Victoria Gubkina, Tatyana Morozova

National Mining University

SOME BENEFITS OF USING E-MAIL IN DISTANT LEARNING

E-mail, which is considered to be one of the computer related communications methods, is often called the mother of all Internet applications. Because of developing networks learners of foreign languages can use this application of communication in the targeted language, including composing and exchanging emails with other students in the classroom or around the world.

E-mail provides a place for meeting and communicating in a foreign language outside of the class. Students need not be in a specific classroom at particular time of the day to communicate with other students or a teacher in a targeted language. They can log in and compose e-mail at their own place or an internet club and thus increase the amount of time they can spend for writing and reading in the foreign language in a communicative context. By linking students outside of the classroom e-mail also provides a means for communicating with native speakers in an authentic communicative environment. Interaction via e-mail creates a feeling of reality to students' communicative efforts which could be considered artificial ones if only in the classroom and produces realism of spoken languages due to its interactive and informal essence. Written communication gives the possibility for each learner to preserve the entire communication and has a great effect in the targeted language.

There are a wide variety of activities which could be used in the course of long distant learning by means of using e-mail. They can be divided into groups and one-on-one e-mail exchanges. Group e-mail exchanges provide students with a practical possibility to communicate with others in the targeted language where students can create their own mailing lists or where the teacher can set up a class e-mail list.

Varied activities can be planned for use within a students' group or between a few other groups in different locations. Students could also join a great number of forums having interesting topics to be discussed or share their own experience on chosen ones. Such e-mailing is separated from face-to face contact and thus it eliminates the stress of immediate demand for reply and students can take their time to

formulate their thoughts. When e-mail communication takes place within one group, the teacher has no problems to link communicative tasks to the topic being discussed in the class and thus provide additional time and involvement with that topic.

Teachers can create e-mail assignments at pre-class, post class or supplementary activities and each of these activities has its own goals and advantages.

A pre-class e-mail assignment is designed for carrying out groundwork and avoids wasting class time by e-mail exchanges the students can cooperate on a list of possible subjects for this assignment to save class time. E-mail is perfect for preparing in advance for class discussions where a teacher can assign a debate topic and ask students to start discussion through e-mail thus the students will have understanding of both sides of the problem and will be able to have a lively and well-planned discussion when it takes place.

For post-class activities they can include e-mail assignments to reinforce or enrich what students have done in the classroom and this can encourage students to revise class discussions, clarify opinions expressed in the class debate or formulate new ideas and views which they were not ready to present in the class.

Supplementary activities such as a reading circle can be proposed because it could encourage students to do extensive reading outside of class and share their opinions via e-mail. This can be done in the form of weekly summaries of news stories to the class e-mail list.

Another version of e-mail interaction is the collaborative project which focuses on reading and writing exchange between students outside of the immediate language learning context. This could be a students' group from another university, city or even another country. Such activity makes it possible to exchange ideas and views with a new audience with the emphasis on communication. Additional benefits to be mentioned of using risk-taking strategies in the class are experimentation with new vocabulary and increased motivation because of the need to do it properly for a long distant audience. Each group acts as the authority on its native language and learns much about the targeted language while fulfilling this task.