narrative

description of their robot, specifications, instructions, technical drawings, and price.

Afterwards they needed to send a letter to an appropriate company or organization regarding its plans to sell the robot. Finally a 250 word abstract of all “The fifth International Conference on Robots and Applications” to be held on Long Beach, California, March 8-10, 1995, and a record of how the group work was distributed.

In addition, the students completed one more individual assignment: a 250 word essay evaluating the project. In Vilmi’s class, students also gave oral reports at a “robot fair” where the team was the consulting group recommending the robot in question and the class was the company that had to decide which robot to buy.

The project was organized as a true competition, with the students themselves determining both the voting procedure and the balance of the student-teacher vote. In the end, the winning entry was posted on World Wide Web so that teachers, students and engineers all over the world could have a look.

The expected learning outcomes for a project of this magnitude are almost too numerous to mention, but note at least that the students get authentic motivation and practice in their exact kind of technological writing they will need in their careers. The scope of the project even requires the students to develop very specialized skills, such as scanning technical drawings into a computer and then transferring them by e-mail.

Vilmi’s motto, which includes her e-mail signature, is “ Tell me and I will forget, show me and I will remember but involve me and I will learn.” Nobody can doubt that she is fulfilling her goal of truly involving her students.

## Conclusions

New technologies are being developed as a result of the increase in the educational level, this raise shows the strong dialectic relationship between technology and education.

The more education the higher the technology, and vice versa. Therefore, the new technologies are being included in the practice of teaching, otherwise it would be incongruent, and the level of education would not go according to the level of the technology, not to use them in the practice of our professions.

This effect, of the new technologies, intimidates some educators who feel that they are going to be replaced by computers. There are some extremist opinions like Perelman who said that traditional teachers and classrooms will eventually be replaced by computers, in my personal opinion most of EFL teachers view technology as a tool, and not as a substitute facilitator of learning. Indeed most teachers and students seem to agree that human beings are necessary to teach, regardless of the tools they use.

Perelman claims that the potential for the virtual classroom is to replace the traditional one, others support the notion that teachers are necessary for the successful facilitation of learning, regardless of whether the education takes place in a traditional or virtual setting. In my opinion whether the class is considered traditional or virtual it needs a teacher, all learners need guidance based on analysis of the individual styles, abilities and learning strategies.

Computers alone will never replace the need for the human instructor. Only a human teacher can show students how to utilize computer based tools to further their education.

A computer itself lacks this sense of connection between the teacher and the student, that is why teachers plan lessons, create curriculums and considered computers as tools to reach their didactic and pedagogic goals.

When using a multimedia program, the computer won't do anything unless the student or the instructor types something. In CALL, the computers are programmed to function according to commands, but they won't recognize your moods or emotions, on the other hand a teacher can feel his/her students in the same way students can perceive if the teacher is mad, sad, happy or tired.

The advantage of computer mediated learning is that the students can repeat the tasks as many times as they consider it necessary. On the contrary, a teacher who has other obligations and duties during the day won't be able to explain to you all day. Also, as mentioned before, teachers benefit a lot with the use of computers, like the exchange of information, the communication with students, etc.

This process of using computers or e-mail in the existing curricula requires a lot of planning and plenty of time investment in class preparation.

Online activities in class are an important development in education, but in my opinion, they are not going to make the teacher's work easier, they won't save any money or provide a secret weapon for troubled schools. If anything, they are much more work than traditional teaching. They require strong skills in course design, besides all EFL teachers are ready to apply online activities in their classes. The tendency of student centered education requires modern tools, and the e-mail is only one of the many online possibilities to offer to students from a wider array of activities to enhance their learning process.

Texts books are a basic tool for EFL teachers, it is necessary to create extra materials, in order to offer a more natural and real environment of communication to our students so the pedagogic goal is reached.

The new age of technology has brought a new generation of tools, like computer programs that offer the opportunity to integrate the use of more skills in the learning



process. All these programs are additional to our current style of teaching, they don't go against the norm.

Teachers won't be replaced, but rather the outdated philosophies and approaches. The EFL class of the past is in many ways no longer applicable to the world in which we are attempting to prepare our students to function.

By bringing elements of technology, such as e-mail, into the traditional teaching of English as a Foreign Language both, students and teachers get the best of both worlds.

On the one hand they have access to vast amounts of information, as well as opportunities for authentic communication for real purposes with internet users worldwide.

E-mail activities offer new opportunities to many teachers and students, it may create a kind of tutorial intimacy that most students and teachers have never known. The online medium is not only feasible, it creates the potential for literally world wide markets for teaching students anywhere in the world.

If the EFL teacher know how to get the best out of the internet, then conducting courses with online activities (distributing and collecting students' assignments) could be cost-effective and time saving, but if not, it would be a very expensive experiment in time and money.

Learning how to use the e-mail for educational purposes can be time consuming and costly for many instructors.

When using e-mail as an educational tool, without administrative support is needed, including lightened course loads and paid training, unfortunately many instructors interested on using e-mail activities are expected to learn about its use on their own, on their free time, and at their own expense.

I have discovered that teachers are indeed interested in learning about the educational applications of the e-mail and other forms of technology, but they simply do not have the time nor money of their own to spend on training.

Because using the e-mail may be not only a technical challenge for teachers, but a pedagogical one as well, I think that the appropriate time and resources must be distributed to promote understanding of the technology to the educators themselves, through seminars, workshops, and tutorials. Once this is achieved, I believe many teachers who currently do not use e-mail as part of the language teaching curriculum will begin integrating this technology into their courses.

There are educators who make strong claims that the virtual activities in the classroom will eventually replace the traditional classroom activities completely, a few would argue that virtual activities in the classrooms do not need teachers.

Of course, we have all seen instances in which computers have replaced human beings. Remember going to drive-up tellers at the bank? The ATM replaced them a long time ago, but did not replace the teller completely. If you have questions or concerns that the ATM cannot help you with, but you can go inside the bank and talk with a human being, we can say the same about a gas station and other services. Therefore, human beings were not replaced; rather, their functions were changed.

This analogy holds true for educators as well. There are software programs which can respond to students in very general ways, but no machine can replace a human being leading a class, whether it be a traditional or virtual one. As I said before computers cannot interpret feelings, emotions, spontaneous reactions or unusual questions from students. I have not yet seen a computer which can think on its feet. In fact, if a computer is confused or baffled, it will most likely freeze!

Moreover, students need an inventive and knowledgeable leader who can create a learning environment which is most conducive to each particular group of students,

which, as we all know, varies from semester to semester, or even section to section. Computer programs do not take into consideration individual students' characteristics, learning styles or abilities. In addition, a computer cannot adjust a lesson based on the emotional state of an individual or group of students on any given day.

Without the guidance of a teacher, and specific, learner-centered activities, computers will do little to help students learn English.

As a result, though the roles of teachers in the classroom may change, but the need for teachers will not.

Teachers using the e-mail as an educational tool must keep pedagogical goals in focus.

As with any tools a teacher brings to the classroom, use of the e-mail must have a pedagogical focus that is clear not only to the instructor, but the students as well.

Otherwise, students are likely to get caught up in the technological aspect, losing sight of their learning goals.

Using the e-mail for the practice of teaching EFL requires changes in teachers' roles, approaches, and attitudes towards teaching.

I consider that in order to be effective using e-mail as an educational tool, EFL teachers must be willing to put their egos aside, remove themselves from the classroom limelight, and place the focus of the class on the students. While the student centered class has grown as an abstract concept in pedagogical theory, the reality is that many traditional classes still focus on the teacher. Using online activities like e-mail makes me assume or believe that the more students do for themselves, the more learning will take place, that is why the very nature of the e-mail is conducive to students centered learning and subsequent empowerment.

Teacher training on using the e-mail must include new pedagogy as well as technology, in other words teaching instructors how to use the functions of the e-mail is not enough to prepare them for using it as an educational tool. I think that in order to successfully

bring the e-mail into the classroom (or the classroom onto the e-mail) requires training in not only the mechanics of how to use the technology, but the philosophies of how and why to teach with it as well. Moreover, the e-mail lends itself naturally to collaborative, communicative and task-based classes (which are, of course, student-centered).

From my point of view I consider that teachers who have been leading teacher-fronted, non-communicative classes will have to rethink their approaches or be replaced by new teachers who understand the need of new technologies and also understand them.

Online activities can be conducted in many ways, depending on the pedagogical goals of the instructor, availability of technological resources, and level of students' proficiency in both English and computers, this is an open field for the us, so we can experiment and either succeed or fail.

The most advantageous effect [of using e-mail] has been that if I forget to give the students an important message in class, still is possible do so after class, including assignments due and important notices for them from the administration, these two things are already done in UQROO. Students can also send questions about how to solve various problems or to improve their grade at their convenience, not necessarily having to set up an inconvenient office hour to do so.

In addition to the practical aspects of using the e-mail function of the Internet, through e-mail communication students gain writing, reading and critical thinking skills, and besides the development of writing skills, e-mail activities further develop students' reading comprehension and thinking skills.

Students always know who the audience is and the purpose for each entry. They are eager to communicate their thoughts in comprehensible language, knowing that what they write will be read by their classmates and me. Students are also clearly interested in reading, understanding, and responding comprehensibly to what their classmates or penfriends have to say.

It is also important to point that storing course materials and assignments on a web page or distributing them via e-mail allows students to retrieve them at their convenience. In the traditional classroom setting, if a student does not come to class, a teacher must either meet him outside of class to give him the materials he missed or remember to bring one session's work to the next (along with the handouts for that session as well). So I dare to assume that online distribution places more responsibility on the student, which is what we as EFL teachers are pursuing.

Using the Internet as a tool in the EFL class does not presume forfeiting established teaching and learning tools which have helped students in the past. Rather, the e-mail can add to and improve upon what EFL teachers have been doing for years now teaching in a student-centered, communicative and collaborative class environment. Whether learning takes place completely online or in a traditional setting in combination with the virtual, students can extend their learning beyond what the traditional class offers for the improvement of their ability and confidence to communicate in English. Indeed, the e-mail provides EFL teachers and students with opportunities for exposure to natural language outside classroom, collaboration (both inter- and intraclass), student responsibility for learning, motivation & enjoyment of the learning process, cross-cultural communication, awareness of global issues & concerns, creative outlets & opportunities for publication, development of computer skills.

Furthermore, using functions of the Internet, such as e-mail, can help EFL students further develop their skills in reading (including skimming and scanning), writing for specific purposes and audiences, and, most of all, critical thinking. Moreover, students enjoy being a part of the newly-developing Internet community.

What I have discovered through my own research is that there are benefits to using e-mail for teaching and learning as well as in traditional settings. Rather than choose one over the other, I recommend combining the best aspects of each. In order to create a



setting which is most conducive for students learning on how to think and write as they will be expected to do not only in academia, but in the outside world as well.

By exposing our students to online resources such as the electronic mail, we are providing our students with an education that will prepare them for the kinds of thinking and writing they will be expected to do once out of the shelter of our classrooms.

As the Internet affects our lives across all disciplines, those who can write and think quickly and critically will be the ones who are ultimately successful in what is the goal for most human beings to communicate (Anderson, 1995). However, those who do not possess fluency in the use of computers and writing will be considered by academic standards to be uneducated, and will likely fall behind not only on college campuses, but in their work places as well.

Moreover, as intercultural connections in academia and the work place increase, it is especially important for EFL students to gain skills in writing for not only one person (a teacher), but for global audiences, which is possible through the e-mail.

At the present time, the virtual EFL classroom has no established protocol, so it is up to those of us currently experimenting with this alternative to traditional teaching to bear the responsibility and duty of sharing what we learn with others.

As a community of instructors, many of whom feel stifled by traditionally accepted teaching methods in EFL and a lack of application to the 'real world', we are in a position to work collaboratively, discovering and developing what the protocol for teaching EFL using online resources should be.

Teachers who accept this challenge with enthusiasm and optimism will not only be at the forefront of historical change, but will also have a creative outlet in which to explore new and inventive ideas for teaching language, thus helping to develop a new paradigm in education.

Because the e-mail removes barriers of color, race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability and other attributes which people use against each other in everyday life, I find it difficult, if not impossible, to understand how anyone in the field of EFL instruction could see the e-mail as anything but educational.

It is time that educators and administrators accept the influence and impact of computers on life as we know it. Once we concede that some past approaches to education which still remain in place, are no longer applicable to the world of today. We must work together to effectively utilize the tools at our disposal, such as the e-mail, and offer our EFL students the education they deserve and crave.

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