

needs, learners' lack and wants, professional and personal information — has to be taken into account.

4. Needs analysis is not a single affair but a recurrent process, which might influence the changes in the course.

5. The findings from a needs analysis are not absolute but relative and subjective.

6. There is no single set of needs for all groups of learners, though, on the other hand, learners' needs are not necessarily unique in each case, they can be systematised.

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## **WRITING AS A PERSONAL PRODUCT IN VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT**

Forewordilities of the Internet are limited

Electronic communication has established a new inventory of forms for interaction. Although apparently more limited and less rich than interactions in which the participants are physically present, 'virtual communication' also provides new opportunities and new problems in the presentation of self.

Teachers dealing with CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) sooner or later come to realise the specifics of the teaching process in a computer lab with 5 -10 PC's. The teacher-student relationship gradually assumes the form of joint work in virtual environment. This environment, depending on the resources of the school, may be limited, closed inside a local intranet, or open to the vast resources of the Internet. But even if your PC-lab has access to World-Wide Web, a good deal of time in your on-line language lesson will be dedicated to things unavoidably individual. Individual and typewritten. Compiling glosses, making grammar and lexical exercises, text processing and compression — all sorts of serious reading/writing work are performed individually. In short, one might even have the impression that the computer makes your students fulfil serious work in isolation. It is just like in a village, where each labourer works in his or her own field (pun intended). But computer-literate students have a strong feeling of belonging to a larger entity. Their desire to share experience is sincere, and becomes a motivating factor for joint work in virtual environment. So, if your students are prepared for communicating in virtual environment, let it be so.

Probably, your hardware parameters and course requirements will be among the decisive factors in choosing concrete software tools. We would like to draw your attention to both 'local' and 'global' approaches towards using such software and software-related items as:

1) ICHAT — a real-time programme for classroom use,

2) ICQ — a web feature, for enhancing the interpersonal / group communicative competence of students,

3) personal pages — a web feature, for stimulating students' creativity within a new writing genre.

## 1. ICHAT

### Classroom mode and self access mode

There are many ways in which ICHAT can be used, but for convenience we shall divide these into two broad types of situation, which are commonly termed *classroom mode* and *self-access mode*. In *classroom mode* the stimulating materials (for example, very short stories to start the chat with, or an initial topic) are chosen by the teacher, who may also exert some control over the way in which the activity is conducted. In *self-access mode* learners are free to choose the topic themselves and to work with it in any way they please. This may take place in a learning centre, or when learners work with a computer at home. It should be emphasised that the distinction being drawn here is based primarily on the degree of teacher control rather than the physical location or number of learners involved.

Similarly, 'self-access' does not necessarily imply that learners work individually, but rather means that they determine the form and content of the activity. Working in pairs or groups with ICHAT is not only a way of making good use of expensive resources; it is also enjoyable and in many ways more fruitful than individual self study.

### Using ICHAT in classroom mode

To begin with, you may use ICHAT — with some texts (initial topics, clues, etc.) prepared in advance in order to provoke communication — as a treat for your class on a Friday afternoon or the end of term. There is nothing wrong with this, but ICHAT is also, and principally, a serious and intellectually stimulating language learning activity that, sooner or later, you will want to integrate into the main stream of your curriculum. To do this you will need to think about the choice of texts and topics for discussion, about any preparatory activities and materials, which you will use to help your learners, and about managing the lesson.

### Forming groups

Probably you will find that physical factors, especially the size and quality of your monitor screens and the arrangement of furniture, are quite important in determining the optimum number of learners in each group. Every learner should be able to read the screen without difficulty and to reach the keyboard with one hand. If these conditions are not met learners on the periphery of the group tend to feel excluded and lose interest after a while. In practice this usually means that the maximum effective group size is five: one at the keyboard and two on each side. If you have too many learners (or not enough computers) to enable your class to work in groups of this size, it may be better to plan the lesson so that while some learners are working with ICHAT others are engaged in a different activity away from the computer. These learners will have their turn with ICHAT on another occasion. Otherwise there is no reason why groups should not be self-selecting.

### Supervising the activity

If your learners are working in groups, encourage them to take turns at the keyboard. Special typing skills are not necessary and you will find that learners rapidly become familiar with the keyboard.

One of the advantages of ICHAT is that it induces learners to develop their own problem solving strategies. This is highly challenging and motivating. Of special value is the need to learn how to correctly join chat, how not to lose the thread of conversation, and how to quit elegantly.

While you are watching your learners chat you will probably be strongly tempted to intervene when you think they get into difficulties. It is best to resist this temptation as far as possible. Try to limit your interventions to hints which will set them thinking along the right lines, such as 'Have you tried this word?' or simply 'Spelling!' Spelling, incidentally, is a frequent source of difficulty, and ICHAT will show up any weaknesses, which your learners have in this respect. It is a good idea to have an electronic dictionary installed at all computers, or let each group have a dictionary in which they can check spellings.

After a while, when you and your learners gain confidence in using ICHAT, you will probably find that the activity as it manages itself and your intervention will become unnecessary. You can devote your attention to learners who are working on other tasks, or you can move towards a guided self access system, where you prepare your learners for specific texts and let them work with ICHAT in their own time.

The printout of some real-time chat is given as a sample below. You can easily see the turntaking markers; actual spelling has been preserved (See sample 1)

### SAMPLE 1

<T-Rex> How are you?

<Bill> Hello, everybody. How did you enjoy the first day of the conference?

<T-Rex> hello, colleagues!

<T-Rex> It is great!

<Bouncer> Jane Bond is sending her love

<Bouncer> I wonder whether we can have a portrait of an Average Ms conference participant?

<Rambo> where are you?

<T-Rex> where are you from?

<Hellraiser> we are here, we are heroes!

<Rambo> I am sitting in Minsk, and you?

<Bouncer> Stop wasting time. We're all here in the room working on into this wonderful chatroom

<Daddie> hello

<T-Rex> What do you mean by wasting time? We are busy with such an interesting work.

<Rambo> Anyone home?

<Daddie> hello. We greet you at the conference!

<Yelena> Hi!

<Bouncer> Darlings! I like the way you are into this stuff!

<Bouncer> Well, how about getting down to business. My question is: Do you like this presentation?

<Daddie> hello. We greet you at the conference! Please write to Mickey Mouse.

<Yelena> It is a very hard work to make the first steps

<Bouncer> Mickey, how are you? No problems, dude?

<Hellraiser> Rambo, I've recognized you !

<T-Rex> Sure. We DO like it immensely!

## 2. ICQ

What is ICQ and why is everyone talking about it?

ICQ is a software package that enables users (e.g. teachers) to see when their buddies (e.g. students) are online and contact them through either the dialogue or message facility. To work with ICQ your computer class should have access to Internet. It allows real-time communication and enables users to really talk to each other. The Internet offers ample opportunities for communication with native speakers. Students become fascinated by the simple act of 'chatting' around the world. Once they discover this, they get hooked very quickly. So, a new type of learning environment is emerging, which represents *a shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered learning environment* (Warschauer, 1997).

So, ICQ (I Seek You) is a World Wide Web-based program that lets you find your friends and associates online in real time. You can create a Contact List containing only people you want to have there, you can send them messages, chat with them (both *classroom* and *individual mode*), and send files. This form of communication is very appealing to students, although some teachers might look at it with a wary eye. In fact, certain university teachers prefer email for contacting their students on the web. There may be certain difficulties in arranging group work on the web, the technical problems of connecting, and of arranging the timetable for chat. There must be some careful planning of work on the part of the teacher who must find the best ratio of group/individual work on the web for each session of chat within the framework of his/her course.

## WEB PAGES

Web pages provide more opportunity for creative embodiment of your students' selves, though less for interaction. They can present photos of themselves, favourite graphics, snatches of speech, and share their interests and contacts. The home page provides 'a locus for electronic self'. This fact makes home pages quite valuable in learning how to arrange information in English (and not only in English). The expressive resources of HTML, the Hypertext Markup Language, are limited and not altogether under the author's control. It seems that the main things available are the informational content, and the language 'dressing' of the text (and these are what novelists have used for years, after all). From a language teacher's viewpoint, valuable is the possibility of teaching the norms of both composition and of verbal form of such messages.

Attempts have been made to classify home pages into categories. It may be useful for students of English to know these categories, so as to have some bearings on the 'genre' in which they might write. Hugh Miller (1996) suggests the following categories:

1) Hi, this is me (as an individual). The purpose of the page seems to be purely self- presentation. Content may include: this is what I look like, this is where I'm from, this is what I study, these are my favourite bands/pastimes/books, here are links to my friends' home pages, and here are some more neat/cool links.

2) This is me (as a member of an organisation). The most common examples are faculty home pages. A brief CV, teaching and contact details, timetable arrangements are the requirements, but some people choose to add more.

3) Hi, this is us. These are family home pages, sometimes titled as such. The content is more likely to be about membership, group structure, and history than about the personal self of the individual posting the page. Details of individuals emerge further down the tree of links, and they are often third party descriptions rather than first party. There is more emphasis on the personal achievements of the people presented than in individual home pages, and in structure and content, they are more like sets of pages produced by institutions rather than persons.

4) An advertisement for myself. There are some subcategories here:

4a) Cool style. There is content to show that the person is particularly skilful, interesting, or striking. More mundane information may be left out, so the whole intent of the page is 'self-promotion' and there is no pretence of the spurious objectivity of 'self-presentation'.

4b) The electronic curriculum vitae. A very straightforward and honest attempt to gain employment and a way of making your abilities and occupational interests available round the world.

4c) An advertisement for the service I can provide. This falls in a range between the CV and the impersonal corporate advert. Those that are most a form of 'self-presentation' are from people whose services depend on particular personal skill or charisma: designers and artists are two examples.

### Summary

Writing in virtual environment is a challenging and motivating activity which can acquire various forms, and rely on different software packages. Teachers can start with ICHAT in closed internal networks, and after your students have gained some experience (provided that you have a connection to the web) the potentialities of ICQ and web home pages can be used for enhancing the communicative competence of your students. Probably, your regular work with the software described above will mark a shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered learning environment.

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## **О РОЛИ ВНЕАУДИТОРНОЙ РАБОТЫ В ПРОЦЕССЕ ОБУЧЕНИЯ ИНОСТРАННОМУ ЯЗЫКУ**

Обучение иностранному языку, как правило, длительный процесс, и ощутимые результаты появляются не сразу. Мотивы, которыми руководствуются учащиеся, угасают, и интерес к учебному предмету падает. В данный момент начинается поиск тех стимулов, которые способны вызвать у