

Email communication between year 9s in an English and a German school

Index

Contact details and abstract.

Focus of the study.

Context of the study.

Practical theory.

Teaching plan.

Research plan.

Research findings.

Discussion, conclusions and recommendations.

Evaluation and reflection.

Bibliography.

Appendices.

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Educational sector of
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Abstract:

This small- scale case study examined how to use primarily email (and some word processing) to develop communication between an English and a German school to support the teaching and learning of modern foreign languages (German) at secondary school level. The approach employed was based upon the idea that email contact could help to raise attainment in KS3 and to increase confidence in using German. In particular, the study examined use of this approach in work on tenses (perfect and future) carried out with a group of pupils taking part in the school's German Exchange over a period of 6 months. Evidence about achievement and levels of confidence of ICT use /ML skills was gathered through pupil questionnaires and interviews. The main findings of the study were as follows:

- Some pupils used the target language more outside of school to contact their partner. One pupil described how she had been generally emailing her partner with short pieces of news in the target language without having been asked to do this for classwork.
- Pupils felt that emailing their partner had helped to improve the quality of their written German, and that they looked to raise their German to match the native speaker's level. Pupil questionnaires looked at these two points and asked pupils to choose a 'best fit' view on a 5-point positive to negative scale. This was

discussed in greater depth during small group, semi-structured interviews. They also looked to raise the level of their German to match the native speaker's level of English.

- There were however frustrations in writing as a result of lack of range of vocabulary and grammatical structures, such as cases and tenses. These points were commented on during pupil interviews.
- The email link has encouraged some pupils to keep in contact with their exchange partner beyond the exchange. Again, this was commented on this during the interviews. Email offers a convenient, cheap and quick way of remaining in contact, and allows pupils to write short pieces in the target language.

Focus of the study

For this study I set out to investigate the use of email as a form of communication between two groups of pupils of similar age: one in the UK, one in Germany. The aim was to look into the effects of ICT on pupil learning and development when put into regular use through an email project within a classroom setting. I chose to focus on a number of aspects of learning and development:

- What effects would regular email contact have on the application of written German and pupils' reading skills in German?
- Could regular email contact in German help to build the pupils' confidence in writing German? For example, would pupils feel that emailing would help to improve their German (grammatically, in the application of tenses and the range of vocabulary)?
- Would the task help to increase subject motivation, as well as develop relationships between pupils in different countries?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages for pupils of using email / word processing for extended writing pieces in the target language?

I felt these areas merited investigation for a number of reasons:

- As a teacher of German, I wanted to find out whether regular email contact with a German pupil could help to raise the measurable academic attainment of my own pupils.
- I am also Head of German and am naturally keen to look into any methods of teaching and learning which help to raise achievement and interest in the subject.
- As a languages teacher, the declining number of pupils who continue with further study of modern foreign languages is of great concern. This is a particular problem between Key Stages 3 and 4, ((Nuffield Enquiry Moys 1998), but within our own school, we are also experiencing this with option choices at the end of Key Stage 3. Could, therefore, ICT enhance engagement in the subject area and thereby help to increase uptake of modern languages at Key Stage 4?
- The use of email is commonplace among teenagers. I was curious about whether this application could be included within the teaching of modern foreign languages with positive outcomes.
- All teachers are considered 'teachers of ICT', and the delivery of ICT across the curriculum is a key area for development. I therefore felt it would be useful to see whether pupils found that there were specific advantages of using email / word processing to produce extended pieces of writing.
- ICT also offers a vast array of opportunities for supporting the teaching of modern foreign languages, as was discussed at the CILT CALL Conference in December 1998. I wanted to look more closely at how using ICT in language lessons would be advantageous for pupils at Chesterton.
- I hoped that establishing electronic communication between year 9s and a similar group in our German partner school would help to raise interest in the forthcoming German exchange.

I did not choose one particular teaching group to focus on. Instead I chose the group of year 9 pupils participating in the German Exchange. The 16 pupils were from two teaching groups - 4 from 9A1, my teaching group who had been learning German since the start of year 8. The remaining 12 were from 9B1, who started German in year 7. Not all pupils involved in the exchange would be involved in the research - one was from year 11, and the remaining 4 were in other teaching groups. I thought this would prove an interesting group to look at, as it offered the opportunity to compare achievement between comparable ability groups in each year half. It would also help to highlight the obstacles faced by each group in terms of their ability to write at length in the target language, and the ease with which they apply it to everyday communication.

Similar projects have been carried out in schools, and are described on the Becta website (www.becta.org.uk). These reports referred to the positive outcomes of their projects, but did not discuss the problems faced by teachers. I wanted to look in greater detail at a range of aspects which could affect the development of a small-scale email link. It is also impossible to guarantee similar outcomes in each school because of all the variables such as initial pupil motivation or access to ICT facilities. I was interested in looking at the areas of focus in relation to my own place of work and pupils.

Context for the study

Chesterton Community College is a multicultural, mixed 11-16 state secondary school in Cambridge with approximately 1100 pupils. It is located close to the city centre, with the majority of pupils living within either walking or cycling distance.

The school currently offers 8 form entry, and when pupils arrive in year 7, they are divided into two 'year halves' ('A', forms 7.1 to 7.4, and 'B', forms 7.5 to 7.8). Pupils in the 'A' half start with French and the 'B' half with German. Unless requested upon application to Chesterton for a pupil to start with a particular language, groupings are generally random. Pupils have five 50-minute lessons per fortnight. Once settled, in year 8 each year half continues with their original foreign language for 4 50-minute lessons per fortnight and picks up the other language for 3. This is reversed for year 9. All pupils study two foreign languages, except for set 4 in each year half who have 5 lessons per fortnight of their original language, and two of 'Key Skills' (literacy and numeracy).

All pupils have access to ICT facilities in the Resource Centre both during the school day, as well as before and after school. There are currently approximately 17 computers available in the Resource Centre for pupil use, and all are linked to the internet. There are 3 rooms of 17 computers, including the Resource Centre, which can be booked for class use.

As all pupils have easy access to emailing facilities either at school or at home. A home audit revealed that 15 of the 16 pupils have email access at home, and the other accesses email from school. It would not present a problem in setting email tasks based upon the curriculum as homework. Being able to book a room of computers for a use in a lesson would also allow me to observe the way in which pupils in my teaching group (9A1) worked on email tasks. It would also help me to gain insight into the difficulties encountered when using email to communicate as part of a curriculum-based task. Being able to work with pupils on email tasks would help me to be able to look into ways to work around any problems which came up, and to look at any obstacles encountered with this type of email research project.

Practical theory

ICT, primarily email and word processing, was chosen to help develop communication between the English and German pupils as it offers several advantages over hand writing a letter or piece of homework.

- It is cheap, even free to pupils using the school's computers.
- It operates on a real-time basis, and is instantaneous. If the recipient is online, the sender could receive a near immediate response. It can be very motivating for pupils to be able to see evidence that their communication has been acknowledged, and could encourage a greater level of response from the initial sender.
- Email communication is a two-way process, and adds authenticity to the class-based tasks as the pupil 'knows' the recipient. Once pupils had opted to take part in the exchange, the German school then paired pupils with one from their school with similar interests.
- Emailing allows pupils to write short paragraphs - this is important in modern languages, as pupils often lack the vocabulary, grammatical concepts and tenses produce extended pieces of writing. I hoped that writing short pieces would help encourage pupils to try to write at length, even if their writing was not always grammatically accurate. It is possible that the sender may receive a prompt reply which can help to prompt the composition of the next email. Composing a letter in the target language can sometimes prove a daunting experience for those with only a few years of language study.
- Similarly, the prospect of making a telephone call in the target language can be intimidating. Email allows pupils to form a conversation style piece of writing, because they can interact online, writing short pieces and responding to their partner without the obligation to write at length. Email offers the writer time to reflect and, if necessary, to use support materials such as a dictionary, to look up problematic vocabulary.
- Using a word processing package or email to compose communication allows the writer to look over their work and to easily redraft or correct as necessary. The piece of work looks well-presented, and pupils do not waste time having to write out a piece again from scratch in order to achieve good presentation.

Since email offers so many advantages over writing a letter by hand, I hoped that using email would help to build and develop more regular communication between pupils in the two schools. The general assumption with exchanges is that pupils write to each other in the target language, rather than their own. Email therefore offered a great opportunity to work closely on the development of written German both grammatically and in terms of vocabulary building.

Teaching plan

The initial letter writing between pupils from 9A1 and 9B1 was started in the summer term of year 8 with the aim of promoting the German exchange. Once pupils had signed up for the exchange, the German school paired up pupils in September and we started the email process with the exchange group. With pupils from German arriving in October, Chesterton pupils sent a brief initial email with some personal and contact details, and were encouraged to correspond with their exchange partner. I felt it was preferable to start the research based email work after the initial visit, as the person to whom each pupil was writing would no longer be a stranger. Furthermore, the topics to be taught after Christmas lent themselves better to email tasks than those in the autumn term.

During the autumn term one of the topics in the Scheme of Work was past holidays. Although in our textbooks, *Deutsch Heute* (Sidwell & Capooore), and *ZickZack 2* (Goodman-Stephens, Rogers & Briggs) this refers to a past trip, I felt this could be closely adapted to fit describing the Christmas holidays. This would provide both an appropriate and authentic subject for an email task, as it is an area about which pupils are likely to want to write to their partner. At this stage in their language learning pupils do not have the grammatical basis or the relevant vocabulary to be able to write straight off without support. I planned teaching the perfect tense from the textbook to 9A1 and 9B1 in November, so that come January, pupils would be familiar with the grammatical structures. All that should then be required is revision of the perfect tense, leading to a computer-based German lesson during which pupils would compose their email and send it to their partner.

November & December 2000.

Deutsch Heute chapter 16.

9A1 5 lessons covering the content of the textbook with in-depth work on formation of the perfect tense in German (Appendix 1).

9B1 Colleague to follow the same plan and outcomes.

Pupils who were not taking part in the exchange word-processed a piece describing their Christmas holidays. Pupils who were emailing had to print a copy out of their email for collection. This would provide the evidence for the research.

January 2001.

Revision of formation of the perfect tense based on previous teaching area. Pupils to then complete a worksheet-based series of tasks, where the perfect tense is adapted to Christmas (Appendix 2). This supported the building of subject-specific vocabulary which was not covered in the textbooks, and provided a template for the composition of an email. Emails sent after classroom based lessons. 12 July, 2001

Our exchange visit took place in February 2001. Prior to our arrival, pupils were encouraged to write an email in German which included our arrival details. I choose not to focus on this for the research as it was a relatively short task and did not particularly develop the pupils' attainment or vocabulary.

I then looked forward through the Scheme of Work for a task which would suitably extend pupils and offer an authentic reason to email the exchange partner. As most of the tasks in the textbooks were topic based, I felt that the teaching of the future tense would be suitable. This area is not covered by the textbooks. However with some pupils involved in the exchange continuing with German at Key Stage 4, it is useful to have an awareness of tenses at an earlier stage. Although it is important to cover vocabulary based content, covering a range of tenses gives pupils the opportunity to both express themselves more fully and at a more mature level. Covering the future tense would also offer the opportunity to suitably extend pupils and provided a reason to email the exchange partner about plans for the summer holidays.

May 2001.

For both groups - Production of own materials for teaching the future tense/ways of expressing future plans. Initial revision of hobbies and activities was followed with their incorporation into expressing plans for next week. Pupils would then complete a reading activity based on plans for the summer, to help build vocabulary and to offer guidance on a structure. Pupils would then word process an initial draft of around 70 words in class on their plans for the summer holidays. The next two lessons would be spent redrafting a final copy on the computer and, for pupils taking part in the exchange, an email function.

Approximately 7 lessons.

Evidence was gathered in the form of copies of emails printed out during lessons, and any emails which the pupils were willing to share. I decided to focus on the two tense based tasks as both areas allowed pupils to write openly at length on an authentic task. Throughout the period, pupils were encouraged to maintain email contact with their partner. I felt that emailing based purely on classroom task could lead to communication between partners becoming stale, and was not always an authentic subject area about which pupils would naturally write to each other.

Research plan

I chose to concentrate on some specific areas as part of this research:

- Whether email communication in the target language could help to improve the application of written German both grammatically, and in terms of vocabulary building. I wanted to look at this both from a pupil perspective, as well as at a measurable level.
- The effects email contact with a native speaker had on pupils' confidence in using German.
- How email communication could help to develop and increase motivation and engagement in German. On a more long-term basis, would such a project help to build and develop relationships between pupils in different countries?
- The advantages and disadvantages for pupils of using email / word processing in developing extended writing in the target language.

Focusing on grammar and vocabulary development is of particular interest, as I wanted to look in depth at whether email based communication based initially on classwork could help to promote the learning and educational development of pupils. With pupils being assessed by National Curriculum levels at the end of Key Stage 3, I was also curious as to whether this form of learning could help to raise writing levels within German at Chesterton. I felt that technically accurate writing was the skill most likely to develop through email communication in the target language.

Helping to build a pupil's confidence in their ability to communicate in the target language is a key factor on motivating study and engagement in the subject. Looking further down the line, it is desirable on a personal basis to help forge more permanent links between pupils of different cultures and countries - this can help to raise cultural awareness via up-to date access of news and information from the internet, and to develop international links via email.

In order to be able to gain a pupil perspective on the effects of the email project on the aforementioned areas, I carried out a multiple-choice questionnaire about views on emailing and German (Appendix 3) at the start of January. This was among all pupils from 9A1 and 9B1 who were taking part in the exchange. This would help to gain a general perspective among the exchange group about the different aspects upon which I wished to focus.

I chose to produce a quantitative questionnaire in order to obtain measurable results. This could then be accurately compared with results from a follow-up questionnaire at the end of the project (Appendix 3). I put in two statements for each point upon which I wanted pupils to reflect, as upon comparison, it would be evident if a pupil had randomly chosen answers.

In May I interviewed 5 pupils about the project in order to encourage a greater level of reflection. The interviews were semi-structured (Appendix 4) to encourage pupils to develop the points I chose to focus on in the questionnaires. I also hoped that by conducting interviews, it would help to raise and probe points which pupils would not necessarily write about in detail in the spaces for comments on the questionnaires. Conducting a small group interview could raise further points for consideration from a pupil perspective, which I, as a researcher, may not have previously considered. I decided to focus upon a small group of 5 pupils in order to be able to look more closely at the effects of the research project on pupils. Although for the purposes of this research, gender was not an area for investigation, it may be worth noting that I chose two from 9A1, both male, and two girls and one boy from 9B1. I did not choose a girl from 9A1 because both the girls who took part in the exchange had partners who did not use email. The main reason for choosing these pupils is that they are reliable, and can express themselves in a mature, confident manner, which I felt was helpful in gathering in-depth evidence at the end of the research.

KG from 9A1, with estimated National Curriculum levels in January of between level 5 or 6 in writing at the end of Key Stage 3. He is not planning on taking GCSE

German, but is self-motivated and hard working in all areas of his work.

NC, also from 9A1, is likely to be borderline level 4 or 5 in writing at the end of Key Stage 3. His written work has, in the past, been grammatically inaccurate and with erratic spelling. He intends to take GCSE German.

From 9B1, TE is a motivated student, and she is estimated to achieve level 6.

KX is able to write at length, but on occasions the accuracy of his work waivers. He is estimated to achieve level 5 or 6 in writing. He plans to take GCSE German.

DV lived for several years in Switzerland and, although she has an excellent grasp orally of German, her written work can be inaccurate. Currently, she intends to take GCSE German.

Research findings

Looking at each area of focus, the following results were obtained from the 16 pupils surveyed in the January questionnaire.

Development of writing:

- 7 of the pupils agreed that emailing their partner could help to develop their use of tenses (figure 1)
- 13 agreed that it could help to increase their range of vocabulary (figure 2).
- 11 agreed that they would have to use a dictionary more (figure 3).
- 10 agreed that emailing in German would help to improve their grammar (figure 4).

Confidence:

- 11 agreed that their confidence in writing German could improve through emailing their partner (figure 5).

Motivation:

- 7 agreed that they were likely to take GCSE German (figure 6).

Future contact:

- 9 pupils hoped to maintain in contact with their partner (figure 7).

ICT (email):

- 10 agreed that they were more likely to email their partner than to write a letter by hand (figure 8).
- 6 agreed that their ICT skills would develop through emailing their partner (figure 9).

Figure 1

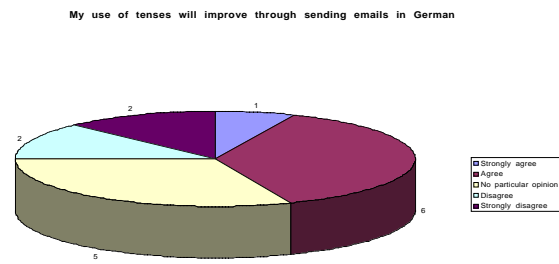


Figure 2

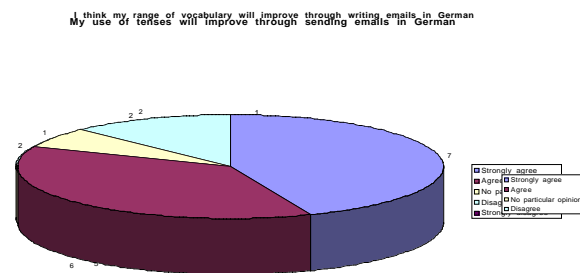


Figure 3

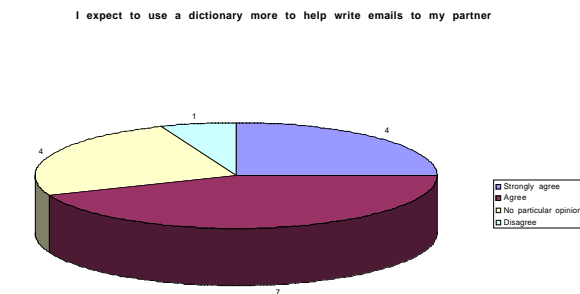


Figure 4



Figure 5

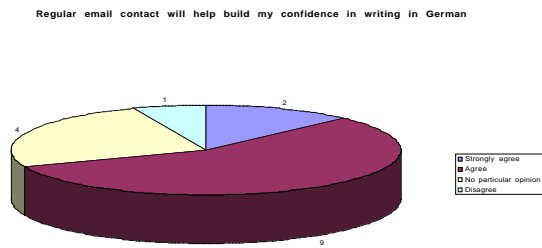


Figure 6

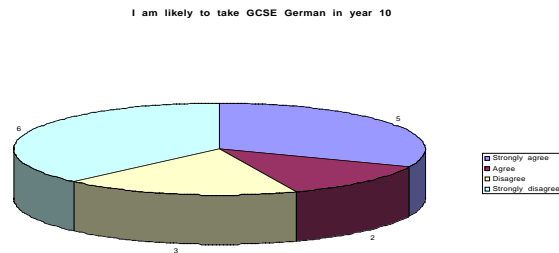


Figure 7

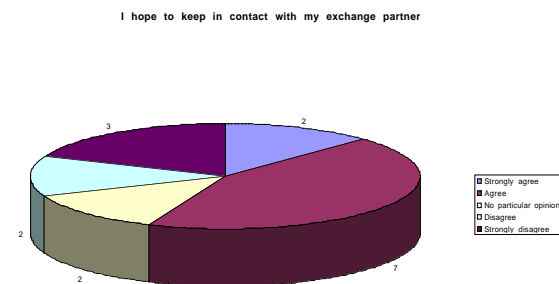


Figure 8

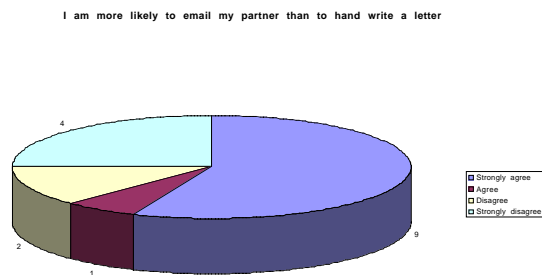
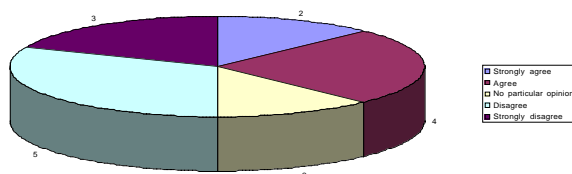


Figure 9

My ICT skills will improve through emailing my partner



I then looked at the results again in relation to my focus group. Of the five surveyed:

Writing:

- 4 agreed that emailing their partner could help to develop their use of tenses.
- 3 felt that emailing their partner could increase their range of vocabulary.
- 3 anticipated that they would have to use dictionary more.
- 4 felt that their grammar could improve.

Confidence:

- 5 agreed that emailing their partner could help to improve their confidence in writing German.

Motivation:

- 4 were likely to take GCSE German.

Future contact:

- 4 hoped to remain in contact with their partner.

ICT:

- 4 were more likely to email their partner than to hand write a letter.
- 1 felt that ICT skills could develop through emailing partners.

The small group semi-structured interviews did indeed encourage pupils to develop their opinions about which they had responded in the questionnaires, as did their commentary on the two pieces of writing.

Writing and confidence:

All pupils involved felt that emailing their partner had been of benefit in some way. Three found that their partner occasionally responded with corrections of their email in the target language - similarly, pupils were writing back with corrections of their partner's English. This was of particular use to TE, who found that she therefore "[didn't] make the same mistake again", thus helping to improve the grammatical accuracy of her work. Another (KG) found that his partner offered stylistic feedback (Appendix 5), thus helping him to develop the fluidity with which he wrote the second piece for the project.

The group also started to become more constructively critical of their writing.

Several reasons were given:

- Having a native speaker as a recipient encouraged two pupils in particular to raise their level. (DV), the near native speaker of the group, summarised the key reason in her commentary on her writing:
"I thought quite carefully about what I was writing because I was sending it to my exchange and I didn't want her to think I was stupid".
"Having to email it did make me try to make my work slightly more impressive" (NC).
- All pupils felt that emailing their pieces helped to raise the grammatical accuracy of their writing, again, there was an authentic reason for their work - a recipient reading their work:
"Emailing it made me have to think more about the grammar I was using " (KX). TE also supported this view in her commentary, and highlighted word order, and awareness of this feature, as a particular area which had been improved through emailing.
- The fact that German pupils generally have a higher comparable level of their target language was also a factor in motivating pupils to achieve a higher level:
"They have better English than our German so you want to match it" (DV). (KX) also supported this.

The teacher-assessed National Curriculum levels in writing also support the pupils' perception of improvement in their written work. In January my colleague and I predicted which National Curriculum level each pupil from the group would achieve in writing. In figure 10, the two are compared.

Figure 10 Estimated versus actual National Curriculum Levels (Writing)

	Estimated (Jan 2001)	Actual (June 2001)
9A1		
KG	5 or 6	6
NC	4	5
9B1		
KX	5 or 6	6
TE	6	6
DV	6	7

The table illustrates that in each case where the pupil is borderline between two levels, he/she has achieved the higher of the two. Two have also achieved a higher level in writing than anticipated.

Interestingly, regular emailing has also helped to reinforce the informal letter writing salutations, as it "has helped to make writing a letter to come more naturally" (KG).

However, vocabulary was a key area of frustration. DV "felt confident about both pieces, because they were both subjects with which [she] was familiar with and it was like what [she] used to talk about in German when [she] lived in Switzerland". KG and NC however both felt that lack of vocabulary frustrated them from being able to fully express themselves in the target language at a similar level as in English:

- KG found it annoying when he had to write the same sort of meaning in "baby language which is more simple - you feel that if you knew the vocabulary you could have done better".
- NC wrote in his commentary that he "found it frustrating to not be able to say what [he] wanted to in both letters" through lack of vocabulary. He also mentioned in his interview that a lack of grammar as well as vocabulary was a hindrance.
- TE and KX both raised that fact that the lack of grammatical structures and vocabulary made them write in a "repetitive style" (TE), with a similar content.

ICT:

Although not really an ICT skill, the only development in ICT skills noted by pupils was the speeding up in typing (TE). It was interesting that NC had to set up an email account at the start of the project (during a German lesson), and since then, he has found that he is making regular use of email, although not necessarily solely to keep in contact with his partner! I did not observe any other developments in ICT skills. All the pupils preferred to word process their document, and highlighted the advantages of using ICT:

- It is "easier to correct work " (KX and DV) - "you can delete anything" (KX). KG pointed out that this was particularly useful for longer pieces of writing.
- There is the spell check facility in the target language, which DV found particularly helpful.

- NC found it easier to pick out errors in a word processed document than a hand written piece when checking his work.

Emailing in particular was also preferable to writing a letter. This is not only because of the points mentioned above, but also because you "can write little and often" (TE) and maintain close contact. This is a clear advantage for pupils who might find it difficult to construct a piece of extended writing. Pupils find it easy to write short pieces on familiar, well-practised subjects, such as home and family, or their local area. Frustration and problems often occur when they are unable to express themselves in the target language as they would in English. Although many take time to use a dictionary it can be time consuming and, eventually boring, to keep looking up vocabulary for an extended piece of writing. Writing a letter generally involves time to compose a piece worthy of being sent, and is often even more difficult in a foreign language. This is one reason why pupils find that having written about familiar topics, postal communication with an exchange partner dies out.

Motivation and engagement:

Four of the five pupils are continuing with German at Key Stage 4, although it was difficult for pupils to say how much of this decision was solely down to emailing their partner. However, it clearly motivated some pupils who are keeping in contact with their partner in the target language out of lessons - TE, for example, has found that she "uses German more outside school" than before. As anticipated, emailing work to their partners has helped to provide authenticity to their classwork:

- "It adds an everyday sense for writing" (DV).

None of the pupils minded having to send classwork to their partner, although two pointed out that it was "weird" (DV and TE)) to suddenly send tasks, and that it was not something you would naturally write about to someone.

Discussion, conclusions and recommendations

The project undertaken within the context of Chesterton School has, on the whole, been successful in a number of ways. Firstly, it has helped to clarify the advantages of using ICT in modern languages:

- the ease of redrafting;
- the clarity of the text helps to facilitate proof reading;
- using a spell check in the target language helps pupils to find unnoticed errors.

Using email to support communication between pupils in different countries is clearly motivating. The convenience of accessing email, the rapid response time and the opportunity to write short pieces frequently to one's exchange partner meant that some pupils were in regular contact.

Maintaining email contact in the target language has clearly been of benefit to pupils in relation to their writing in the target language. Feedback from their partner has helped to enhance vocabulary as well as to develop accuracy. The fact that the recipient was a native speaker also motivated some pupils to raise the standard of their writing in an attempt to write at a level similar to their partner's foreign language.

However, it was clear that pupils did find it frustrating that their level of German was not comparable with their partner's English. German pupils however start to learn English at an earlier age, and tend to have a greater number of hours per week than English pupils of a similar age.

I feel strongly that this is a project which I would repeat, and would recommend to other schools. There are some points requiring consideration when running such a link:

ICT issues

When to start:

If the teacher is looking to start emailing a partner school with a view to establishing or building interest in an exchange, it is worth starting early. The better the pupils know each other, the easier they will find it to write something of relevance to their partner, even if there are mistakes.

Choice of task:

I found that I needed to be selective in the tasks, ideally ones which pupils would talk about to each other. Some topics lend themselves well, but this may require adapting the Scheme of Work to build in opportunities for contact.

Basic teaching requirements:

Lack of vocabulary and tenses were clearly frustrating for many pupils. It would therefore be advisable to expose pupils to a range of tenses (perfect, future and some

conditional) at an early stage, even if they then go on to make mistakes. For the most able who wish to write in greater details, having more structures available to them will help them to express themselves more fully. Perhaps a reference sheet of useful phrases would help to support extended writing.

ICT:

Although ICT clearly offers many advantages for pupils over hand writing a letter, it still remains an area of worry for many teachers. Although I am no expert on ICT, I know what I need to in order to get on with basic tasks, so, for me, this was not a concern. Pupils have advanced skills, and it is likely that most classes have at least one pupil in the class who they consider the ICT 'expert'. I found that I too learned computer shortcuts and learnt new techniques from using ICT in class. The main hindrances were when computers crashed, didn't work or the printer wasn't working properly - all things of great frustration to the class teacher. I discovered that sometimes it was easier for pupils to word-process their correspondence, then to attach it to their email if there are computer problems.

Links:

Strong links with the partner school are essential. The link with our partner school is well established, and it was reassuring to know that pupils would be appropriately paired up, and encouraged to email responses. Despite encouragement from their teachers, not all the German pupils involved were so reliable. At times, it was disappointing for our pupils not to receive a prompt response, or even one at all.

This basic project also has wider potential for cross-curricular development. Geographical research on the area could be supported with emailing partners for information on the region, food technology for local dishes or history for background information on the country, even their perspective on different events between the two countries. English could develop the area of literature from other cultures and traditions.

It would be interesting to research the impact of ICT in enhancing ML learning at Key Stage 4 or 5, where the outcome is a formal qualification. Along the course, pupils could develop more sophisticated writing skills on a broader range of topics than at Key Stage 3, and would therefore be able to express themselves more fully. This type of email project at an older age may help to raise achievement and increase motivation in the study of modern foreign languages at a higher level. Similarly, targeting a low ability group or a poorly motivated group would also be an interesting study.

Evaluation and reflection

Carrying out this study has contributed to my own professional development. As previously mentioned my own ICT skills have developed as a result of gaining knowledge from pupils during lessons.

The way in which I look at using ICT has also changed. Having gathered the advantages of using word processing for producing extended writing, I would certainly aim to use ICT more often when producing the final draft of a piece. The whole project is one which we, as a school, could look to initiate at an earlier age. It would, however, be necessary to modifying the Scheme of Work - this would help to give pupils maximum exposure to a range of tenses and structures which they may wish to include in their writing. It could also help to support and develop interest in exchanges through having prior knowledge of the partner.

The findings of the study are of course very specific to Chesterton, and carrying out a similar project may not have quite the same results. Many variables beyond classroom teaching would naturally have influence on the intended outcomes - access to computers, relationship with the partner school, reliability of pupils at both ends to email are examples of variables beyond the teachers control which would have great influence on a project's success. The findings are, I believe, reliable enough to give a good impression of the general benefits of establishing an email link between schools in different countries, as well as the obstacles faced. It may be able to achieve a greater confidence on the specific developments in pupils' writing by looking more carefully at areas such as

- application of a grammatical point which pupils were forced in to using for the composition of an email;
- asking pupils for a copy of emails containing feedback from their partner;
- getting pupils to go through their work highlighting which items of vocabulary, grammar or tenses they have obtained purely from correspondence with their partner.
- looking at contact over a longer period of time than I did (six months of email orientated work).

As mentioned, I would carry out this project again, but with some modifications and different ways of approaching it as discussed above. It has been an enjoyable experience for both myself and the pupils involved, and will have hopefully helped to develop stronger links between the pupils in the two countries.

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Web links:

- support on using ICT in teaching. Also contains details of school-based ICT research and further links.

www.cilt.org.uk resources, information and support on all aspects of modern languages.

www.linguanet.org.uk - materials and information for languages teachers and learners

www.vtc.ngfl.gov.uk - provides support for using ICT in teaching across the curriculum.

Appendices

Appendix 1

TEACHING MATERIALS FOR PERFECT TENSE

sein + das Perfekt

Some verbs use part of 'sein' instead of 'haben' in the perfect tense

sein

ich bin	wir sind
du bist	Ihr seid
es/er/sie/man ist	Sie sind
	sie sind

These mainly involve movement - do not translate word for word

gehen	To walk/go	gegangen
fahren	To go (transport)	gefahren
schwimmen	To swim	geschwommen
fliegen	To fly	gefliegen
steigen	To climb	gestiegen
reiten	To ride	geritten
passieren	to happen	Es ist passiert
folgen	to follow	gefolgt
kommen	to come	gekommen
geschehen	to happen	geschehen

+ compounds eg aus gehen → aus gegangen
an kommen → angekommen
aus steigen → ausgestiegen
ab fahren → abgefahren

Das Perfekt

To talk about the past (something you have done or that happened in the past), you use mostly the perfect tense.

• Hast du den Film gesehen? Have you seen the film?
• Ich bin in die Stadt gegangen. I went to town

Each phrase is made with part of haben or sein plus a past participle.

Ich habe den Film gesehen I have seen the film

Ich bin in die Stadt gegangen I have been in the town (I went to town)

Formation of past participle

Weak verbs (regular)
Find infinitive = machen
Remove -en : mach X -
Add ge- : gemach ✓ gesehen
Add -t : gemacht X -

Strong (irregular)
Find infinitive = sehen
Remove -en : seh X -
Add ge- : geseh ✓ gesehen
Add -en : gesehen X -

Appendix 2

CHRISTMAS TEXT

Weihnachten

In der Weihnachtsferien bin ich nach Deutschland zu meiner Familie gefahren. Wir haben Cambridge um 9 Uhr morgens verlassen und sind mit dem Auto und dem Shuttle-Zug nach Heidelberg gefahren. Dort sind wir um 22 Uhr angekommen.

Am nächsten Tag, den 24. Dezember, habe ich bis 10 Uhr ausgeschlafen. Mit meiner Mutter habe ich unser Essen vorbereitet. Dann haben wir den Weihnachtsbaum geschmückt und die Krippe ausgestellt. Meine Mutter hat Kerzen auf den Kaminsims und an die Fenster gestellt. Traditionell essen die Deutschen am Heiligabend eine Gans. Wir haben aber Lachs und einen Feldsalat gegessen.

Um 17 Uhr sind wir mit meinen Geschwister und Eltern zur Kirche gegangen und danach haben wir zusammen gegessen. Dann hat mein Vater die Kerzen am Christbaum angezündet und wir haben einige Weihnachtslieder gesungen. Nachdem meine Mutter die Weihnachtsgeschichte vorgelesen hatte, war endlich Bescherung. Wir haben unsere Geschenke ausgepackt und dann noch lange zusammen gegessen.

Am Weihnachtstag haben wir uns mit Verwandten getroffen und alle zusammen im Restaurant zu Mittag gegessen. In der Nacht hatte es geschneit, so daß wir nach dem Essen im Schnee spaceren gegangen sind; nach einer Schneeballschlacht sind wir nach Hause gegangen.

1. Was sind die Paare?

a. Weihnachtsferien	1 Candles
b. Weihnachtsbaum	2 Christmas cards
c. Kerzen	3 Christmas holiday
d. Heiligabend	4 Opening of presents
e. eine Krippe	5 Christmas stories
f. Weihnachtslieder	6 A Crib
g. Weihnachtsgeschichte	7 Neighbours
h. Bescherung	8 a snowball fight
i. Verwandten	9 Christmas tree
j. Schneeballschlacht	10 Christmas Eve

2. How did the person travel to Germany?
 a) When did they arrive?
 b) What did she + the mother prepare?
 c) What did they do afterwards?
 d) What is it traditional to eat in Germany?
 e) What did the person do at 17.00?
 f) What did the father do?
 g) What happened after the mother read Xmas stories?
 h) What did the family do afterwards?
 i) Who did the family meet on Christmas Day?
 j) What did they do after eating?

3. List all the past participles in the text. Then try to find the infinitive they originally come from.

Appendix 3

Your views and opinions on emailing and German

Name:

Class:

The statements below are things that students sometimes feel about German and using email. Thinking about yourself in relation to these areas, give your honest opinion about them. Read each statement then ring the number which best fits your view. There is also space for you to make further comments explaining your view on each statement.

- **Yes, I agree**
 - **More yes than no. I tend to agree.**
 - **I'm not sure. I don't really have a view.**
 - **More no than yes. I tend to disagree.**
 - **No. I disagree.**
-
- Sending regular emails will help me to become more confident in writing German ... 1 2 3 4 5

 - My exchange partner writes to me mostly in English 1 2 3 4 5

 - Letter writing by hand and then posting it is more efficient than email 1 2 3 4 5

 - Emailing my partner is preferable to posting a hand-written letter 1 2 3 4 5

 - My ICT skills will improve through regular email contact with my partner 1 2 3 4 5

 - I will be able to understand how to use tenses better through writing emails 1 2 3 4 5

 - I am likely to take GCSE German in year 10 1 2 3 4 5

 - I will have a better range of German words from having to write emails in German... 1 2 3 4 5

 - I expect to use a dictionary more to help write emails to my partner 1 2 3 4 5

 - I expect I'll remain in contact with my partner 1 2 3 4 5

 - My reading skills will be helped by reading emails from my partner 1 2 3 4 5

 - Emailing my partner regularly will help improve my German grammar1 2 3 4 5

- I will probably carry on with German next year 1 2 3 4 5
- My use of tenses will improve though sending emails in German 1 2 3 4 5
- Regular email contact in German will help build my confidence in writing German .. 1 2 3 4 5
- My writing will become more grammatically accurate through sending emails in German 1 2 3 4 5
- I am more likely to send my partner an email than handwriting a letter 1 2 3 4 5
- I expect my ICT skills to develop through emailing my partner 1 2 3 4 5
- Email is better for keeping in contact than posting a letter 1 2 3 4 5
- I'd like to do German but it doesn't fit into my choices for year 10 1 2 3 4 5
- I will need to look up more German words to help compose my email..... 1 2 3 4 5
- From reading my partner's emails, my understanding of written German will improve 1 2 3 4 5
- Most of the emails I receive from my partner are in English 1 2 3 4 5
- If options were not restricted, I'd continue with German 1 2 3 4 5
- I think my range of vocabulary will widen through writing emails in German 1 2 3 4 5
- I hope to keep in contact with my exchange partner 1 2 3 4 5

Appendix 4

Pupil interview questions - May 2001

- 1 Has sending regular emails helped you to become more confident in writing German?
- 2 Does your partner still write to you mostly in English?
- 3 If you contact your partner is it more likely to be an email than by letter? What are the advantages of this method? Which do you prefer?
- 4 Have your ICT skills improved through email contact with your partner? If so, how? What have you learnt that is new?
- 5 Has your use of tenses improved through sending emails in German? In what way? Do you feel more confident at using tenses?
- 6 Has your range of vocabulary improved through writing emails in German? Why do you think it has improved?
- 7 Have your reading skills improved by reading emails from your partner?
- 8 Has your writing become more grammatically accurate through sending emails in German?
- 9 Do you feel you have improved in German in any other ways from emailing your partner?
- 10 On the whole, has emailing been of benefit to your German? Do you think you would have made this progress if the only contact had been handwriting a letter?
- 11 Did having to email it to your partner make you want to achieve a higher standard of work than with pieces you have had to write for class? Why is that?

Did you mind sending classwork to your partner?

This piece of work

In what ways did it help to write it up on the computer rather than by hand? What are the advantages of using ICT to support your work?

Would you have preferred to hand write this piece or use ICT? Why?

What are the good points in your opinion about this piece of work? What makes them good points?

Comparison

Which piece of work do you feel is better? Why?

Was either of them easier to write? Why was that?

Commentary

What you had to do.

What you think the good points are.

How confident you felt about writing each piece.

Which you feel is your best and why.

Which one has the best tenses in?

What did you have to look up in a dictionary?

What did you have to ask your teacher about?

Which are the sentences which you wrote with lots help from the example, and which ones you added by yourself.

Did having to email each piece make you think more carefully about what you were writing? What sort of things did you have to think more about?

Appendix 5

