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**THE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION IN AN E-PAL PROGRAM ON
LEARNING AND MOTIVATION IN AN EIGHTH GRADE FRENCH
CLASSROOM**

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study documents the experiences of eleven eighth-grade French students and their teacher as they take part in an e-pal exchange with a similar class in France. The study explores how the exchange affected the learning and motivation of the American students. The students communicated in both their native language and the target language in order to have opportunities to both read and write in French. Class discussions related to the exchange added an oral component. At the end of the study, students completed a PowerPoint project, in which they highlighted what they learned. The study suggests that an e-pal exchange engages students. This is credited to the authentic audience with whom they were communicating. It also suggests that an e-pal exchange exposes students to additional vocabulary through the modeling of their e-pals as well as their own desires to seek out new vocabulary in order to communicate effectively. The authentic context in which the new words and phrases were introduced is recognized as the reason students were able to continue to correctly use the vocabulary. As a result, the author concludes that an e-pal exchange can increase student learning and motivation.

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RESEARCHER STANCE

I began learning French in ninth grade when e-mail was probably in its infancy. I quickly decided that French was my favorite subject and could not learn it quickly enough. By tenth grade, I knew I wanted to study abroad in France. I urged my mother and teacher to help me do so, though neither seemed to think the time was right. They knew me well and looking back, I think it would have been too soon. Several years later, when I was a junior in college, I spent the year in Montpellier, France. Unlike the majority of American students studying there, who rented apartments with fellow English speakers, I chose to live in the dorms with the French students. This, I believed, would allow me to communicate entirely in French and become fluent in the language, as I had aspired to since the ninth grade.

Before going to Montpellier, I studied French for six years. Throughout four years in high school, I completed many worksheets, textbook activities, and some partner work. I earned straight As, yet my French was weak. I was not familiar with the native French accent, since I had never spoken to a Francophone, and audio activities were not a part of our regular curriculum. Finally, in college, I went beyond the standard textbook activities to write some essays and even had Francophone professors. As a result, my skills in French improved. Still, I could not converse at length or in depth. I believe this is because I did not have the opportunity to communicate in context in French. I used French

because I wanted to learn it and because I had to in class, but I never used it in any real world situation. That all changed when I went to France, where I communicated in French in order to survive and beyond that, to get to know people and develop relationships. French was finally real.

I want French to be real for my students by helping them learn French in context. For this reason, I try to avoid the standard textbook exercises as much as possible, though I admit that at times they seem to be inevitable assignments. However, I prefer role-playing activities and skits that require students to converse in French for an entire conversation. The students generally enjoy them because they are not typical classroom exercises. They can interact with others, which they love, because most of my students are very social. Also, since they are in middle school, they are still at an age when it is “cool” to perform in class. Still, I am aware, as are the students, that the skits are fictitious scenarios that the students play out because I ask them to. While the topics are appropriate for my students, they are not driven by my students or by any existing circumstances. Unfortunately, my students do not have the opportunity to communicate with native speakers. While I have cassettes and videos with Francophones, these tools do not compare to the opportunity of interacting with native speakers. Something is missing from my students’ experiences, the link between the classroom and the real world. With the help of the technology available today, I hope to close that gap.

In order to find answers to my question, “How will participation in an e-pal program affect the learning and motivation of my eighth grade French students?” I am going to implement an e-pal exchange. E-pals is one way to use technology in the classroom to go beyond the walls of the classroom and communicate with French speakers. I hope that this e-pal project will make French real now for my students. I do not want them to have to wait years like I did. I want them to be able to use French for a purpose other than getting a good grade. I want my students to feel the need to use it. I want them to use it as a means, not an end. I want them to be able to do what I wanted at their age, to learn a language and use it to communicate with speakers of that language in a real life context. I hope they walk away with improved language skills, a realization that learning in school does relate to their world outside of school, motivation to be lifelong learners, and perhaps even a new friend they will keep in touch with for years to come.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As technology is increasingly integrated into classrooms around the world, foreign language teachers and learners may benefit from its inclusion. Technology helps teachers incorporate authentic tasks into their curriculum. Because of technology, teachers can expect more from students and offer new opportunities not previously possible (Means & Olson, 1994). Classes divided by oceans can now be connected by e-mail.

However, “technology alone will not improve the quality of education, but when integrated with curriculum and instruction, it can be a powerful educational tool” (Reed & McNergney, 1999). Fishman & Zhang (2003), Assistant Professors of Learning Technologies at the University of Michigan and Co-Principal Investigators of the Center for Highly Interactive Computing in Education and the Center for Learning Technologies in Urban Schools, identifies proper planning for technology as necessary, though challenging, for schools to reap the benefits. The technology plan described by Fishman includes learning objectives for the use of technology, implementation strategies, and ongoing evaluation to ensure that the objectives are achieved. According to AL-Bataineh & Brooks (2003) of Illinois State University, when using technology, some important issues that must be considered are staff training, adequate equipment, continuous funding, and how to appropriately integrate technology to increase learning. Considering these

issues and addressing them within one's own school district will assist in maximizing the advantages of technology use in the classroom.

AL-Bataineh & Brooks (2003) note the importance of not only making technology available but also meeting the challenge of using it to differentiate instruction for students with various learning styles. The key to successful individualized instruction and implementation is the teacher. According to Reed & McNergney (1999), technology appropriately integrated into the curriculum enables students to develop higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as enhance learning. Reed & McNergney describe technology use as successful when it engages students, helping them to become independent learners.

E-pals enables students to take on active roles in the learning experience and to go beyond the confines of the school walls. They can communicate in the target language with native speakers during the school day. E-pals offers the opportunity to communicate in the target language with a real audience for a real purpose.

This real world experience makes language learning authentic. "Authentic tasks amalgamate complex performances in the same way real-life problems do" (Saphier & Gower, 1997, p. 478). Gordon (1998) identifies the following characteristics of authentic learning: authentic learning requires students to make decisions and take actions that have concrete results; it focuses not only on

knowledge but also on what one can do with available resources; it develops knowledge, skills, and attitude simultaneously; it is meaningful to students; it increases student understanding by building on previous experience; it requires students to publicly show their learning which is held to real life standards of quality. Newmann (1996) defines authentic academic achievement by “construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and value beyond school.” (p. 282)

According to Newmann & Marks (1996), authentic classroom instruction includes opportunities for higher-order thinking, extensive communication between teacher and/ or students to improve understanding, exploration of connections and relationships of content, and connections to the real world beyond the classroom. Newmann & Marks explain that authentic learning has positive effects on student learning because it involves application or analysis of information rather than imitation, students’ understandings are shared and verified publicly, and there is value beyond success in school.

Some researchers believe that teaching content as it relates to the real world rather than in theory increases student learning and retention because students must “draw on [their] knowledge of subskills and facts, but they are put to use in service of a larger task that is realistic” (Saphier & Gower, p. 478). This idea is supported by researchers at the University of Georgia’s College of Education, who spent five years conducting eight case studies and cross-case

analysis focusing on how new teachers incorporated authentic learning. Predmore (2005) described two of the participating teachers as a high school family and consumer sciences teacher and a middle school life sciences teacher. According to Predmore, the researchers concluded that students learn more when teachers used authentic approaches. The students also felt they learned more. One reason is that students were motivated because they observed real world connections.

“Motivating students consists of making students receptive to and excited about learning, as well as making them aware of the importance and value of learning itself” (Stronge, p. 18). Some students work hard because they are motivated by good grades or positive reactions from teachers and parents. Other students are unmotivated to put their best effort into assignments that only their teachers will read. According to Stronge, “An effective teacher recognizes that students vary in their motivation levels” (p. 18).

Effects on motivation became evident when Tebo-Messina and Blough (1989), a college English professor and seventh grade English teacher, respectively, organized a letter exchange between their classes in order to provide their students with a real audience for their writing. The educators believed this might improve their students’ writing, which they felt was “artificial and forced”. The project engaged students, who wanted to be understood by their pen pals and make a good impression. The students realized their writing was not without purpose and they developed as writers. Both educators observed an increase in

motivation, as their students' writing became a true effort to communicate with a real reader.

Stanford and Siders (2001) found evidence of increased motivation documented in the positive feedback they received from students, who participated in their study of the effects an e-pal project had on middle school students' writing skills. The students were so motivated to write, they did not even regard the communications as an academic requirement.

Most students do not interpret getting to know another student as an assignment but rather an interesting experience. This is evidenced by the findings of Tudini and Rubino (1998). The two professors, who teach Italian at Australian universities, wanted to increase the purposefulness of students' writing by providing them with an authentic audience. Throughout the one semester program, partners exchanged e-mails about assigned writing topics. At the end, both professors concluded that the project increased motivation, proof of which was obvious in the extra effort students demonstrated in their writing. The results of a questionnaire they asked students to complete showed that the majority of students enjoyed getting to know someone over the Internet and found the program useful because their writing had a real purpose and audience.

Communicating with a real audience can motivate students not only to write but also to write well. Feeling the need to be understood, students tend to write more clearly and correctly. McClanahan (2001) studied the effects an e-pal

program had on students' writing as a result of writing for an authentic audience. She focused on a high school literature class in the US during an exchange with a high school literature class in Moscow. Fifty-eight percent of the American students reported paying closer attention to grammar, punctuation, spelling, and clarity because they were writing to be understood by a real reader.

In an effort to write well and communicate clearly, students may refer to their e-pals' writing. Particularly when learning a foreign language, students can learn new vocabulary or phrasing from their e-pals. The modeling the more knowledgeable pal performs helps to enhance student learning. Kaufman (1998) analyzed the e-pal communications of his university ESL students, who corresponded with one another as well as ELS learners from other universities, in order to determine whether the students felt they were learning from the e-mail and exchange and whether he felt they were really being challenged. The questionnaires Kaufman asked his students to complete supported his hypothesis that students perceived a greater benefit in communicating when they had more skillful pals. Kaufman concluded that working with more knowledgeable peers helped students develop their language skills more efficiently.

Hadaway (1990) noted the benefits of modeling in her study, which paired public school ESL students with university teacher preparation students for a one year pen pal program. The goal was to expand the ESL students' language skills and knowledge of the writing process. Hadaway found positive linguistic results,

attributed to the authenticity of the program and the modeling it presented in all areas of language, including slang and informal conversation.

While students can learn new vocabulary from their partner, students can also seek out and use new vocabulary on their own in order to communicate clearly and be understood by their partner. Liu (2002), an American professor, coordinated an e-pal program between a second grade classroom in the United States and one in China, in order to determine how the participants' school learning experience and cross-cultural understanding would be affected. Although the program allowed the Chinese students to apply, reinforce, and improve their English language skills, the American students language skills improved as well. The American participants also learned new, challenging English words that they were able to use correctly by themselves. Liu credited this to the meaningful purpose of the students' correspondence.

As a result of using new, more difficult vocabulary, students may be able to write more detailed e-mails. During the first two weeks of a study, Stanford (2001) collected baseline data from three groups: e-pal, pen pal, and control. At the end of the study, the greatest progress was observed in the e-pal group, where every student demonstrated an increase in total words written. In addition to being longer, their e-mails were more complex. Stanford concluded that these data support the importance of a genuine audience in a social context, which an e-pal exchange offers.

According to Cummins (1999), improved language skills can fall under two categories: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). The former refers to language used in common speech and is more easily learned than the latter, which refers to challenging and abstract academic language. BICS is learned through everyday conversation, while CALP is learned through education in the second language.

Improving language skills is one benefit of e-pals. Another possible opportunity is to learn more about another culture. Pacheco (2001), a teacher of Spanish, paired her fourth graders with students in Russia for an e-pal project. She agreed to the exchange because she thought it would help her and her class better understand Russia, a country with which the US has had strained relations in the past. Sometimes the teachers assigned topics and other times they did not. The classes participated in a variety of activities: sending birthday and holiday e-cards, making and sending gifts that represent the students' culture, field trips to see Russian dance and a Russian comedian, learning basic Russian, playing chess and checkers on the Internet, private chats on the Internet, exchanging videos of themselves and their school, making student web pages, and celebrating holidays of their e-pals. According to Pacheco, the students were excited about the exchange and learned a great deal about each other's culture.

Liu (2002) found that the interaction an e-pal project offered, engaged the students in learning about one another. They were eager to learn about their

partners' school and their country. The American and Chinese students learned about each other's culture by identifying similarities and differences between themselves and their partners.

Motivation and learning, advantages evidenced in these studies, are affected by a student's attitude. A positive attitude and confidence can improve students' academic experience. Fargen (1996) conducted a study of an e-mail program between his high school, alternative, physical education students and university kinesiology majors. He did not assign writing topics to his students, though the university students were encouraged to discuss physical activity themes. At the end of the ten-week program, Fargen concluded that the e-mail exchange improved his students' quality of learning, since attitudes, motivation, and relationships were all positively affected. This was observed in the students' increased willingness to participate as the project progressed, positive statements made by the students, their genuine interest in reading e-mails from their pals, and the increased respect they demonstrated towards classmates and teachers.

Hadaway (1990), whose study focused on instructional goals, also discovered emotional results. The students experienced increased self-confidence. The partners were a source of support and encouragement. The correspondence offered a safe, non-confrontational opportunity to take risks and practice the target language.

McClanahan's (2001) study also focused on student writing. However, the results demonstrated more than what the students wrote in their e-mails. She triangulated her data collection by conducting pre- and post-project attitudinal surveys, e-mail document analysis, student observation, student and teacher interviews, and a post-project group peer-response session. McClanahan discovered the students felt more confident about their writing.

According to the literature, authentic learning encourages students to build on prior experiences, apply knowledge, and is meaningful to students outside the classroom. While planning is necessary for successful integration of technology, the authenticity of the real audience an e-pal program provides is key in its potential positive effects. The literature suggests that student motivation will increase due to the observable connections of the exchange to the real world. The literature also suggests that modeling and the desire to be understood will lead to improved language skills. According to documented studies, cultural awareness, attitude, and self-confidence will also increase.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

My school district services 1,512 students. For the community, education is a priority. In 2004, 89% of students went on to four-year colleges, 8% attended two-year colleges, leaving 3% of students who did not go to college. Like the other schools within the district, the middle school is well equipped with technology. There are two computer labs, at least one computer in each classroom, and sixty laptops on ten carts that may be brought into any classroom. Also, all of my students have at least one computer in their home. The town is an affluent community, where low-income housing and free school lunches do not exist.

In order to answer, “How will participation in an e-pal program affect the learning and motivation of my eighth grade French students?” the first thing I had to do was find a class in France. While it was not necessary to find a class who comes from a similar town, I believed it necessary to find a class similar in size and motivation. I accessed epals.com on the Internet and created a profile, in which I gave a basic description of my middle school class. I explained that there are seven girls and four boys, in their third year of French, who live in a small town, located approximately 40 minutes from New York City and that we were very motivated. I was able to find a teacher whose school profile seemed similar. She taught in a small school district in northern France and had a class of thirteen students in their third year of English. Perhaps most importantly, after e-mailing

with her, I believed her to be as serious and motivated as I was to carry out an e-pal exchange. We decided to begin our exchange during the first week of school and to send e-mails approximately every two weeks thereafter. We brainstormed some possible topics but decided that the first e-mail would be an introduction and we would decide on topics as we went along. We also agreed to vary whether our students would be reading or writing in the target language so that both our classes could gain experience in comprehension as well as communicating their own thoughts in the target language.

After locating a class in France that seemed to share similar goals, I asked for my principal's permission to conduct my study. She agreed and signed the consent form (see Appendix A). Then, I sent two permission slips home with my eleven students. The first asked for parental permission for my students to participate in the study (see Appendix B). The second asked for the parents to participate by answering a questionnaire at the end of the study (see Appendix C). All of the parents gave me permission to collect data about my students and all of my students' mothers, with the exception of one, agreed to participate.

As a teacher researcher, I conducted a qualitative study and used the following methods:

Field Log

Throughout the e-mail exchange, I documented participant observations. These field notes describe specific observations, interactions, and statements. I

listened for reactions from my students while they were reading e-mails from their e-pals, as well as interactions between students while they were typing e-mails. In addition, I observed the students' body language. I initiated conversations with my students regarding the content. I recorded information about questions I asked my students and questions they asked me. This was done during the time students were reading e-mails from their partners, writing e-mails, and participating in class discussions. I was able to note comments, conversations, and body language that could have gone unnoticed during a busy class or been quickly forgotten about if not recorded. Then, by rereading these observations, I made interpretations, noted patterns, and focused on emerging themes. In my field log, I also documented my thoughts about how the project was progressing, helping me to reflect and learn throughout the process.

Student Journals

I asked students to write three journal entries. The students wrote their first entry, in which they shared their reactions to the project before beginning it, on the fourth day of school, after the e-pal project was introduced. The second entry was written on October 20, approximately halfway through the study. Students wrote their third and last entry in mid-December during the last week of the study. For each entry, I provided a list of questions (see Appendix D) for the students to address. However, I also encouraged the class to write any thoughts they were having about the project. Each questionnaire ended by asking what else

the students would like to share with me. This method provided insight regarding the attitudes, feelings, and opinions of my students. This feedback helped me to understand their perspectives of how the project was going and if they were noticing any changes in themselves.

Student E-mails

I read the e-mails my students received from their e-pals before my students received them. Likewise, I read the e-mails from my students to their e-pals before they were sent. A feature on epals.com allowed me to do this by automatically sending all correspondence to me for approval. Only with my approval could the messages be forwarded to their recipients. In addition, I asked the students to keep copies of all correspondence in their e-pal binders. I told the class I would use these e-mails to review each student's progress in the language. I looked for a variety of vocabulary being used, including new vocabulary presented in recent lessons that was relevant to the writing topic. I also looked for various types of sentence construction and the use of different tenses. In addition, I looked for indications of increased cultural awareness.

Informal Individual Interviews

I conducted informal interviews throughout the study to follow up and find out more about comments and reactions of the students, as well as to search for answers to my own new questions that arose.

Student Power Point Projects

At the end of the study, I assigned a Power Point project to the students. I asked them to create a presentation showing what they learned about their e-pals and what they learned from their e-pals. The former was factual information that they could take directly from the e-mails. For the latter, the students shared new vocabulary they learned and cultural insights. The presentations served as summaries of their e-pal experiences. They helped me to evaluate the nature and extent of the impact the exchange had on my students.

Questionnaire

I sent a questionnaire (see Appendix E) home to parents at the end of the study, asking them for impressions and feedback regarding their child's participation in the e-pal program. Before the study began, the parents of one student chose not to participate. Of the ten remaining students, nine returned questionnaires completed by their parents. Their feedback provided me with another perspective.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness and credibility were ensured throughout my study in several ways. First, I read existing literature about e-pal programs and designed my study with this research in mind. Second, I collected data using a variety of methods. My point of view is represented in the observations I conducted and the field notes I recorded. Data from my students' points of view were collected from

student journals and interviews. The parents offered their points of view in the questionnaire they completed at the end of the study. As a result, multiple perspectives are represented. Throughout the study, I recorded field notes from participant observations and informal interviews as they occurred or immediately after class. Also, data were collected over the course of three months. Therefore, my findings were not determined hastily but rather over time.

THE STORY

Introduction of E-Pal Project on First Day

My eighth grade class is the first group of students I taught for the third consecutive year, as a result of foreign language becoming part of the sixth grade full year academic curriculum two years ago. It is a small group, including four boys and seven girls. While one student is classified, there are no struggling students in this class. They are generally a conscientious group. Still, learning a new language presents a challenge. I chose to conduct my study with this group because of the class size and because after having been their teacher for two years, I didn't have to go through that initial period in the fall of getting to know the students like most teachers do. We would be able to jump right into the project. Furthermore, I felt that I could trust them to responsibly handle the independence this project offers. Also, in the past, this class preferred projects to tests, particularly making videos of skits they created. They seemed to be open to new and different ideas, particularly if there was any "fun" aspect. I thought they would find getting to know an e-pal fun and exciting.

I was really excited to introduce this project to my students. An e-pal program is something I had thought about implementing for a couple years, but I knew it would require a significant amount of planning. This year I found the time to outline my plan and was able to locate a class in France that shared similar

characteristics and goals. I didn't waste any time by presenting the idea to my students on the first day of school.

My 11 eighth grade French students entered class with smiles on their faces, chatting with me and with one another, apparently feeling comfortable returning to my classroom for a third year together. I began class by asking the students *en français* what they did during the summer. As I focused on each student to ask about the summer's events, the students' hesitance to switch to French was obvious in their smiles, giggles, and glances around the room at one another. Despite their claims of having forgotten everything, they managed to recall enough French to answer my questions and tell me about the camps they attended and the vacations they took. Next, I distributed the handout explaining the year's grading breakdowns. Finally, I came to "E-pal Project 20%." As I explained that we were going to have e-pals this year, I heard a couple students react with a hushed "ooh" and "cool". However, the class was quieter than I expected. They didn't know what "e-pal" meant. This surprised me, since all of them seem to know more about technology than I do. I explained, "E-pals are the same as pen pals except that you e-mail them instead of write letters." This quickly cleared up any confusion. Then, I explained that the teacher in France would pair her students with us, but their class had two more students than our's. "Would anyone be interested in having more than one e-pal?" I asked. Eileen's hand shot up immediately, "I'll have two." Ann asked, "Could I write the same

thing twice?" I said yes, but that some questions and answers would be unique to each person. "Yeah, ok. I'll do it," Ann decided. Then, Mindy asked, "Will you be looking at the e-mails?" The strong warnings of my principal flashed through my mind. "Yes!" I firmly assured her. "Your e-mails will be monitored extremely closely. I will read everything. E-mails sent to you will come to me first. You will receive them only after I approve them. And the e-mails you write will come directly to me when you hit "send." I have to approve them in order for them to be sent on. I know you wouldn't do anything out of line, but I have to warn you. There will be serious consequences with me and with Mr. Seiders if you write or send anything the slightest bit inappropriate." My response seemed to be clear to the students, since they then changed the subject. Paul asked, "Is their English any good? How do they sound?" "I don't know. I haven't communicated with any of the students. I've only corresponded with their teacher. So, we'll see." Cathy wanted to know if she could use instant messaging abbreviations. I helped her to realize how difficult it would be to understand by asking her to imagine if her e-pal wrote to her using French abbreviations. Elissa asked, "How much time before we have to write about a topic will we know?" I reassured her that they would have a few days, including class time. Since there were no more questions or comments about the project, I asked a few students what they thought as they were leaving class. Gerry and Jack shared concerns about "all the writing" in French. Cathy said she didn't know what to think because she didn't know to

whom she was writing, and Mary just said it was cool as she ran by. I was disappointed that everyone didn't display more excitement, but I figured they were just fearful of the unknown. They had never done anything like this.

Logging on for the First Time

During the summer, Charlotte, the cooperating teacher in France, suggested we use a poem (see Appendix F) as an icebreaker for the children to get to know each other. I thought this was a great idea. Our students could use this fill-in-the-blank poem to help their e-pals get to know them. The French class would write their poems in English and we would write our poems in French. I explained the idea to the class and shared with them an example in English that Charlotte wrote and then one in French that I wrote. I told the class that they would write *Mon Poème* over the weekend for homework. Even though this class is very typical in that they do not like homework, especially over the weekend, no one complained at all. On the contrary, they began talking about what they could write in their poems. They were motivated to complete this assignment. This positive reaction surprised even me and I knew then that my students were on board with me for the e-pal experience.

It was time to receive our first e-mail. I told the class that their e-pals had already sent their poems. The students were so excited. They all ran over to the laptop cart and grabbed a computer. However, since it was only the third day of

school and they had not yet used the laptops since the software upgrades and changes during the summer, there were some problems logging on. By the time everyone got to epals.com, class was over. I was disappointed, feeling like technology issues caused class time to be wasted. However, I expected there would be some snags getting started and I felt they would be worth working through in order to reap the benefits I expected from the project. So, I told the class we would have to log off and open our e-mails on Monday. Every student let out a sound of disappointment. I heard “awwww,” “noooo,” and “but.” On this day, our forty-minute class was too brief even for the students. Elissa quietly refused to wait. Ignoring my instructions, she opened the first e-mail from her pal and began reading. Gerry and Gina asked if they could read their e-mails at home. I said it might be nice if we all wait until Monday to read them at the same time, though I had my suspicions that some students would choose not to wait and would take a peek at home. Actually, I enjoyed this impatience and excitement. As Ann and Cathy passed me on the way out the door, I asked if they told their parents about the project. “Yes, my mom said it’s a very good thing,” Ann said. Cathy added, “My mom said it’s always good to make new friends.”

First Journal Entry

After a hectic first week of school and all my excitement to tell my students about the e-pal project and get them e-mailing, during the calm of the

weekend, I realized that I had almost forgotten about my plan. I did have a plan for this project, which included getting some feedback from my students before beginning. I was so anxious to get started I almost jumped ahead of myself. So, Monday morning I passed out blank sheets of paper and asked the class to take as much time as they needed to answer some questions I had written on the board (see E-Pal Journal One Questions, Appendix A). I wanted to know the reactions of my students to the project, whether or not they were looking forward to it, whether they had any concerns, and whether they believed it would improve their French. I assured them that there were no correct or incorrect answers and that I definitely did not want them to write anything they thought I wanted to hear. “Just tell me what you really think,” I explained. The students seemed to take my questions very seriously as they spent the majority of the class period contemplating and writing answers to my questions.

As I read their responses later that day, I was pleased to see that all the students, with the exception of Pete, were as excited as I. “It is a very new thing to me and it should be a lot of fun but if I could I wouldn’t do it.” Pete’s choice here really surprised me. How could he not want to? It’s something different and hands-on compared to all the standard, boring activities done in so many classes. This was my initial reaction, until I realized that he was nervous. “There are tons of things that could go wrong and give the wrong impressions,” he explained. “Also my French isn’t the best so it will be embarrassing to talk very

immaturely.” Pete was fearful of the unknown. All of a sudden he was asked to converse in French with a real French person, not just his classmates and me. They had never done anything like this. I hoped that by the end of the project, he would say he was glad he had an e-pal. Other students expressed concerns as well. Mindy wondered, “. . .I’m concerned that we won’t be able to understand what they are trying to say.” Jack wrote, “The only concern I have is that later on when we have to start writing in French, what I say makes sense and is understandable.” Elissa was concerned, “. . .about the writing and reading in French because I’m not the best writer in English and having to write long e-mails in *French* makes me nervous.” Jack, Mindy, and Elissa’s concerns were overshadowed by their own positive thoughts, which they shared next, about the project. Jack wrote, “When you first told us about the e-pal program I thought it could be a lot of fun and with the right attitude an easy A.” Mindy explained, “What I first thought when you told us about this project was that it would be cool to be able to talk to people in other countries. . .I think that it will be a good experience. . .I think this project will be so much fun.” Elissa wrote, “When you first told us about the e-pal program I was really excited because we learn about how they talk and what they’re like every day but to actually hear it first hand from someone who experiences these things every day is gonna be fun. . .I’m glad you picked our class to be the first year with this project.”

The rest of the class shared the enthusiasm. Gina explained, "I think it's so cool that we can do this within our class." Mary wrote, "I was excited and I couldn't wait to start it. I am really looking forward to it because I think it will be cool to know someone my age who lives in France." Gerry, Cathy, and Ann were also eager to get to know a French teen. Paul and Eileen thought it would be fun.

Everyone agreed that this would help to improve their French language skills. Elissa pointed out the benefits of communicating in conversations rather than isolated sentences. Paul realized this could help him feel more comfortable communicating in French. Mary, Jack, and Pete all felt that having an e-pal could help improve their French grammar. Eileen, Gina, Cathy, Ann, Mindy, and Gerry all felt this could help them learn new vocabulary, realizing the likelihood that their e-pals would use some words and phrases they did not yet learn as well as their own possible need to look up new words in order to express themselves.

The class also agreed that they expected to learn more than just French. They shared their expectations to discover what it's like to be a French teenager. Jack's comment, in particular, struck me, "I think I would get more of a first hand view of France and less of an urban tourist type of view that we get from the book." I was impressed that one of 13-year-old students made this observation. It's true really. If you're learning a language from a textbook, it is like learning as a tourist. You're not really getting the experience. Jack realized that e-pals was

his chance to go beyond simulated experiences and finally have a real French experience.

Mon Poème

The next day was the fifth day of the school year and finally the day to read the first e-mails from France. I explained to the class that they would spend the next two days reading their e-mails, comprehending them by looking up any words they did not know or asking me for help, and typing their first e-mail, including *Mon Poème*, to their pals. “You will be working at your own pace in a sense, but these are the things that we need to accomplish in class today and tomorrow.” Then, I handed out an E-Pal Checklist (see Appendix G). I explained that students were to use it, as they were reading and typing the e-mails. I explained that they would receive a new checklist at the time of each e-mail exchange. The checklist would help them to ensure that they were doing what I expected of them. We read over it together and there were no questions. So, I told them to begin. There was an air of quiet excitement in the classroom, as everyone raced to open their e-mail.

I, of course, had already read and approved each of their e-mails. Epals.com offers a setup option, which allows for great security. All e-mails sent to or from students must first be previewed and approved by me. This is one aspect of epals.com that I really like, particularly since my principal expressed

some serious concerns about students sending or receiving inappropriate e-mails. While I was not nearly as worried as she, this made me more comfortable, since she warned me that such an occurrence had better not happen and it was up to me to make sure it didn't.

In their first e-mails, the students from France introduced themselves in French. Charlotte, their teacher, and I thought students might be most comfortable introducing themselves in their native language. However, we knew they could write *Mon Poème* in the target language and believed that assigning them to write that portion of the e-mail in the second language would ease them into the e-pal project. In addition, the entire e-mail would encompass the best of both worlds, comprehension and writing in the target language.

The e-pals from France shared their names, their age, the name of the small town in northeastern France where they live, what siblings if any they had, what pets if any they had, their hobbies, and their strong and weak points. In addition, they sent attachments with their photographs. As my students read their e-mails, the quiet quickly changed into chatter. Some students were sharing information about their e-pals with their friends, while others were sharing sentences that were awkwardly worded in English. After the students opened the attachments to see their e-pals, they held their laptops up to show the others in the class. Some moved around to get a closer look. As all the students were calling

out information about their e-pals, walking over to their friends' computers to look at each other's e-mails and pictures, smiling, and occasionally asking one another what something meant, I noted that the students were really engaged. After an initial period of excitement and a lot of conversation, I encouraged the students to begin looking up words they didn't understand or to see me for help. Some students used the French- English dictionaries, though for the most part students were able to understand the introductions in French. This was vocabulary that my students had previously learned.

While the students were typing their e-mails, Mary asked if we could send our pictures to them. Elissa, Eileen, Mindy, and Ann chimed in that they wanted to send their pictures. I responded that it would be nice and I'm sure our e-pals would like us to, but that I would have to send permission slips home to their parents first. I thought about how we, in the United States, are more cautious with regards to children in school. In addition to sending us their pictures with their first e-mails, they also included their last names. This was personal information I reminded my students several times not to include. As for the pictures, I wasn't concerned about sending them. However, I was concerned about who else might object. For that reason, I put off sending home permission slips for a few weeks.

The next day as the students were finishing up introducing themselves to their e-pals, I glanced around the room and could not locate a single completed E-

Pal Checklist. Some students did not have the checklist in front of them and others had it out, though partially or entirely incomplete. I reminded the students that they were to complete the checklist while they were working. Everyone quickly scrambled to check off each statement on the list. Well, that was pointless I thought, since the checklist serves no purpose if the students aren't using it as they are working. I realized they had forgotten and I would have to remind them again next time.

When all the students completed their e-mails, before I even approved them and sent them on to their pals, Gerry asked when they would write back. I said we plan to do an exchange approximately every two weeks. As I reviewed their e-mails and forwarded them on to their recipients in France, I was pleased to see that, like Gerry, the others were looking forward to e-mailing again. Several students ended their e-mails with notes expressing anticipation for their reply. Mindy wrote to her e-pal, "I think this will be so much fun." Eileen wrote, "I can't wait to find out more about you!!!!" At the end of her e-mail, Cathy explained, "I would love to talk to you more, but I have to stop."

Les Vacances d'Eté

It was time for our second e-mail exchange. I recommended to Charlotte that the students write about what they did over summer break. My class had just learned how to communicate in the past tense at the end of the prior year and we

were in the middle of reviewing it. An e-mail about summer break would allow them to use the past tense to talk about something real for them. Charlotte agreed to the topic and so I assigned my students the task of drafting their second e-mail in French. It happened to work out that I assigned it for homework over the weekend, like the draft of their first e-mail. I was pleased when again, the students did not complain about having homework over the weekend, as they had in the past with other types of assignments. However, there were some grunts when I said we were writing this e-mail entirely in French.

Sunday evening I approved our second batch of e-mails from France. When I entered the classroom on Monday, pushing a cart of laptops in front of me, the students began commenting that their e-pals must have sent them messages. Everyone started calling out, wanting to know if their pals had written in French or English. "Yes!" Gerry exclaimed when I said English.

I planned to review and return the students' drafts that they completed over the weekend, while they read their e-mails and looked up on the Internet where it is that their pal vacationed. Then, I wanted them to type their draft and send it. Mistakenly, I thought this could all be done within a forty-minute class.

To begin, we logged onto the laptops but couldn't get on epals.com. It seemed that there was a problem with the school's server. "This is why it's so hard to use technology in the classroom. You can't count on it." I said with

frustration in my voice. How could I study the effects of this program if I couldn't even carry out my plan? The class just looked at me blankly, not seeing the pressures I was feeling. Their stares made me realize I needed to think of a solution rather than complain.

Luckily, the library's computer lab was available and the computers were working fine, so we relocated. While the students were working, I realized it would be a good idea for the class to also print a picture or map of where their e-pals vacationed to help them learn where exactly their e-pal went. Adding that task to the list required additional time. Throughout class, I observed the students going to their friends' computers and moving around. However, when I checked, I found that each student was on task. They were looking at where their friends' e-pals went and what they wrote, while still doing their work. When I asked Jack why he was standing at Pete's computer, he said he was looking at Pete's e-mail while the picture of his own e-pal's vacation destination was loading. I was pleased to see students showing an interest in their classmates' e-pals as well as their own. The low hum of conversation continued throughout class but everything I could hear remained on the topic of e-pals. Still, at the end of the period, only half of what I planned was complete. In addition to the unexpected trouble with the laptops and the extra picture students had to print, the corrections I asked students to make on their drafts took more time than I expected. As a

result, I had to ask the students to finish corrections for homework and to send their e-mails the next day. Everything took longer than I expected.

The next day everyone completed and sent their e-mails. Even though I reminded students the day before to use the E-Pal Checklist to ensure they are doing everything they need to, I noticed again that students were not using it and when I asked, they quickly checked everything off after the fact. I created the checklist as a tool to help the students. Clearly, it was not helping them since they were not referring back to it. Since the students were working well without it, I decided not to provide the checklist going forward.

I also changed my mind about something else. Originally, I wasn't going to ask students to share anything about their e-pals with the class. I figured it might be more personal if they didn't have to report everything back to the class. However, during the first two exchanges, I noticed students sharing a lot with one another. So, I decided it might be nice for them to get to know one another's e-pals as well. I asked the class to share what they learned so far about their e-pals with the class and to jot down key information about one another's e-pals as they heard it. After each student stood in front of the class and shared in French about his or her e-pal, I asked the rest of the class questions to test for comprehension. They appeared interested as they all sat facing forward, smiling at times, making comments especially when anyone shared what singers and groups their e-pal

liked, shared their own experiences, and answered all of my questions correctly and in complete sentences. In addition, they were learning more by hearing about each other's e-pals. For example, Gerry told us his e-pal visited Chambord and Chenonceaux. Ann jumped in telling us that she saw them both. This sparked a conversation about the castles, which are never mentioned in our textbook. If not for this, students might not have heard of these well-known landmarks in France. Cathy's presentation sparked a discussion about Normandy, where her e-pal visited. Some students didn't know where Normandy was but knew the story of D-Day, while Jack has been there and shared with us what he saw. In addition, since we discussed what each e-pal did during vacation, they used so much more vocabulary than what was just in their own e-mail. For example, Jack introduced jeux vidéo. Elissa and Paul both introduced parc d'attractions to the class. Then, Eileen told us about a parc d'attractions that she went to in France. By sharing, this project also has a conversational aspect, which is certainly important as well.

L'Ecole en France

Charlotte suggested that in the third e-mail exchange students describe an aspect of their school system. I thought this was a great idea because in seventh grade this class studied a brief unit on the French school system, though we did not go into depth. As a result, they had some background but had more to learn. We chose five aspects for our students to discuss: school calendar, school lunch

menu, students' own school, students' own schedule, and the school system from nursery school through college. We grouped students and assigned the topics. We asked students to write their e-mails in their native language because we thought it might be confusing for students to explain these topics in the target language. After the e-mail exchange, I asked students to identify similarities and differences. Then, they presented their topics to the class.

The French students sent us some wonderful attachments that really enhanced their e-mails. Gerry and Jack's e-pals wrote about the school calendar in France and sent an attachment with their school's calendar. Eileen's two e-pals sent her a sample menu for a week at their school. Gina, Mindy and Elissa's e-pals described their school and attached photographs for us to see. Ann and Cathy's e-pals wrote about a typical French student's school day and attached a sample schedule. Paul and Pete's e-pals described nursery, elementary, and middle schools in France and included an attachment outlining what students do at each level. Mary and Ann's other e-pal explained the French high school system and attached a graphic organizer. The attachments illustrated what the e-mails explained. This was helpful, since in some cases such as the explanations of the French school system, the level of French was more advanced than my students' current capabilities. As Pete stated, "Some of the French was a little new to us and the presentations weren't easy, but it was better having the handouts to help us."

Second Journal Entry

Approximately halfway through the study, I asked students to write their second journal entry (see E-Pal Journal Two Questions, Appendix A). First, they wrote feedback about the recent exchange about school. Ann thought it was a “really interesting way to learn about it” and Jack agreed that it was “better”. Gina said, “It was fun to hear it straight from a French student rather than reading about it in a book.”

When evaluating the entire e-pal program, Jack, Elissa, and Pete commented on learning from their e-pals. Jack liked “seeing French from a French person.” Elissa liked “learning the culture firsthand.” Pete stated, “The information is much more accurate from their first hand account than the French book.” Elissa and Cathy felt that at some points it has been “hard” or “confusing,” but class discussions, my explanations, and looking up words in the dictionary helped them understand. The rest of the class described the program as “fun,” “interesting,” “easier,” and “awesome.” Kids don’t normally use these words to describe teaching approaches. Several students said it is “cool” to know someone in France. They also said they were “learning a lot.” Paul said he was surprised by how much he already learned. Jack believed the class learned more than they would have “through normal teaching methods.” Other aspects the students liked were the opportunities to work with partners and to use laptops.

When asked what they disliked about the program, students said they wanted to e-mail more often. Others said they did not like waiting for responses. They would prefer to instant message each other rather than wait for an e-mail response. However, this is not possible, since my principal said I must screen everything sent to and from the class. Lastly, Paul, Jack, Gerry, and Elissa complained that their e-pals were vague in some comments and did not always answer their questions. My reaction was that these were not bad complaints. In fact, the students are expressing their desire for increased communication with their e-pals.

At the end of the journal entry, I asked students what else they would like to share. Those who chose to write additional comments gave me reassurance. Gerry wrote, "I am really enjoying the e-pal project and look forward to French every day." Mary said, "This project is really fun, and you learn a lot from it." Ann commented, "This is an awesome idea and an awesome project!" Gina was looking out for my future students when she wrote, "I think this is an exciting project and I hope that we're not the only class that gets to participate in it." I was very happy and very surprised when I read these entries. I believed the project was going well, but I still did not expect such overwhelmingly positive feedback. Mary and Ann both commented on enjoying seeing their e-pals' mistakes in English because it made them more comfortable writing in French. Pete, who was the most hesitant about the project and initially said he wouldn't do it if he had the

choice, wrote, "I was surprised at how easy it is to understand their letters when they write in French."

Nos Photos

Since the first e-mail the French students sent with their photograph attached, my class had been asking to send their own pictures. Therefore, I sent a form home with my students, asking for their parents' permission to send a photograph of their child to his or her e-pal. With the exception of Cathy, all the children returned their signed permission slip. I asked Cathy why she had not returned it, and she told me her mother did not want her to send her picture. Her mother referred to when I told the students not to give out personal information like their last name and address, and she believed sending a photograph was just like giving out that type of information. She seemed a bit disappointed but accepted her mother's decision.

It was just after Halloween when all the permission slips were returned. Since it was a sunny day, the students begged to go outside to take the pictures they would send. All the girls posed in front of a small tree, while the boys posed in front of the principal's sports car. When the class e-mailed their digital photographs the next day, they also included what they did for Halloween and what they dressed up as. Charlotte had told me her students would love to hear about the American holiday because they did not completely understand it.

Ma Ville

For the next e-mail exchange, Charlotte and I asked our students to describe their town to their e-pals. As my students read their e-mail, Gerry shared an awkwardly written quotation from his e-pal, “In winter we can skying and in the summer we can walking.” The students laughed. “Mine says skying too!” blurted Ann. Gerry asked me, “Why do they do that, say it like that?” I explained that they just made a simple spelling error by not changing the y to an i. I compared it to errors they made, which made the class realize that what seems like a minor error in a second language can make it sound much different to a native speaker.

Gerry, Ann, Mindy, Elissa, Peter, and Jack continued to read aloud some excerpts from their e-mails. Jack shared, “Mine says, ‘I live on the German frontier’.” Gerry laughed, though it was not mean-spirited. From the tones of their voices, their body language, their wording, and their giggles (as opposed to condescending laughs), it was clear to me they were excited to share and hear the e-mails. Like Ann and Mary shared in their journals, they find their e-pals’ English interesting and funny at times.

Ann asked, “What does ‘meilleur correspondant’ mean?” After explaining that her male e-pal is identifying himself to her as the best e-pal, I commented on how interesting it is that he wrote that for the first time right after she sent her

picture. The class found this quite interesting as well. Ann smiled and turned red. “Watch those long distance relationships!” Eileen warned. “Just say you are taken,” Jack advised. I asked, “Why do you want her to say that?” Everyone, including Ann, got quite a kick out of all this. The students were giving off such an enthusiastic vibe throughout class.

The next day, after reading about their e-pals’ town, the students worked on their responses, describing their town. Charlotte and I decided this exchange should be written in the target language. However, some of the French students had written short notes in French at the end of their e-mails. I approached Gerry and asked him what his e-pal had written to him in French. “Pendant les vacances je n’ait pas feter Halloween. Que pense tu des elections pour qui etait tu moi j’etais pour John Kerry.” This sentence included vocabulary that Gerry had not learned and, making comprehension even more difficult, his e-pal made errors in punctuation, grammar, and French. Still, Gerry was able to perfectly grasp the meaning. I asked him how he determined the meaning, considering the errors and new vocabulary. He explained that he figured it out by context and by using the rest of the words he did know. I was so impressed. That is exactly the approach he should use. I wanted to take it a step further and now have him use some of the new vocabulary. So, I asked, “How would you say ‘I am going to celebrate Christmas’?” Once again, he responded perfectly. He was successful in determining meaning and then applying what he learned.

I moved along to Paul, whose e-pal wrote, “Pendantles vacances je me suis amuse mais je ne suis pas parti en vacances. Et toi es-tu parti? Je n’ai rien fait pour Halloween. J’espere que tu es content pour les election presidential.” Again, there were errors. Yet, Paul was able to translate perfectly. I asked him how he was able to do so, since this note also included vocabulary he had not learned. “Well, I knew the ‘je me suis amuse’ part because I remember that from an e-mail I wrote, when I asked you how to say I had fun playing Manhunt.” I was so excited. I don’t think he would’ve been able to recall how to use that phrase again himself, but he knew it well enough to recognize it. “Je me suis amuse” is a common phrase that our textbook does not teach. Paul only learned it because of e-mailing. He continued to explain that he looked up “parti” in the dictionary and figured out the rest by context. Paul used a variety of tools in order to determine meaning. Rather than ask me for help, he recalled methods I suggested in the past to help students with comprehension. I do not expect my students to know everything, but I want them to know how to use a variety of tools and methods to lead them to answers.

As I walked away, passing Ann, she asked, “What does ‘Je te remercie’ mean?” I did not want to just give her the answer. Instead, I wanted to lead her to the answer so that she could learn how to determine meaning on her own as Gerry and Paul did. “Well, what word do you see in there?” I asked. “Merci”. “So, what

do you think?" I challenged. She hesitated and quietly asked, "Thank you?" "Yes. It's just another way of saying it."

I moved on to Elissa and asked, "Did they celebrate Halloween?" She referred to the e-mail, which stated, "J'ai pas fait Halloween" and quickly answered with a firm "no". Then, she thought again, looked back at the e-mail, pointed, and said, "but they say it like this". She noticed the reason I asked her that question. The phrasing was used in a way she had never learned. Rather than engage in a grammatical discussion of why her e-pal worded it that way, I simply said, "Yes, they didn't do it." She seemed content with my reassurance, as she nodded, said "ok", and turned back to the computer. I wanted to avoid a long explanation because I wanted to encourage her to trust her instincts with comprehension. She struggles at times with grammar. She does okay on tests but is much better with oral communication because it does not allow her the time to overanalyze or think too much about how to say something.

Cathy called me over, "Mademoiselle, does this mean I would've preferred Kerry to win the election?" I read the e-mail, "J'aurais prefere que ce soit Kerry qui gagne les elections." "Yes", I said. "Why do they have "aurais" in there?" she wanted to know. I explained that it meant "*would have preferred*". She understood the meaning exactly. Even though she didn't know what "aurais" meant, she translated it accurately. She will not learn that verb tense in eighth

grade, but she was exposed to it solely because of this project. She, and the other students are able to handle this more advanced vocabulary because it is mixed in with what they know and can do.

Then, Cathy read “Allez bye!” and asked, “Is this just like bye?” I said yes and told her that “Allez au revoir” is frequently said as well. In this case, Cathy knew the words but had never seen them used together and the end result of translation is awkward. While she did not learn new vocabulary, she learned common phrasing used in casual conversation. There is little of this in our textbook. This is the sort of French that one learns through interactions with native speakers.

L’Action de Grâce

As Thanksgiving approached, I decided that it would be a wonderful opportunity for my class to share some of their American traditions in an e-mail about the holiday. I asked the class to brainstorm some ideas of what we could share. The students thought they should write about: turkey, the big meal Americans eat, what time they eat, what they do with their families to celebrate, whether they are going on vacation, the parade in New York City, the football games they watch, the history of the holiday, and how the date is determined. I was very pleased with the list they created.

I offered the students the rest of the class period to begin writing a draft of their e-mails. Surprisingly, half of the class said they did not want to use class time. They preferred to write a draft at home. Some said they just prefer doing it at home. Others were more specific and said it's more relaxing to do it at home or they like to put on music while they do it. I could not believe that they were choosing to have a homework assignment that night. I also could not believe that they used the word relaxing in the same sentence as the homework they were giving themselves. Apparently, however, they were not thinking of this task as a dreadful assignment, but rather just writing a note to a peer.

The following day we attempted to get started right away, but the laptops didn't work. Since this happened before, we were not delayed for long. My backup plan was in place and we moved to the computer lab in the library. I reviewed and handed back the drafts they wrote the night before, as the class logged on to the computers and got to work.

Gina was helping Eileen with the difference between *notre*, and *nos*. Eileen said, "I just memorized *notre*, *nos*, *votre*, *vos*, but I don't know what they mean." I was disappointed to realize that Eileen was able to regurgitate these words on a test for me because she memorized them, but she could not even use them on her own now. At the same time, I was happy to know the e-pal exchange

was allowing her the opportunity to apply what she “memorized” and really be able to use it in conversation.

Gerry asked, “Is it mon grand-parents or ma grand-parents?” “It’s “mes’,” I answered. Then, Mindy asked, “Is there a space between the Y and A in ‘il y a’?” “Yes,” I said. These are things I would have said the students definitely know. I guess they do when they are doing an exercise that focuses on that particular vocabulary. However, when using it in context, they do not remember everything. E-mailing is allowing them to think in terms of communication not rote learning.

In the drafts of the e-mails that I handed back, I added a few new vocabulary words to some e-mails in order for them to be clearer in what they were trying to say. Cathy and Paul came up to ask exactly what the words meant. They could have just typed their e-mails using the new words, but instead they inquired about them. I was glad to see that they really wanted to understand their meaning.

Mindy asked me if she could go back to the classroom and I let her go without questioning why. I observed her after she returned and found that she had gotten her textbook and was looking ahead to a food chapter we had not yet covered. Rather than ask me, she took the initiative to use an accessible tool and helped herself learn new vocabulary.

As the students were working, I overheard some talk about attaching pictures to their e-mails for their pals to see. When I opened their e-mails to review before approving them, I found that Gina, Mary, and Mindy attached pictures of a traditional Thanksgiving meal and Cathy attached drawings of Pilgrims and Indians. They were motivated to do more than what was required and spend the time to find an appropriate picture. They genuinely wanted to help their French pals get a feel for what Thanksgiving is about.

Mon Objet

Charlotte's class and my class had gotten to know a lot about one another. They told a little bit about themselves in their introductions; they shared about their vacations, their school, their town; we explained some American holidays. At this point, Charlotte and I thought it would be nice for each student to get to know his or her e-pal a little bit better through a more personal exchange. So, we asked the students to bring an object into school that is very important to them. The object should be special and represent themselves in some way. We took digital photographs of each student's object. The students wrote e-mails that included a few sentences describing their object and why it was special to them. Then, when we sent our e-mails, we included an attachment with all the pictures. The e-pals had to guess which was the photograph of their e-pals' object.

Our French e-pals sent their e-mails to us first. When I read their e-mails for approval to send them on to my students, I found that a lot of the wording they used was very French. In other words, they used phrases that do not translate well and casual French language that is not presented in most textbooks. I warned the students and told them I would help them figure out the meaning of challenging phrases. As the students read their e-mails, I circulated and stopped to speak with everyone to see how they were coming along.

Cathy learned new words like *goût*, *se mâche*, *surtout*, and *sucre*, the last of which was a new vocabulary word that would be presented in the next unit of our text. By looking these words up in the dictionary, she was able to comprehend her pal's e-mail and determine which object belonged to her. Mary also used the dictionary to look up words she did not understand, but when she came to the phrase, "*n'importe quoi*," she used an online translator.

Likewise, Gina used a dictionary, but when she came to a phrase she did not know, "*étant partie*," she used her own analyzing skills to determine the meaning. She saw the word "part" within the phrase. Knowing that "part" in English can mean "leave," she was able to understand her e-mail.

Mindy successfully identified her partner's object because of the descriptive words in the e-mail that she already knew. I was disappointed though when I pointed to a new phrase, "*il me porte bonheur*," and she could not tell me

the meaning. She skipped over it because she could identify her e-pal's object without knowing what that phrase meant. I'm glad she did not get hung up on that phrase and still got the main point of the e-mail, but I would have liked to see her take more initiative, since she did not look anything up or ask me for help. I told her to find out the meaning and get back to me.

Elissa, like Mindy, was able to identify her e-pal's object without finding out the meanings of some words and phrases. However, like Gina, she was able to identify French words by considering what English words they might look like. She realized that "rond" means "round" and "touches" is buttons.

Gerry did not use the dictionary at all. He understood his e-mail, with the exception of the word, "fin." Like some of his classmates, he decided it looked like an English word, "fine," and, since a pen was being described he decided that word applied.

Paul recognized a number of words in his e-mail and was able to figure out which object belonged to his pal, but he came to me for help in comprehending one phrase, "les grands sportifs en ont." He knew sportif means athletic. I tried leading him to understand that his pal was talking about professional athletes, but he did not get it. So, I told him it means, "The pros have them." Although he had trouble understanding it that day, a few days later I asked him what "les grands sportifs" are and he was able to tell me.

I was delighted to see the students handling the challenging e-mails so well. No one got overwhelmed. In fact, I thought everyone was going to need my help. Instead, they took the initiative to independently discover the meaning of the e-mails they received. It would have been easier to just ask me to tell them what words meant, especially since I offered my help at the beginning of class. However, they took responsibility for their own learning and used tools like the dictionary, online translators, and their own analyzing skills.

Les Présentations

As the end of the study approached, I felt it was important to ask my students to summarize this experience. I began a dialogue with my students, discussing what I planned to assign. I wanted each student to do an oral presentation and a poster about his or her e-pal. During our discussion, Gerry suggested that they do PowerPoint presentations. All the students agreed that they liked his idea. I really liked it too and wondered why I had not thought of that. A PowerPoint presentation would be perfect for what I wanted students to do. So, I assigned a PowerPoint presentation, for which students had to present what they learned *about* their e-pal and what they learned *from* their e-pal. I expected the former would be easier, as the latter would require them to examine their own learning and draw conclusions. For the first aspect, I told them to tell us about their e-pals and include quotations so we could hear their e-pals' voices in their

projects. In order to share what they learned *from* their e-pals, I told them to include specific vocabulary they learned and to think about what they learned about French teenagers, French culture, and what ideas they had going into the project that have now changed as a result of the e-mail exchange.

The project was to be worked on primarily at home, though I gave the students two and a half class periods during which they could work on it in class. While most of the class said they were comfortable using PowerPoint, I wanted everyone to feel very comfortable and I knew there might be some questions. I have done PowerPoint presentations, but I do not consider myself extremely knowledgeable about the program. So, I asked the head of our district's technology department to come to our class one day to assist the students and answer any questions.

Two weeks later, students presented their e-pal projects. They went as I expected in that the stronger students such as Gerry and Gina did the best and weaker students like Jack did not do as impressive a job. Where the project did not go as I expected was in the answers to what students learned from their pals. The bulk of all the presentations was comprised of what they learned about their e-pals. They did include lists of vocabulary they learned from their pals and could now use themselves. However, I think my expectations were higher than they should have been. My students are only thirteen, yet I was expecting impressive

observations and reflections. They are probably too young to think metacognitively, as I do in graduate courses, like I was hoping they would. They probably have difficulty because of their age and because they are never asked to analyze their own learning like I asked them to do.

Still, some impressive conclusions were drawn. Elissa said, “We probably both thought our e-pal was going to be a stereotypical French or American person, but hopefully we all realized that’s not true. We are a lot alike. For example, we are all into the newest things that are available and we all like having a good time.” Eileen said, “I didn’t know if they would be like a stereotypical, snobbish French person or if they would be just like American teens. I found that they are not at all rude.” Gina said, “I learned that French teens are pretty much like us. Although their family is really important in their lives, their friends are just as important as ours are.” Ann said, “They like some of the same activities that we do, like shopping and sports.” Not I, not our textbook, not any book or video could ever give my students this sense of what French teenagers are like. This is something that they had to experience themselves to learn.

Final Journal Entry

Before the conclusion of the study, I asked my students to share their thoughts about the e-pal program with me one last time (see E-Pal Journal Three Questions, Appendix A). The students spent much of the class quietly reflecting and writing responses.

Every student agreed that we should continue the exchange with our e-pals, noting that it is fun and they learned a lot. Mindy pointed out, “In the beginning of sixth grade we barely knew any French and now we are talking to people in that language.” Elissa explained, “I think this is a very nice way to learn things that books and movies can’t teach us. I think the only way to learn some things is to experience them, and I think communication is one of those things.”

Everyone concluded their French improved as a result of the program. They attributed this to the new vocabulary they learned, as well as how to better formulate sentences. Gina wrote, “I’ve learned lots of new vocab that I can remember and use now. Also, I’ve learned how they say things differently than just translating.” Elissa said, “French sentences have improved in my mind.” Cathy wrote, “My French has improved because we learn new stuff to make our e-mail better. Also, we review and use old stuff for practice.”

No one in the class thought anything should be changed about the project. “I think the program is perfect the way it is,” Gina wrote. However, Cathy noted that if they could instant message, “maybe learning French could be a little bit faster.” Gerry did not want to change the program but suggested that I have them do more projects about the program.

In response to what else they would like to share with me, many students wrote nothing. A few wrote that the project is fun. Mary wrote that we should definitely go to France.

I was thrilled, though honestly not surprised, to read the positive reactions the students had about the e-mail exchange throughout the preceding few months. I believed the students would want to continue to e-mail, but I was reassured when every single student responded “yes.” Obviously, my students and I recognized how beneficial the e-pal program was and could continue to be. But did the parents feel the same way? I had to find out.

Parent Questionnaires

At the end of the study, I sent questionnaires home to the parents to get their feedback on the e-pal exchange. Their responses were all very positive. All the parents said their child talked to them about the project and all felt it was a positive experience. Gina’s mom wrote, “It was something other than ‘textbook learning’ and it was also personal, which gives it more relevance.” Ann’s mom wrote, “All opportunities to really use the language are important learning opportunities.” Mary’s mom found the exchange gave her daughter “more of a reason to communicate properly in French.” Jack’s mom found the exchange helpful because “he needed to express himself to someone else.” Many of the parents reported that their child’s interest in French language, French people, and France itself has increased as a result of the program. They also agreed that I should continue the program. Cathy’s father did not fill out the questionnaire but wrote me a letter. He believed the results of this program were “amazing.” He shared that seeing Cathy work on her e-mail drafts was the first time he has seen

her work for hours, rather than “zip through” her work. He said she “put her heart and soul into each e-mail to make it better.” He wrote, “I definitely think that you should continue the e-pals program for one main reason. This reason is that I want everyone else to experience the positive things that my daughter did.”

ANALYSIS

Analyzing the data I collected was a continuous process. According to Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and McCormack (1991), analysis is “part and parcel of the ongoing, intertwined process that powers data collection” (p. 86).

I wrote analytic memos, defined by Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and McCormack (1991) as “conversations with oneself about what has occurred in the research process, what has been learned, the insights this provides, and the leads these suggest for future action” (p. 80). These memos helped me to analyze my purpose, hopes and fears in conducting this study, my reactions to student journal entries, the benefits of students sharing about their e-pals during class discussions, and my experience collaborating with the teacher in France. Writing these memos helped me to identify significant occurrences and ideas.

After several weeks of data collection, I began coding the analytic memos and participant observations in my field log. Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) define coding as when “we read and reread a portion of data and provide labels- usually notes in the margins- that identify a meaning unit” (p. 162). As I reread my field log, I assigned a word or two, such as motivation or student interest, which summarized the significance of each paragraph. The coding process encouraged me to reflect and determine what areas I wanted to explore further prior to the conclusion of my study.

Then, by identifying codes, I sorted my data into categories or bins. I created a graphic organizer, which made it easier to review the categories. Theme statements emerged and I was able to identify patterns. Afterwards, I collected and reviewed the students' e-mails to determine whether they supported the theme statements and patterns I found. My final theme statements led me to my findings.

FINDINGS

At the start of the project, my students were nervous and unsure of what to expect. This project allowed them greater freedom than they were accustomed to in school. They had freedom in their work, time management, responsibilities, accountability, and level of involvement. Freire (1970) explains, “The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom” (p. 47). I felt that this freedom was necessary in order to allow the students to grow as individuals and learners as a result of this project. While I tried to allay their concerns, I found that only time and experience would. Their second journal entries confirmed this. After reading them, I was sure their initial worries were gone.

Throughout the project, I found that students were engaged. They were truly interested in the project. They were excited when they saw me enter the classroom with the laptops, knowing their e-pals had written. They were disappointed when our class period was at times not long enough for us to read or write e-mails. They did not want to wait another day to communicate with their e-pals. They shared aloud excerpts of the e-mails they received with their classmates. They visited their classmates during class to find out what their e-pals had written. They accepted weekend homework assignments for the project without complaints. In some cases, they preferred to do assignments at home rather than use the class time I offered.

The students' journal responses confirmed for me how my students felt about the project. They regarded the e-pal project as "fun" and "cool," not as an academic chore. They shared that learning through e-pal exchanges was a better, more interesting way to learn. They expressed their excitement about coming to French class every day because of the project.

The e-pal exchange motivated my students to take ownership in their learning. Dewey (1938) states, "Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information" (p. 79). They relied on me less than they ever had. The French-English dictionaries in my classroom were used more during this study than they probably had in all the years they were on my shelf. Rather than asking me for quick answers, students often took the initiative to use the dictionaries and, sometimes, online translators.

My students were accountable and responsible for their learning experience. In the past, I had walked students through the learning process, one activity at a time. I was the boss and said what we would do, when, and how. However, the e-pal project changed my role and the roles of my students. As Dewey (1938) describes, "The teacher loses the position of external boss or dictator but takes on that of leader of group activities" (p. 59). While the objectives were clear, this project took me out of the spotlight and motivated the students to lead themselves through the learning process to the end goals.

My students were motivated to take on their new active roles in their learning experience because this project was different. It was authentic learning. Vygotsky (1978) states that “teaching should be organized in such a way that reading and writing are necessary for something” (p. 117). In this study, reading and writing were necessary to communicate with, get to know, and develop a relationship with a peer in France. This was different from other activities in the foreign language classroom, which often simulate real life. This was real life. “Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world” (Freire, p. 81). The authentic aspect is what parents liked about the project and why they felt this project enhanced their children’s learning experience.

The authenticity of communicating with a French teenager helped my students learn a great deal about French culture. As many students pointed out during their PowerPoint presentations at the end of the study, they learned that French teenagers are not all that different from them. They learned that they have a lot in common with their French peers, such as the importance of family and certainly friends, as well as their interests in sports and other activities they do in their spare time. The exchange made students realize that the stereotype describing French people as rude is just that, a stereotype. They now have the knowledge to ignore cultural labels. In addition, my class learned from their e-pals about the town where they live, as well as other places in France, where our

e-pals vacationed. They also learned about the French school system in detail. I taught some lessons on the French school system in the past. However, my students confirmed it was more meaningful this time, hearing it first hand from their e-pals who were experiencing it. Also, the French e-pals provided us with wonderful attachments, which helped my students visualize what the e-mails explained. Last year I explained to the class what a typical lunch would consist of at a French school. However, receiving the attachment of an actual week's menu from our e-pals' school, made it real.

This e-pal exchange also exposed my students to useful vocabulary that would not be "taught" in eighth grade French. In their PowerPoint presentations, students included lists of words that they learned during the project and are able to continue to use. Some of this vocabulary is words and phrases that they sought to learn in order to communicate their ideas. When the students looked up these words, it was because they had the desire to learn them not because they were isolated words on a vocabulary list in a chapter that I said we would study. Vygotsky (1978) notes that "an intrinsic need should be aroused in them" (p. 118). My students were using new vocabulary to express themselves, in a context that was important to them. This felt need to learn the words, along with the meaningful context in which they were used, is why they remember and can still use this vocabulary.

Other vocabulary my students learned during this project was vocabulary introduced by their e-pals. In nearly every e-mail, my students' e-pals used words my class had not seen before. In some cases, it was just a word or two, other times it was a couple of sentences. Since my students were motivated to communicate and get to know their e-pals, they felt the need to understand them. When they did not understand a part of their e-mail, they worked to understand it. Many times they were able to discover meaning through the context in which the vocabulary was used. Other times they used the dictionaries or asked me questions. Whichever way they went about finding meaning, they did so because they wanted to know. And, they wanted to know because it was vocabulary used in a meaningful context, a personal communication from their peer.

In most cases, the vocabulary learned related to Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), since our e-mails focused primarily on everyday life. However, the exchange did help to develop Cognitive/ Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) when we studied the French school system. Students learned specific language related to their e-pals' school system, after seeing it used by their partners.

The e-mails from France served as models for my students. While they could not have produced some language on their own, they were able to use vocabulary and certain phrasing after it was modeled for them by their e-pals. This idea is described in Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the zone of proximal

development. He explains, “The zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state” (p. 86). For example, my students were able to effectively express their opinions about the presidential elections by imitating the phrasing their e-pals used to express their own opinions. The modeling the e-mails from France offered and the imitating my students sometimes did helped them develop their language skills.

As I observed my students using new vocabulary and imitating phrasing used by their e-pals, I found that their French was overall more advanced than before we had begun the project and more advanced than the French of any of my previous eighth graders. This was evident in the length and content of the e-mails. My students’ e-mails were often several paragraphs long. Neither they nor my past eighth grade classes had ever written in French at length like that, and certainly not numerous times. In fact, these students were initially fearful of writing more than one paragraph. However, after the project began, we did not discuss a required length for each e-mail. The students willingly wrote longer, more detailed e-mails, though the girls always seemed to have a little bit more to say than the boys. Within these paragraphs, I found my students wrote about more than one topic and used a variety of sentence structures and tenses. In the past, assignments often focused on one or two grammar points. As a result, students did not have to integrate a variety of skills into one assignment. However, because e-

pals is authentic communication, it was natural and necessary to do this. For the first time, students were drawing on all their French knowledge, rather than isolated aspects. The students' e-mails included short sentences, as well as sentences with clauses. Their e-mails also included appropriate combinations of past, present, and future tenses. Previously, students had primarily used each tense in isolation and became confused when switching tenses. These more detailed, complex e-mails were clear evidence of the great strides my students made in the development of their French.

There was a lot of planning that went into this project that helped make it successful. Perhaps the most important aspect is that I found a cooperating teacher, Charlotte, who shared similar goals. We worked closely together to choose writing topics and establish a schedule. At the same time, we were both very flexible. Despite all the planning, some snags were unavoidable such as technology issues, limited class time, and the different school calendars. Still, Charlotte and I communicated well with one another to work around these issues.

As the study progressed, I had to be flexible with my own plan as well and make some adjustments on my end. For example, when I realized the e-mail checklist was not helping students as I anticipated, I got rid of it. Also, when I realized that having students tell the class about their e-pals could enhance learning for everyone, I added time for sharing.

The bumps in the road were few and far between and are no comparison to the benefits my students and I received from the e-pal project. The increased motivation and learning of my students was so rewarding for me to observe. While I felt the project went well, the feedback from my students and their parents was overwhelmingly positive. They all said the project should not stop here.

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

This experience has been extremely rewarding. Each year I assist my students in learning French in order to prepare them for real opportunities where they may encounter the French language. For the first time, I allowed my students to experience such opportunities in my classroom. I was able to observe my students in action, doing what we have been preparing to do for over two years. I think the experience went very well, though there are some organizational aspects I would like to adjust and new areas I would now like to explore.

Although I teach sixth, seventh, and eighth grade French, I plan to continue this project with my eighth graders only because they know enough French to communicate effectively about a variety of topics, but they still have a lot to learn. However, my district has begun teaching foreign language to students in first grade. Therefore, soon my sixth graders will come into my classroom, already knowing some French. Then, I will consider doing an e-pal project with my sixth and seventh graders. That will eventually allow me to continue the project with my students over the course of up to three years.

This year I was very lucky to have worked with Charlotte, the teacher of our French e-pals. We worked so well together and she was as motivated and flexible as I. While I would like to work with her again next year, that may or may not be possible depending on our future teaching assignments. If it is not possible, I hope to find someone equally dedicated. However, it is difficult to

anticipate how things will work with another teacher. Therefore, I think it would be useful to create a detailed plan with the cooperating teacher before beginning the project. This year I did not want to create a schedule of specific writing dates and topics in advance, since I had never participated in an e-pal exchange. I did not have a sense of how the exchange and the school year might progress.

Charlotte and I agreed to write approximately every two weeks and we generated a long list of possible topics. However, we made decisions as we moved forward in the project. Now I have experience and knowledge about how long everything takes to do and what types of issues may arise. Of course, we will still have to be flexible, as unforeseen issues could arise. Still, I think a specific, agreed upon plan might help ensure that I have as good an experience in the future as I did this year.

Also, during the study, I realized that having class discussions, during which each student shares about his or her e-pal benefited the entire class. As a result, I changed my plan and asked students to share during a few somewhat formal class discussions. Going forward, I would like to plan a class discussion after every exchange. This opportunity for sharing allowed us to incorporate oral language into the e-pal exchange and students learned from one another.

Within the new plan, I would like to set aside several opportunities for students to write to their e-pals about a topic of their own choosing. This time, while keeping the students in mind, Charlotte and I decided on all the writing

topics. The students were engaged, though I wonder what might happen if we give them this freedom of choice. I wonder where a self-directed exchange might lead and how it would be similar or different to this study.

Finally, I would like to take further advantage of what technology allows classes to do. I want to consider other ways to incorporate technology into an e-pal exchange, especially since my school is so well equipped. To begin with, I would like to try exchanging digital video clips with our e-pals. This would be another way to incorporate oral skills into an e-pal project. Also, I think seeing video clips, where students can hear their e-pal's voice and observe mannerisms, might help students feel like they know their e-pals more intimately. We could do individual videos or videos of the class. Videos could be focused on students speaking or doing a demonstration of a cultural topic. The possibilities of what we could show one another on video are endless.

I am excited to continue to explore e-pal exchanges with my students. Surely, next year will be as unique as the new e-pals we will meet. I hope the changes I plan to make and the new things I would like to try enhance the experience for next year's students and provide me with some answers. Still, I expect new questions will arise and I will think of things I can do differently. That is the story of teaching. Every year my students are different and, so I do things differently. There is no end to the change that this profession demands.

Therefore, I will continue to inquire and adjust my practices to explore more effective methods to facilitate learning in my classroom.

I hope that other educators find my story helpful and consider implementing an e-pal program into their own curriculum. I would encourage interested teachers to create a profile on epals.com to find a class who has similar ideas and goals. Then, create a plan with the cooperating teacher, taking into consideration what you want to focus on and what you want to accomplish.

Throughout the project, I encourage teachers to involve the students and ask for their feedback. Teachers should also take time to reflect on what is occurring and if any adjustments should be made. Continuous reflection is an important aspect of improving classroom practices.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A: Principal Informed Consent Form

September 23, 2004

To Whom It May Concern:

I give my consent for Marisa Wilhelm to conduct a research study in her classroom. It is my understanding that the research is supported by educational literature and is a requirement for the completion of her Master's degree program at Moravian College. Further, I understand that consent for the study will be obtained from all participants and that participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Pseudonyms will be used in write up of the data collected to protect the students' identities. The data from this research study will be held in the strictest confidence and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Students in Miss Wilhelm's eighth grade French class will participate in an e-pal program, coordinated through epals.com. Students will write journal entries at the beginning, middle, and end of the project. In addition, students will have the opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions during class discussions and individual interviews. Students will also write an essay and make a poster about their e-pals in December. Students are required to complete these activities regardless of their participation in the study. Legal guardians of these students will be asked to share their feedback in a questionnaire that Ms. Wilhelm will send home in December. However, only information from participating students and parents will be documented and included in the study.

Finally, I am aware that questions regarding this research should be directed to Ms. Wilhelm or her advisor, Dr. Joseph Shosh, (610) 861-1482, jshosh@moravian.edu.

Sincerely,

XXXXX XXXXX
Principal, XXXX
School

Appendix B: Parent Consent Form for Student Participation

September 23, 2004

Dear Parents/ Guardians,

During the 2004- 2005 school year, I will be completing courses towards my Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. These courses have enabled me to research the most effective methods I can use to provide the best learning experience for your child.

The program requires that I complete a systematic study of my own teaching practices. The focus of my research this semester is the impact of participation in an e-pal program. Using epals.com, I have located a class in France, who shares similar goals. This will allow your child to correspond in class via e-mail with a native French speaker. I believe this e-pal program will increase the students' motivation to learn French and help to develop their skills in French. Also, I think that being able to use French to get to know a French-speaking peer will help students make a connection between school and the real world.

I will collect writing samples from the e-mail exchanges, interview interested students, and keep a journal. Students will write journal entries about their experience, as well as write an essay and make a poster about their e-pal. All children will participate in these activities as part of my regular eighth grade French program.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child's grade will not be affected and your child may withdraw from the study at any time. Information collected will be confidential and will only be used in my final research report. At the conclusion of the study, all information will be destroyed. In addition, neither your child's name, nor the name of any participating student, will appear in any written report or publication of the study or my findings.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at school by phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or e-mail at mwilhelm@xxxxx.xxx. Xx. Xxxxx has approved this study and may be reached at this number as well. My faculty sponsor is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be contacted at Moravian College by phone at (610) 861-1482 or e-mail at jshosh@moravian.edu. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Marisa Wilhelm

I attest that I am the student's legally authorized representative, that I read and understand this consent form, and that I received a copy.

Yes, my child may participate in your study.

Child's name: _____

Legal representative signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Parent Consent Form for Parent Participation

September 23, 2004

Dear Parents/ Guardians,

During the 2004- 2005 school year, I will be completing courses towards my Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. These courses have enabled me to research the most effective methods I can use to provide the best learning experience for your child.

The program requires that I complete a systematic study of my own teaching practices. The focus of my research this semester is the impact of participation in an e-pal program. Using epals.com, I have located a class in France, who shares similar goals. This will allow your child to correspond in class via e-mail with a native French speaker. I believe this e-pal program will increase the students' motivation to learn French and help to develop their skills in French. Also, I think that being able to use French to get to know a French-speaking peer will help students make a connection between school and the real world.

I will collect writing samples from the e-mail exchanges, interview interested students, and keep a journal. Students will write journal entries about their experience, as well as write an essay and make a poster about their e-pal. All children will participate in these activities as part of my regular eighth grade French program. However, in addition, I would like to ask you to participate in this study by sharing your feedback about the program in a questionnaire I will send home in December.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child's grade will not be affected by your participation or non-participation. You may withdraw from the study at any time. Information collected will be confidential and will only be used in my final research report. At the conclusion of the study, all information will be destroyed. In addition, neither your name, nor the name of any participating parent/ guardian or student, will appear in any written report or publication of the study or my findings.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at school by phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or e-mail at mwillhelm@xxxx.xxx. Xx. Xxxxx has approved this study and may be reached at this number as well. My faculty sponsor is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be contacted at Moravian College by phone at (610) 861-1482 or e-mail at jshosh@moravian.edu. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Marisa Wilhelm

I attest that I read and understand this consent form, and that I received a copy.

Yes, I will participate in your study.

Name(s) of Parent(s)/ Guardian(s): _____

Signature(s): _____ Date: _____

Appendix D: Student Journal Questions

E-pal Journal One Questions:

1. What did you first think when I told you about the e-pal program?
2. Are you looking forward to it? Why or why not?
3. What concerns, if any, do you have?
4. Do you think this will help you with your French? If so, in what ways?
5. In addition to the French language, what else do you think you might learn?
6. What other thoughts do you have to share about our upcoming project?

E-pal Journal Two Questions:

1. What are you enjoying most?
2. What do you dislike?
3. What surprised you?
4. What have you learned?
5. What else would you like to share?

E-pal Journal Three Questions:

1. Do you want to continue the e-pal program? Why or why not?
2. Have your thoughts about learning French changed at all? If so, how?

3. Do you think your French has improved as a result of the program? If so, in what ways?
4. Have your thoughts about French people changed at all? If so, how?
5. What have you learned from your e-pal?
6. What have you learned about yourself?
7. Would you change anything about the program. If so, what?
8. What else would you like to share with me?

Appendix E: Parent Questionnaire

Name: _____

1. Has your child spoken to you about the e-pal program throughout the school year? If so, approximately how often?

2. Do you think the e-pal program has been a positive experience for your child? Why or why not?

3. Do you think the program has impacted your child? If so, in what ways?

4. Do you think I should do an e-pal exchange again next year? Why or why not?

5. Are there any aspects of the program I should change?

6. Do you have any other comments you would like to share?

Appendix F: Mon Poème

My Poem

I, (your first name)

A (4 adjectives that describe you) boy/ girl

Friend of...

Lover of... (three things, people, or ideas)

Who feels... (three adjectives)

Who needs... (three items)

Who fears... (three items)

Who would like to see... (three people, ideas, or places)

Am an admirer of... (famous man/ woman)

And hate... (famous man/ woman)

Welcome you to my poem

Appendix G: E-Pal Checklist

E-Pal Checklist

My E-Mail:

- _____ I have completed the e-mail assignment.
(The e-mail draft is complete and with you in class on the day it is due.
Also, the e-mail focuses on the assigned topic.)
- _____ I have shared a good amount of information with my e-pal.
(Your e-mail is detailed.)
- _____ I have asked my e-pal questions to which I really want answers.
(You are expressing a genuine interest in your e-pal and/ or aspects of
his/her life.)
- _____ While your e-mail may or may not be 100% correct, you are making a
clear effort to use proper grammar and are succeeding in doing so.
- _____ I have completed any corrections suggested by Mlle Wilhelm.

E-Mail from my e-pal:

- _____ When my e-pal includes vocabulary with which I am unfamiliar, I take
the initiative to look up words in the dictionary.
- _____ I demonstrate comprehension of my e-pal's e-mails by accurately sharing
details about my e-pal and our communication with Mlle Wilhelm and the class.