

# An email exchange: native speakers and entry-level ESOL students



Jenny Barrett

School of English & Applied Linguistics, Unitec

# Rationale

Empowerment (Warschauer, Turbee & Roberts, 1996)

Increases motivation (Gray & Stockwell, 1998)

Reduces anxiety (Beauvois, 1995)

Increases participation (Kern, 1995)

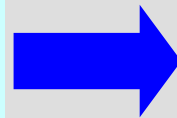
More confidence to move on to conversation in L2 (Roed, 2003)

Appeals to learners with a propensity for learning through social interaction (Warschauer, 1998)

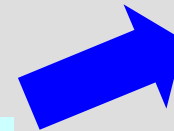
The link between  
email use and  
language  
acquisition?

# Exchange design

The number and length of interactions corresponds to the amount of language learning (Stockwell & Levy, 2003)



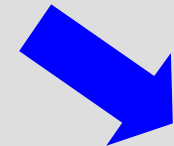
Need to maintain interest levels



Goal oriented



Assessed



Provide opportunities to discover commonalties

Underpinned by second language acquisition theory - providing the conditions believed to be required for language acquisition to take place

# Current email exchange

- ESOL students and native speakers in New Zealand
  - 40 beginner students and 40 ‘Kiwis’ from around the North Island
  - Comparison between non native speaker / native speaker email exchanges
    - Quantity of text
    - Number of exchanges
    - Instances of negotiation of meaning
    - Computer attitudes – start / finish
    - Interviews – authenticity, learner autonomy

# Activities

- Fill in a personal information form
- Match partner to a photo
- Complete partner's diary for the week
- Spot the difference – pictures
- Plan the meeting / party: task per pair

**Made it an integrated and assessed part of the course – included in the writing portfolio**

# Supplementary activities

- Write a story based on the myth's of your partner's culture
- Design a new flag

## For higher levels

- Produce a newsletter / a web site
- Produce an email together e.g. protest emails

# Issues to date

- Native speaker English
  - Humour
  - Length of text
  - Negotiation of meaning at beginner level
  - Genre of email
  - Vocabulary

# Humour

Hi L\*\*\*

My name is D\*\*\*\*, and Jenny has asked me to introduce myself.

I am a famous video shop owner from Whitianga. Do you know where that is?

How is everything going with your studies? How long are you in NZ for and what are you up to?

Regards

D\*\*\*

# Length of text

Hello L\*\*\*

It is nice to hear from you. I'm sorry I have not replied to your e-mail letter sooner, but I have been staying in a house in Auckland where there is no telephone line. Now I am back at my home on the Hauraki Plains, near the Coromandel Peninsula and so I have just received your e-mail letter, using my own computer.

Now I shall answer your questions.

Firstly, in answer to your question, "How are you?", I'm sad to report that I have had a fall and broken a bone in my right foot. This happened just before I went to Auckland on the 13th August and I have had to rest my foot as much as possible since then. Otherwise I am very well, thank you.

How are you?

Secondly, in answer to, "Where are you from?", I was born in South Africa and have lived in New Zealand for 30 years.

Thirdly, in answer to, "Are you a teacher?", I must answer, "No", although I have two younger sisters who are both teachers. I trained to be a pharmacist in South Africa but since living in New Zealand I have done office work. Have you studied or trained for a career?

I look forward to hearing from you.

D\*\*\*

# Negotiation of meaning

hollo D\*\*\* How are you I nlca to seeyou too I come from china china shang

hai my one son on new zeland asb bank. bye my name is l\*\*\*\*

Hi L\*\*\*\*

....I did not quite understand about your son and the ASB bank. Did you mean that your son lives in New Zealand, and he is working for the ASB bank?

hello D\*\*\*

are you married ?

do you haue any children?

from L\*\*\*\*

# Colloquialisms / text-speak

no i do not have a girlfriend

not my sort of thing

how is english language school?

do u also work in auckland

what else do u do, intrests, hobbies etc

well have to go am busy at moment sorry about the short letter this time.

yours sincerely

k\*\*\*.

# Other issues

- Management / administration
- Student computer skills
- Sustainability

## On the positive side...

- Student motivation
- Attention to form
- Quantity of output
- Access to authentic English and 'real' Kiwi lives

*He has been to  
Ethiopia!*

*He has a  
girlfriend with  
two children. Do  
I say he has  
children?*

- **More time to spend interacting with the language being produced by the email exchange, in addition to task completion.**

# Resources

- [www.epals.com](http://www.epals.com)
- Your organisation's networks
- Community groups
- Friends and family!