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CHATTING IN LANGUAGE CLASS:

**A proposal for implementation of computer-mediated
communication in the high-school
foreign-language curriculum**

**A Senior Project by
Amy L. Fielder**

Table of Contents

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	3
Purpose Statement and Anticipations for Project	4
Review of literature	5
Bibliography	23
Educational Proposal	27
Recommendations for Future Work	29

Introduction

A group of students sits in a computer laboratory, diligently examining their computer screens and tapping on their keyboards. It is a quiet atmosphere; one hears only the clicking of keys, but occasionally students release spurts of laughter or gasps of surprise or disappointment. These expressions of emotion demonstrate that the students appear motivated and inspired to participate. Yet, the students are not doing research on the Internet, nor are they typing papers. They are not playing games or completing instructional tutorials. Rather, these students are “talking” in a foreign language; they are communicating through a local area network of computers on an electronic-discussion program.

This type of computer-mediated communication can serve as an innovative addition to the foreign-language curriculum, due to its many benefits. For instance, there exists a need for concentration upon communication within foreign-language education. Students must have opportunities to communicate within their studied foreign language in order to achieve mastery of the language, or fluency. In addition to traditional forms of oral and written communication, computer-mediated communication seems to serve as an extremely effective resource for the attainment of the goal of foreign-language communication.

Purpose Statement and Anticipations for Project

In the incessant search for more effective methods for teaching foreign languages, the educator seeks activities that motivate and encourage students, promote higher-order learning, and empower students to achieve the primary goal of learning a language: the ability to communicate in a foreign language. This project hopes to investigate a somewhat recent addition to the plethora of foreign-language teaching methods: the use of computer-based discussion or electronic communicative sessions on local area networks (LAN). This type of program, in which students “talk” on a synchronous system of computers, attempts to simulate authentic oral conversations, yet in a written form, thereby concentrating on improvisational communication. This project focuses on the possible benefits and disadvantages of the inclusion of this educational resource in the foreign-language curriculum. Above all, this project aims to promote the use of technology in schools, by including a proposal for the implementation of computer-mediated communication in the high-school foreign-language curriculum.

LAN “chats” are highly supported by research as effective in language teaching (Beauvois 1992, 1997; Bruce, Peyton, and Batson 1993; Kelm 1992; Kern 1995). Yet, the use of technology in schools is often neglected due to several factors: the expense, teacher anxiety, and adherence to traditions. Although most students will enjoy the benefits of electronic communication, some teachers might be intimidated by the challenges of electronic teaching and the responsibility demanded by the educator. The proposal to include LAN communication in the foreign-language curriculum might not gain the support of administrators unwilling to dedicate necessary resources. Educators might also be hesitant to incorporate an innovative idea into an already full curriculum. Hopefully, the following project and proposal will be accepted by the educational community and carried out by foreign-language educators.

Review of literature

A high-school student sits in her second-year Spanish class, actively scribbling down various notes from the day's lessons. There are the daily vocabulary words with their English translations on one blackboard; there are some model verb conjugations on the front board; and the homework assignment is written on the side dry-erase board, in both Spanish and English. Latin music is playing in the background while students are completing their activities. Hispanic artifacts, posters, and news articles line the walls, energizing the atmosphere of the classroom. In general, the students remain quite "engaged" throughout the class; the instructor frequently presents interesting cultural facts in conjunction with the routine grammar lessons.

During the following months of the course, various audio and video resources are used on occasion to complement lessons based on phonetics or cultural etiquette. The class sometimes even studies literary texts to investigate the history or philosophy of a certain era. Yet, in the end, grammar remains supreme. After the instructor presents a concept during a lecture, the students practice this new knowledge by completing tasks from the textbook, the workbook, and various study materials. The teacher stresses the repetition of grammatical exercises—conjugations, translations, and other forms of language practice. Grammar is the logical focus for a beginning or intermediate level language course; grammar defines the function and the form of every "piece of language." One must understand the rules of a language before attempting to communicate in that language. The purpose of a foreign-language course is, however, to promote and support authentic communication in the foreign language. Regular conversational time in the foreign language is essential to the attainment of mastery in

this language. The language student must listen to others, considering the meaning of their words, and responding in a thoughtful manner. These goals are not, however, easily attained; many students have more difficulty with the “spoken” form of language than they do with the “written” form. Proficiency in language communication requires repeated practice through the use of appropriate learning methods such as oral conversations, class discussions, or written communication.

Foreign language within the United States is often treated as “a subject that exists between the covers of a textbook,” and students therefore “view the learning of a foreign language as the completion of textbook activities rather than attaining the goal of being able to use the language for purposes of communication” (Lafayette 1993:127). Since English is the language in which two-thirds of European business—and most of international business—is conducted, many Americans tend to feel quite self-assured that they will be able to use their native language in practically any country without problems. Many believe that there exists no need to learn other languages. Yet, France and Spain are both battling the encroachment of English into their native languages, while the rest of the European countries in which English is not the native language also do not desire one specific *lingua franca* (McGoey 1991). The Council of the European Community has also made a firm commitment to multilingualism. The members of this group of nations have pledged to include the mandatory instruction of at least two foreign languages within the school curriculum. Although schools in smaller countries such as the Netherlands, Greece, Portugal, and Denmark have long focused on language as a major part of the instruction—mainly for economic reasons,—larger countries like Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain have not always mandated the learning of

multiple languages (Weiss 1991). Yet, this recent emphasis on the study of foreign language demonstrates a growing trend towards globalization through collaborative efforts; many nations have committed themselves to the common goals of learning foreign languages and recognizing the importance of their use.

The United States, however, typically shows little concern for making alterations within its own foreign language curriculum, despite changes abroad. The “shallowness of a monocultural curriculum” (Tedick et al 1993: 45) within the American educational system is suggested in Gerhard Bach’s statement: “To the European observer of these developments, the reform proposals made by the U.S. foreign language experts appear to be addressing the real global needs inadequately” (Bach 1991: 46). Yet, some Americans would support the current foreign-language curriculum within American education, because they argue that there exist few occasions within the United States for the regular use and practice of a foreign language. Therefore, emphasis upon the instruction of foreign languages within the classroom would not be substantiated for most American students. The study of foreign languages is often considered for the majority of students as “an elite endeavor with no expectation for actual practical use” (Tedick et al 1993: 55). Since the United States has long been a country of assimilation, the languages of immigrants have often been suppressed, and English has been the only language one needs to know. More recently, however, immigrant cultures that come to the United States maintain their native languages; therefore, opportunities, and even needs, for “foreign” language proficiency are growing daily. The schools should react to this change in populations, despite the fact that “the power of language and culture within the educational setting of U.S. schools has long gone unrecognized and unexplored” (Tedick

et al 1993: 46). Foreign-language courses must improve their current structure in order to encourage and ensure more communication within the classroom.

Certainly, the instructor must facilitate communication in the classroom. The teacher leads the students within the classroom and directs them in their studies. Those instructors who vary their teaching methods, adapting and innovating according to sound learning situations, are the most successful. The foreign-language teacher is responsible for making language instruction “as effective and meaningful as possible” (Gaies 1985: 1). Since communication is the goal of language instruction, one must focus upon the social and humanistic context of language; “the human-development aspect of language-learning forms the nucleus around which all other decisions must rest” (Tedick et al 1993: 44). Cooperative learning techniques and group work, as well as problem solving and role-playing, lend themselves very well to foreign-language instruction. Yet, most teachers do at least two-thirds of the talking in the language classroom. This can inhibit student creativity and self-determination in the learning of a language and can encourage student dependency upon the instructor (Gaies 1985). A teacher-centered classroom promotes authoritative control of a classroom and discourages student responsibility.

A more student-centered classroom, on the other hand, encourages students to “manage their own learning” (Gaies 1985: 19) and to rely upon themselves and other learners within the classroom. The role of the teacher can be placed upon the students through activities that encourage peer involvement. The students are used as resources, models of learning, and sources of information for each other. When students have difficulties or questions, they ask each other, and they support and motivate each other to learn. Cooperative learning also encourages students to engage in forms of self-

discovery in order to determine their individual learning styles and the methods that will best enhance their learning. If a student discovers that he or she requires more or less time to complete a project, he or she may proceed at his or her individual pace. Within a conversational situation, this student can practice specific phonetic elements with a partner, or he or she may serve as the “expert” resource on certain grammatical structures for another classmate. If a student is interested in a certain subject, he or she may choose this topic for the theme of a conversation or a skit. Cooperative learning can involve students working together as partners, in small groups, or even as an entire class in which a student serves as the discussion leader. No matter what the format, the teacher should attempt to use the collective energy of the class to engage and inspire students. Peer involvement is often very motivating to students because it provides variety within the curriculum, as well as a more “authentic” form of communication.. The students are also frequently more motivated to communicate in smaller groups, rather than as individuals before an entire class. The social and psychological effects of cooperative learning are also quite positive, as most students enjoy interaction and the improvement of their abilities to communicate with one another. Although the teacher should serve as the primary resource and the facilitator within the classroom, he or she should certainly take advantage of the strengths of the students, who are “largely underused educational resources” (Gaies 1985: 2).

The teacher must be wary, however, of student differences. Not all students are comfortable in a cooperative environment; some feel overwhelmed by the more outgoing students, while others feel that group work is worthless and below their intellectual and academic capabilities. Those students labeled as introverts typically thrive on individual

learning and might be intimidated by activities that require oral communication. The extroverts, however, usually flourish within the communicative environment with their highly developed abilities to hear and to use a language (Fillmore 1989). In addition, extroverts might progress more quickly in cooperative activities than in those that are teacher-led because they possess a “social know-how” (Cook 1991: 87,88), and they often encourage group participation. Caution must be taken in the grouping of students; students with limited language abilities might feel incompetent if they are placed with the highest achievers. Additionally, the students with the highest proficiency of the language should not necessarily be grouped with the lowest achievers, because they need to feel challenged when learning. When varying teaching methods, the teacher should also realize that “teenagers may dislike any technique that exposes them in public; role-play and simulation are in conflict with their adolescent anxieties” (Cook 1991: 85). Despite the difficulties encountered when using cooperative learning methods, the students should certainly be entrusted with more responsibility in their learning of a foreign language.

The instructor should still stress conversation as an integral component of the foreign-language curriculum. Though each individual acquires a language in his or own unique and creative manner, “second languages are learnt under the pressure of conversation” (Cook 1991). That is, in a classroom that best mimics an immersion environment, the students will become more aware of basic communicative techniques—such as sentence structure, voice inflection, body language, and vocabulary use. Forms of conversation inspire the students, not only because of the interaction that they entail with peers, but also because one can see, hear, or feel authentic and “meaningful”

communication taking place. “Languages are learned best when students are truly engaged in exchanging messages about something of real concern to them” (Rehorick 1991: 118). Although beginning-level language students usually lack the ability to participate in a fluent conversation, they can certainly attempt to interpret the foundations of language while communicating. They should “get more ‘practice’ learning and seeing meaning-based language than they do in producing” (VanPatten 1991: 57). Intermediate-level learners, however, definitely possess certain abilities for language production and should be involved in conversational learning. Within foreign-language courses, language is often “decontextualized” (Tedick et al 1993: 57); that is, language is often “removed” from its context—its sense or meaning, based on a particular situation. The colossal concept of language is often “broken down” into various smaller, simpler concepts like grammar, vocabulary, and phonetics. Although language’s various attributes should definitely be studied in depth, the real focus should be its use within a communicative context. Even with a basic understanding of a language’s traits, one can take that information and use it for communication. This is part of the thinking and learning processes; “the brain organizes information in an associative network—changing and adapting, according to the situation” (Rehorick 1991: 113).

A great debate within language pedagogy, therefore, exists: When teaching and learning a language, should one focus more on the meaning or the form? Certainly, the mastery of language requires both of these attributes. One must definitely recognize the structure of the language in order to express one’s thoughts, but one must also understand specific lexicology, phonetics, and the cultural context of language in order to grasp the significance of an expressed concept. The teacher should try to integrate both the

meaning and the form of a language in their instruction. The conventional methods for teaching a foreign language within the United States, however, sometimes concentrate on a language's form. As recently as ten years ago, American educators were "still basically trying to teach the traditional grammatical syllabus" of language (VanPatten 1991: 55), and this trend often continues today. Researchers have found that "emphasizing structural accuracy has shown that communicative ability does not result" (Savignon 1991: 39). Instead, when confronted with a completely different grammar structure from their own language, students often grow frustrated and disheartened. Students who learn within a solely form-focused curriculum often feel a lack of accomplishment, as well as a lack of communicative confidence. Even those who have studied a language for a lengthy time maintain such difficulties, as demonstrated by the statement: "Complete mastery of the grammar of a language is a teacher's dream" (VanPatten 1991: 55). Still, meaning-based communication should not be viewed as contradictory to grammar.

Within conversation-based classes, there usually exists an overall higher level of fluency and comprehensibility than in grammar-based classes. As mentioned above, there are many reasons for the success of classes that center around conversation such as increased student ability, confidence, and motivation. Nevertheless, "the fact that students do not learn communicative appropriateness from . . . simplistic rule of grammar is not of itself a valid basis" for the abandonment of teaching grammar (Garrett 1991: 83). Above all, the foreign-language teacher should attempt to maintain a classroom that focuses upon communication throughout all stages of the developmental learning process. High expectations for the students to achieve this goal are also crucial; "when we assume

students will understand the target language, they will realize it is expected of them and do so—and they will be proud of their ability to do so” (Tedick et al 1993: 58).

In addition to the traditional conversational approach within the classroom, in which students communicate face-to-face through spoken word, there are many other methods for encouraging communication within the classroom. Certainly, students may communicate through writings or through skits or forms of drama. Yet, there exist many technological resources that have recently been created to aid foreign-language students in their abilities to use and understand language. These resources represent multiple forms of communication and different methods for interaction among students of different nations that all comprise a “communication network of classrooms world-wide” (Blake 1998: 225). The ideal system for the learning of a foreign language would undoubtedly include regular contact with native speakers of that language and spontaneous communicative sessions with these extraordinary resources. The theory of immersion as the best method for language acquisition is widely known and supported by researchers, teachers, and many learners of a foreign language. Therefore, teachers may benefit from foreign-exchange students in the schools or from immigrants who live within the community; however, regular contact with native speakers of a foreign language is rather uncommon here in the United States.

With the creation of various forms of telecommunications, these types of interaction are becoming more achievable, and the potential for communication within this technological realm seems limitless. Through the Internet students may research information about other peoples and cultures. Sometimes foreign-language classrooms may set up correspondences with classrooms in other countries, allowing students to send

electronic mail back and forth between the classrooms. These forms of communication are much more immediate than the traditional written letters and less intimidating and confusing than telephone conversations. Yet, web pages and electronic mail often seem like artificial forms of correspondence, because there exists a “time lapse” among those involved in the communication (Beauvois 1997). Teachers do have some opportunities for involving their classrooms in real-time forms of communication with foreign classrooms; computers are connected within a sort of “chat room”, in which the students can carry on conversations. Despite the potential of these types of networks, the time differences make it difficult to conduct class in real time. A classroom in Chicago, Illinois, for instance, is on a schedule seven hours behind a classroom in Munich, Germany. The American teacher, therefore, must usually concentrate on forms of real-time communication within his or her own classroom.

In this classroom environment, foreign-language students may communicate very naturally—much like a conversation. Within a “local area network,” a number of computers are connected that share capabilities; one possible capacity for these networks is a program that acts much like a chat room. These electronic-discussion programs allow students to view a conversation in process. That is, each student—or group of students—at a computer may send a question directed towards the rest of the class or a response to the discussion of a topic. After each “speaker” decides to send his or her thoughts to the conversation, every other participant can view that expression on the computer screen and then respond accordingly. This free flow of ideas “articulated” by the “speakers” within the conversation represents a remarkable form of communication that is very similar to, or perhaps superior to, regular oral communication (Beauvois

1992a). Local area networks were first used, in fact, in 1985 as part of the English curriculum for deaf students at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. Professor Trent Batson noticed that these deaf students lacked English writing skills, because they were accustomed to the use of American Sign Language for communication. These electronic-discussion experiences focused the students on improvement in written English: not only grammar, but also creative expression of ideas (Bruce, Peyton, and Batson 1993). This same type of interaction can take place when computer-mediated communication is used in the foreign-language classroom (Beauvois 1992a; Kelm 1992).

Many foreign-language educators, however, are reluctant to use technology as part of the curriculum. Teachers usually view computers as machines that possess few capabilities for as a medium for communication. They are often suspicious of computers because they feel that “computers can teach computer language, not a living language” (Bush 1997b: xii). Roland Sussex demonstrates his agreement: “There is a tendency to eschew current technology in language teaching. This is partly due to the perceived inability of much current technology to match the more ambitious pedagogical aims of applied linguistic theory” (Sussex 1991: 183). Perhaps the most indicative example of foreign-language teachers’ resistance to the use of technology within the classroom is documented by a study carried out by the RAND Corporation for the United States Department of Education. These researchers found that, of all subject areas, computers are used the least within foreign-language classrooms (Bush 1997a). Yet, computer technology is improving and gaining popularity, not only within the United States, but also around the world. In 1994 the computer market actually surpassed the television market (Bush 1997b). The foreign-language teacher should consider the use of

technology as an advantageous and necessary component of the curriculum, based on available research. Computers are being seen less as a “dehumanizing force” and more as a “new environment for language study” (Noblitt and Bland 1991: 120).

Some critics of this technology would contend that “written” communication through a computer could not serve to improve one’s communicative abilities, because it is not a real conversation. Rather, such “e-talk” may be considered to be “conversations in slow motion” which are real-time, in which the students have more time to think and compose than in oral communication (Beauvois 1997). Whereas in normal oral conversations, teachers usually do not wait more than three seconds for a response to a question, pauses within electronic communication are sustainable (Batson 1993). Each student may communicate at his or her individual pace, based upon his or her language ability and typing speed. The process could be described as “slow for control” but “fast for idea production” (Bruce, Peyton, and Batson 1993: 84). Although there exists the possibility for slower pacing in these interactions, the drastic difference between written communication and oral conversation is the increased output or production by the students during the computer sessions (Batson 1993; Kelm 1992). Students may produce two to four times more sentences in chat sessions than in oral conversations (Kern 1995). In addition, the “control” of the conversation turns to the students. In oral classroom discussions, the instructors ask five times more questions than the students, but in electronic discussions, the students ask fifteen times more questions than the instructor (Kern 1995). Computer-mediated communication is an extremely cooperative activity in which the students interact and respond to each other, acting as their own facilitators. Everyone may “talk” at once, and everyone has the opportunity to “control” the

conversation, since “turn taking” is not required, unlike in oral conversations (Beauvois 1997; Day and Batson 1995). The students are, therefore, interdependent and less dependent upon the teacher. The educator’s role is that of a facilitator; he or she does not lead the discussion; instead, he or she allows the students to control the conversation, while offering from time to time guidance to the students. The teacher probes the students for further explanation of their thoughts and “regroups” the class when it seems to have lost focus. Yet, “if the discussions are developing, however, there is no reason for the instructor to force the conversation in one direction or another” (Kelm 1992: 445); the teacher permits the conversation to take place generally without his or her intervention. When students “speak,” therefore, their “messages [are] rarely produced for (or in the expectation of) teacher appraisal” (Kern 1995: 459). On the contrary, student responses are not only evaluated by the teacher but also more often critiqued by their peers (Bruce, Peyton, and Batson 1993).

The focus of electronic discussion is to encourage a free-flow form of communication. The objective is the engagement and participation of the students, as well as the encouragement of their efforts. When the students understand that their grades for the discussions are not contingent upon grammar or spelling, they are much more likely to participate without anxiety (Beauvois 1994, 1997; Beauvois and Elledge 1996; Kelm 1992). In the context of an oral conversation, foreign-language students experience much more apprehension. They often experience difficulties based upon their limited abilities to communicate, and they fear public humiliation because they lack self-confidence when speaking another language (Allwright 1991). Also, since student response time is lengthened, there is much less stress in computer-mediated

communication, and students are usually more willing to try complex grammatical constructions, because they are less afraid of making mistakes (Beauvois 1997).

Although these demonstrations of confidence and creativity by the students are part of the goal of the electronic conversations, students could “become increasingly indifferent to the appropriate usage of the target language” (Beauvois 1992b: 460). Students often feel that the form of their language production does not matter, as long as the other students are able to comprehend the meaning of their messages. Since the instructor does not usually correct grammar throughout the discussion sessions because he or she does not want to discourage communication, the students may not recognize grammatical errors and then copy incorrect forms from their peers’ messages. Rarely do the students correct the mistakes of others, but they do often realize and correct their own errors (Kelm 1992). Educators, however, should take notice of areas in which students require grammatical practice, so that they may focus upon the improvement of these problems (Beauvois 1997). Within electronic-discussion programs there is also an option for teachers to print out the entirety of the conversations so that they may signal or correct spelling and grammatical mistakes to the students after the conversations have taken place. This maintains the importance of the structure of the language while preventing discouragement of communication among students (Beauvois 1997).

Like practically every form of communication, computer-mediated discussion sessions promote both creativity and confidence. Since the students “drive” the conversations, they feel like they are engaged in a “more direct participation in their learning” (Bruce, Peyton, and Batson 1993: 1). Students have the power to maintain or to propel the focus of the conversation. As the students can view the results of their

interaction with and their influence upon the other students, they often feel an immediate sense of satisfaction (Gaies 1985). "E-talk" often seems like a more authentic type of communication, and they are generally very lively. Not only do the students usually contribute more to the conversations, but also "real-time written interaction seems to create an urge to engage in language play, to show off one's wit, to display one's verbal audacity. This dynamic can be valuable with students who are generally reticent to express themselves in writing" or in oral communication (Peyton and Bruce 1993a: 67). If open-ended questions are used within the electronic-discussion sessions, there are no real limits; every student is free to express himself or herself however he or she desires. Since these sessions often focus upon topics for student discussion that are controversial or unresolved, students feel encouraged to state their own opinions. In problem-solving conditions, students collaborate to determine the natures of situations, and they consider various options for the improvement or resolution of these "problems" (Peyton and Bruce 1993b). Questions presented initially by the teacher and throughout the conversation by the students are often "divergent;" they are not limited to one answer, unlike traditional classroom discussions, in which students are usually concerned about expressing only the "correct" answer. Students evaluate the relationships among concepts and ideas, while attempting to think in multiple perspectives (Rehorick 1991). These types of conversation, thus, promote higher-order levels of thinking while encouraging creative responses and feedback. Kelm explains that "the computer terminals provide a protective barrier which allows the students to express their opinions more openly" (Kelm 1992: 447). Students tend to be more honest and straightforward in their communication. Additionally, because "rebuttal or criticism in writing for most people does not have the

same primal emotive force as it does when spoken,” “more risky communication is possible” (Batson 1993: 102). Therefore, teachers must be wary of the possibility of student “flaming” or disrespectful comments that could occur throughout electronic discussions (Bertram and Peyton 1993). Yet, this is precisely characteristic of this form of communication’s capacity to encourage creativity. No one can predict how the conversation will develop; the possibilities within open communication are limitless. Although during “e-talk” there may seem to be a lack of “coherence and continuity” (Kern 1995: 470) in which there “may be a rare moment when there is a unanimity of focus” (Bruce, Peyton, and Batson 1993: 83), this apparent chaos is actually quite lucid, and one can “get a sense of the multiple consciousness” (Bruce, Peyton, and Batson 1993: 83) that is present within electronic-discussion sessions.

Despite all the advantages of the use of computer-mediated communication within the classroom, perhaps the most significant quality of electronic-discussion programs is their ability to motivate students in their foreign-language communication, as well as in all of their foreign-language studies (Beauvois 1994). Variety is essential within the classroom, because students often tire of the monotony of repeated formats and methods of instruction and learning. Electronic communication often provides a “break from the classroom routine” (Kern 1995: 469), as well as offering the students opportunities to be involved in interaction with their peers. Cooperative learning is often a considerable source of motivation for students. Students are engaged by communicating with their classmates and by achieving productive exchanges of ideas in a foreign language. Students are often motivated by the use of technology within the classroom; they value this incorporation of new resources and innovation within the curriculum. The

individualized approach to communication within electronic discussions is also a source of inspiration for many students. Through conversations in writing, students may express their thoughts, display their understanding of concepts, use new language skills, and learn from others. When students receive responses from others involved in “e-talk” sessions, this feedback serves as reinforcement, and the students realize that they are capable of maintaining and continuing a form of communication. In Beauvois’s words: “The joy of communication seems to be reward enough” (Beauvois 1992b: 459).

The main barrier to the implementation of electronic-discussion programs in foreign-language curricula is the lack of technological resources within the schools. Even today, in many of our nation’s schools, there are a definite limited number of computers available for student use, and these resources are often outdated or unable to use new software. Instructional use of computers is often relegated to remedial lessons or practice of basic concepts. There is often “little connection between what is being done in the classroom and what is attempted in the computer lab” (Rockman 1995: 27). Although in schools with more resources, computers are more likely to be used creatively within the curriculum, many teachers remain skeptical of the use of computers in instruction. They are more often intimidated by technology, because their training is often inadequate for the use of all of today’s available resources. With the proper preparation, teachers would definitely understand the growing importance of technology as part of educational curricula; if one realizes the abundant uses for technology and its possible advantageous effects upon the student’s learning processes, one would not hesitate to involve computers in one’s “substantive efforts to provide appropriate and improved instruction” for the students (Rockman 1995: 29).

Yet, “the computer by itself does not ensure creativity; rather it is the manner in which it is used that determines how innovative a tool it can be” (Rehorick 1991: 112). Therefore, the instructor must evaluate his or her curriculum in order to recognize how technology could best be used within his or her classroom. If the foreign-language educator continually fosters an environment in which communication is the foremost goal, then the students would greatly benefit from the use of computer-mediated communication programs within the curriculum. “Computers can be useful in improving learning, or they can be a distraction and a time filler” (Rockman 1995: 28). It is the instructor’s responsibility to ensure that the class is achieving its potential. The teacher should serve as a model of support and encouragement of student expression in the foreign language, for “how the teacher uses the target language significantly influences how the students understand and use it” (Wing 1993: 167). Above all, teachers “need to embrace a broad cultural context for language and culture learning that assumes that all students can develop both linguistic and cultural literacy beyond that of their first language and primary culture” (Tedick et al 1993: 58). Though this is a lofty goal, teachers should maintain high expectations of their students’ ability to master a foreign language. By embracing the teaching methods involved in computer-mediated communication programs, which are extremely “linguistically and socially effective” (Beauvois 1997: 182), foreign-language teachers challenge their students to take responsibility for their own learning and to achieve the ultimate goal of fluency within a foreign language.

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Educational Proposal

Objective: The implementation of the use of computer-mediated communication technology in the foreign-language classroom.

Submitted to the following person(s): Educational Technology Committee, Knox Co. Schools

Submitted by the following person(s): Amy L. Fielder

Bases for Objective: The goal of foreign-language education is to provide students opportunities to master a language. In order to achieve fluency, the foreign-language student requires practice in communication. Research has shown that the implementation of the use of computer-based discussion technology within the foreign-language classroom can accomplish the following results:

- Increased student motivation (Beauvois 1992b,1994; Bruce, Peyton, and Batson 1993; Gaies 1985)
- Drastically increased student participation and language production (Beauvois 1997; Day and Batson 1995; Kelm 1992; Kern 1995)
- Increased student confidence in communication (Batson 1993; Beauvois 1997; Gaies 1985; Peyton and Bruce 1993a; Kelm 1992)
- Decreased student anxiety in communication (Beauvois 1994, 1997; Beauvois and Elledge 1996; Kelm 1992)
- Increased creativity in communication (Beauvois 1992a; Bruce, Peyton, and Batson 1993; Kelm 1992)
- Increased student interaction and interdependence (Batson 1993; Beauvois 1992a, 1997; Kern 1995; Peyton and Bruce 1993b)
- Decreased dependence upon instructor (Beauvois 1992a; Kern 1995)

Although electronic communication focuses on conversation, it does not show decreased grammar competence (Cononelos and Oliva 1993). The communication practiced during electronic discussions seems to enhance a student's mastery of a foreign language.

Description of Objective: In electronic discussions, students communicate either online or through a local area network (LAN—a number of computers that are connected and share the same programs). Electronic communication allows students to “hold a conversation,” yet in a written form, much like a “chat room.” Students can contribute initiations to discussions or responses to questions, following the natural course of conversations. This “free flow” of communication encourages students to be more confident and creative in their use of the foreign language, while enhancing student mastery of the language (Beauvois 1992a). When combined with other teaching methods, the use of electronic communication can serve as an effective addition to the foreign-language classroom.

Implementation of Objective: The use of electronic communication would require the following resources:

- At least ten computers either linked through a LAN or with access to the Internet for on-line chat sessions
- An electronic-discussion software program such as the Daedalus Group's Interchange module* or Common Space

*The Daedalus Integrate Writing Environment is a software package that can be used in any course in which discussion and/or writing is an essential component. It is not specific to foreign-language learning but can be used in many subject areas.

See project “Chatting in language class: A proposal for implementation of computer-mediated communication in the high-school foreign-language curriculum” for specific references to supporting research studies.

Recommendations for Future Research

- *Complete a survey of students who have used an electronic-discussion program, as well as teachers who have used this type of program as part of their curricula. This survey could focus upon how the use of electronic communication helps or hurts the students in the learning of a foreign language—grammar, vocabulary, oral communication--, the level of student anxiety experienced during the Interchange sessions compared to oral conversations, the motivation level of the student during the Interchange sessions, and the ascertained value of the program within the curriculum.
- *Complete interviews with teachers who have never used electronic-communication programs. Questions should address the role of communication within the teacher's current curriculum, the variety of teaching methods used in the curriculum, and teacher anxiety or eagerness to use "e-talk" programs.
- *Complete a study within the school system to which the proposal will be presented. This will be research on the technological resources that are available to students and the technological budget for the system and the foreign language departments within the system.
- *Present the proposal to a chosen school system and encourage its implementation.
- *Continue the research of teaching methods that encourage communication within the foreign-language classroom, in addition to the research on the use of technology within the classroom. Support the implementation of such methods and resources within foreign-language curricula.

Appendix D - UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM
SENIOR PROJECT - APPROVAL

Name: AMY FIELDER

College: ARTS & SCIENCES Department: FRENCH

Faculty Mentor: _____

PROJECT TITLE: CHATTING IN LANGUAGE CLASS: A proposal for implementation
of computer-mediated communication in the high-school foreign-language
curriculum

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

Signed: Margaret H. Seaman, Ph.D. Faculty Mentor

Date: May 8, 2001

Comments (Optional):