Teachers, Learners, and Computers:
Exploring Relationships in CALL

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The Teacher as Chameleon: Computer-mediated Communication & Role Transformation

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The author, using examples from his own experience, suggests possible stages through which projects featuring computer-mediated communication (CMC) might proceed. These stages correspond to ten teacher-roles: integrator, solicitor/salesperson, negotiator, news reporter, student confidant, nervous parent, teacher of his/her craft, troubleshooter, human being (with human foibles), and student. He concludes that CMC opens up a range of roles and relationships that might never emerge in a traditional classroom setting.

Introduction

THIS PAPER HAS THREE PURPOSES that, hopefully, will be fulfilled seamlessly. One is to demonstrate how collaborative email-instigated projects can be launched, sustained, and brought to a satisfactory close using documents produced by teachers and students in actual exchanges. The second is to show how computer-mediated communication (CMC) can be smoothly integrated into courses, rather than simply being an interesting add-on. While fulfilling these objectives, the paper illustrates the different roles and relationships that develop between students and teachers in the course of collaborative project work.

I will suggest some possible stages through which teachers and students using CMC might proceed; the character and order of the stages will vary with teacher, setting, and project. They are similar to those of process writing (Murray, 1987, p. 8) in being recursive; they can be revisited at any point along the way.

Stage One: Teacher as Integrator

At this stage the teacher closely examines what she would like (or is compelled) to accom-

plish, what content areas need to be covered (for a content-based course), or what skills to cultivate (for a skill-based course). These combine in a plan using computer accessible resources—including the human ones at the other end of telephone lines or fiber optic cables.

The integrating process can be done off-line, but it may help to consult with fellow teachers in special purpose mailing lists. Time allowing, students can give their views on the CMC applications of the course content. The latter will only work if students know the potential of CMC and have had some experience with it, which did not apply to the teaching setting described here.

The Context

The classes were composed of 100 Economics majors, divided into two groups that met once a week for 90 minutes, and 20 English/American Literature majors who met for two consecutive 90-minute periods every week. All were first and second year students at Aoyama Gakuin University. Being dissatisfied with my previous use of CMC to provide novelty in classes, I was determined to integrate course content and goals into a plan for exchange. That plan will unfold in the series of email exchanges that serve to illustrate the changing roles and relationships of teachers and students.

Stage Two: Teacher as Solicitor/Salesperson

At this stage the teacher packages ideas to attract the interest of colleagues and posts them on one of the forums available for those seeking partner classes. Although it is probably better to separate pleas for cooperation into distinct requests, I combined them in a message sent to the IECC (Intercultural Exchange Classroom Connections) mailing list. My hope was to find a teacher (or teachers) who would find the plans compatible with theirs. I naively thought this would reduce the time needed for inter-teacher negotiation. As it turned out, negotiating with more than one colleague, even when not leading to an exchange agreement, proved highly beneficial in giving the projects additional synergy.

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Date sent: Tue, 29 Oct 1996 08:04:57 +0000
From: Joseph Dias <jodias@cc.aoyama.ac.jp>
Subject: Email/ Video Exchange Invitation
To: iecc@stolaf.edu


I teach approx. 100 Economics majors at Aoyama Gakuin Univer-
sity. My course centers on North American culture. I also teach
literature and writing to 20 British/Amer. Lit. students. I am
interested in a joint email/video exchange where students share
information on culture-related topics (or, in the case of the
Lit. students, the play we are studying, "The Glass Menagerie").
I would like this project to evolve into the making and even-
tual exchange of videos on similar topics. It doesn't have to
be a very professional production—just something to complement
the email exchange and provide some focus. We can convert our
video into whatever format your country uses and accept videos
in any format.

All students have individual email accounts and each class
has its own "list" address. The students can continue the ex-
change through January. We're prepared to begin right away.

Anyone interested?

-Joseph Dias
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Stage Three: Teacher as Negotiator

This inquiry elicited over a dozen responses from teachers as far flung as Slovakia, Hawaii, Utah, Hong Kong, Singapore, and France. The next job was a process of elimination and negotiation; it was a challenge finding colleagues whose timetables, course features, and expectations closely matched mine. Below is one of the responses that led to a fruitful exchange of email and videos between a class of high school students studying senior English in Utah and my Economics majors.

```
Subject: Re: Email/ Video Exchange Invitation
Date: Thu, 31 Oct 1996 08:43:47 MDT
From: "JILL HASLAM" <JHASLAM@ADMIN.VHS.DAVIS.UT.US>

Dear Mr. Dias,

My name is Jill Haslam and I teach Senior English at Viewmont
High School in Bountiful, Utah, USA. I was intrigued by your
posting to the stolaf listserv. Last school year, my students
and I began exploring the video production and exchange con-
cept. We had lots of fun, and I intended to repeat the program
this year. Our intent is to produce short videos on aspects of
local culture (i.e., religion, entertainment & recreation, his-
tory, geography, etc.). Does this sound like what you have in
mind?
— Jill Haslam
jhaslam@admin.vhs.davis.ut.us
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A response from an English instructor based at Chaminade University in Honolulu was the beginning of a successful exchange between his sophomore literature majors and my own.

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Subject: Re: Email/Video Exchange Invitation
Date: Tue, 29 Oct 1996 19:19:41 -1000
From: James Kraus <kraus@chaminade.edu>

I am currently teaching a soph lit class that will be discuss-
ing The Glass Menagerie during the final weeks of this term—
last week of Nov, first week of Dec. Between now and then, they
are reading Oedipus Rex, Hamlet, A Doll's House, Death of a
Salesman.

     All of my students have active email accounts. I would be
delighted to work with you on an email/video exchange.


James Kraus
Professor of English, Chaminade University, Honolulu, Hawaii
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Stage Four: Teacher as News Reporter

Students have not traditionally seen their teachers as news sources. They have justifiably expected course content to be well-worn and pre-packaged—not the case in classes employing CMC. Teacher and students must keep each other abreast of late-breaking developments and report problems along the way. It is perhaps the freshness of CMC that contributes

most to boosting student motivation. After negotiating the features of the exchange with the teacher at Chaminade University, I informed my literature students of the plan:

```
Subject: Making a plan for a drama
Date: Thu, 31 Oct 1996 08:48:31 +0000
From: Joseph Dias <jodias@cc.aoyama.ac.jp>
To: Dias' Core Class <jodias-fri3@cc.aoyama.ac.jp>


I've found a teacher and students in Hawaii with whom we will
exchange email related to "The Glass Menagerie". In groups of 4
or 5 we will also produce original dramas focusing on features
or problems with _Japanese_ interpersonal/ family relationships.
We will perform our play on video with the intention of sending
it to our partner class upon completion. They will
produce a video on a similar theme which they will send to us.
Keep this project in mind and prepare a plan for the drama
before our next class.


- Joseph Dias
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Stage Five: Teacher as Confidant

As details of the plan became clearer, I forwarded messages from partner teachers (and my responses) to my students. There were two purposes for this. One was to show students the work going into the exchange from the teachers' perspectives and, therefore, to encourage a greater personal responsibility to succeed. It is rare in traditionally taught classes for teachers to give students such behind-the-scenes glimpses.

My other reason for informing the students of significant developments was to get feedback. In particular, I wondered if they felt that the teachers were getting overly ambitious, at their expense. This turned out not to be the case. Although, the agreed-upon plan was challenging, especially considering they were interacting with native speakers of English, students felt motivated enough to meet it head-on. Providing insight into the instructors' way of thinking is also the sort of modeling that can provide future teachers among the students with guides to the ways teachers operate.

The following messages show refinements to the planned exchange with students in Hawaii. We forwarded these to our students to show that their enthusiasm had an effect on their teachers' attitude and encouraged us to make further efforts. Students could also become aware that teachers were taking the exchange seriously enough to rearrange the syllabus to accommodate it.

```
Subject: Having a Listserv would be ideal
Date: Thu, 14 Nov 1996 19:41:07 +0000
From: Joseph Dias <jodias@cc.aoyama.ac.jp>
To: James Kraus <kraus@chaminade.edu>


I'm glad to hear that your students reacted positively to the
exchange plan. I told my students last week and they were also
enthusiastic about it. If you are able to arrange a listserv
for us that would be wonderful. Things seem to be falling into
place nicely.

Joseph
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James Kraus wrote:
>When I announced to my class that we will be discussing The
>Glass Menagerie with a group from your school, the reception
>was most positive.
>  I've also rearranged the reading schedule so that we should
>be able to begin discussion by the middle of next week.
>  I will look into the possibility of dedicating a listserv
>address to our exchange. That way, all comments will automati-
>cally be sent to everyone involved. Would this be
>acceptable to you and your students?
>
>Jim Kraus
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Stage Six: Teacher as Nervous Parent

CMC enables students to make themselves "heard" as never before. Hundreds of list sub-scribers can read a message sent by someone who previously never enjoyed an audience greater than one or two individuals. With this power comes the fear of intentional or inad-vertent abuse. Students new to the Internet typically lack this fear, which in itself can exac-erbate teacher anxiety. With students using CMC in language classes, perhaps the greatest worry of teachers is that students will send hastily written, unedited messages to student partners and, worse yet, send such messages to public forums, displaying dirty laundry for all to see.

As email projects may have products of exchange other than electrons (e.g., video), worries over quality can extend to these products. After all, the email and student-produced videos reflect teachers', as well as students', competence. Such fear on the part of teachers can lead to parent-like nagging. In a more positive vein, it can motivate instructors to be more explicit about assignments, spend more time giving feedback, require multiple drafts, and instill in students a sense of producing work for a particular audience.

In the following message to the Economics students, the teacher is probably more ex-plicit in directions than if the product were not something to be exchanged. There are also traces of nagging and the message clearly degenerates to an exercise in histrionics at the end.

```
Subject: More advice about the email/ video project
Date: Wed, 06 Nov 1996 10:02:18 +0000
From: Joseph Dias <jodias@cc.aoyama.ac.jp>
To: Dias' Reading & Discussion/ 2nd <jodias-thu2>

*** Intercultural Video-making Exchange Project Information ***
_Procedure_

1) Do some research on the background of your topic. Try to
find out about how the situation (concerning the topic) is the
same or different in Japan and foreign countries.
Example: If your topic is "Portable Telephones Used by Univer-
sity Students," you should find out the details of portable
telephone use in Japan and in foreign countries. You can begin
by doing searches on the WWW or by making inquiries in the
"Student Lists" that we joined last semester.

2) Create a questionnaire to investigate your topic and send it
out over the IECC-survey list or a student list (MOVIE-SL,
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SPORT-SL, etc.) that is the most pertinent to your topic.

3) Use the results of your research and questionnaire when you are preparing the script for your video. [A narrator on the video can explain your research/ questionnaire findings.]

4) Plan a shooting schedule and decide in detail how your video will be structured, who will be featured on it and what locations you will use.

5) Do the shooting of your video. Be sure that EVERYONE in your group plays an active role.

6) Edit the video and do over-dubbing of the soundtrack in parts where voices cannot be heard clearly. [Keep in mind that the video will be exchanged with students abroad who do not know the Japanese language or culture well. That means you'll have to explain everything clearly and translate any Japanese words or sentences into English.]

This project will take the place of the end-of-the-semester exam, so, take it _very_ seriously! Just doing "something" is not enough. You must do the various parts of the project...

* thoroughly
* interestingly
* with enthusiasm.

The reputation of Aoyama Gakuin University, the Economics Department, your teacher, your group and _you_ yourself depend on how well you do this project. Produce work that we can be proud to send around the world!!!

Stage Seven: Teacher Teaches Teaching

If the teacher decides to include peer feedback in a project, she cannot assume students have an understanding of what constitutes feedback. To be useful in improving organization, making corrections, or having a sense of audience, feedback needs to be very specific. Positive, encouraging comments must be balanced by constructive criticism when necessary. The way a teacher wants students to provide peer feedback is a decision reflecting her priorities. The email below shows the way I instructed the Economics students to provide peer feedback:

```
To: Dias' Reading & Discussion/ 2nd <jodias-thu2>
From: Joseph Dias <jodias@cc.aoyama.ac.jp>
Subject: How to give advice to your classmates
Date: Wed., 30 Oct 1996 05:18:11 +0000
```

Hello,
You should have received surveys from a few of your classmates. It will be your job to read them and provide the survey writers with useful feedback. Here's how you can advise them:

Please don't simply say "Great!" or "Nice job!" I want you to give specific and helpful ADVICE. Tell your classmates honestly whether some parts of their surveys are vague or incomprehensible. Of course, you should also tell them what you like about their survey.

When giving advice, you can use symbols such as the following. Put (Sp) after spelling errors; words or phrases that

should be CUT can be placed between ( ); and words or phrases which your classmate should ADD can appear between [ ]. Comments can appear between { }.

Below you will find an example of a student's survey with suggestions for improvement. Please look at it CAREFULLY and follow the example when you give feedback to your classmates:

```
*** Example of how to give useful feedback *** {I think your
questions are interesting and I look forward to seeing your
results!}
>Recently, the relationship between husband{plural} and
>wife{plural} are changing little by little.
>In japan{country names begin with an uppercase letter}, two-
>income couples are increasing. What is the ideal couples do
>you think? {It's better to rephrase this sentence. It should
>begin with "What do you think ... "}

>QUESTIONS
>1. Is your wife [or husband] working outside? 2. [If you are a
>man] What do you think (that) [of] your wife (is) working
>outside?
>3. Do you agree with two-income? Why?
>{It would be better to rephrase this question. You could ask
>"Do you think it's good for both the husband and wife to work
>at full-time jobs?}
>4. When you (will be) [get] married what do you want [you]
>husbant(sp)/wife to do?
>5. What is the ideal marriage life do you think? {The question
>should begin "What do you think ... "}
>Thank you for (your) reading [my survey]. We will compile the
>answers we recieve (sp) [and] send a summery(sp) to the IECC-
>survey list.
**** END OF EXAMPLE ****
```

Stage Eight: Teacher as Troubleshooter

One unwelcome problem for teachers using computers in their classes is that they are sometimes called upon to provide technical advice. The subject headings in such messages typically read: "Help!," "Trouble," or "Oops." Here is an example:

```
To: jodias@cc.aoyama.ac.jp
Subject: trouble!!
From: Tomoko Kobayashi <a13972305@cc.aoyama.ac.jp>
Date: Fri, 01 Nov 1996 03:28:51 +0000

Hello,

I am sorry I could not use mailing list "dias core" I don't
know why I cannot use it, but, when I tried to post my email,
the computer said "you failed to post." However I could send my
homework to only you.
```

Fortunately, the range of things that can go wrong during email or WWW operations is not endless and, eventually, even the most technically inept teacher can learn to diagnose problems and give appropriate advice. Some may even enjoy being seen as technical Messiahs. From a pedagogical point of view it is desirable in language classes for students to engage in situations which require the target language to solve practical problems. The teacher can make it a rule to help students *only* if they ask for assistance and explain their problem using the target language.

Stage Nine: Teacher as Human Being

Inevitably, teachers will make mistakes. Although it is generally difficult for students to report teacher errors face-to-face, CMC provides a less threatening mode for this. I could not imagine the quiet girl, who authored the quoted parts of the following message, expressing such feelings to me in person. The previous day, I had sent her an angry note asking why she had posted, what I thought was, her unrevised survey to a mailing list, ignoring my recommendations for revision.

```
To: M. M. <xxxxx@cc.aoyama.ac.jp>
From: Joseph Dias <jodias@cc.aoyama.ac.jp>
Subject: !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
Date: Fri, 29 Nov 1996 14:56:39 +0000
```

>DEAR DIAS

It's better to write Mr. Dias or Joseph. Also, uppercase letters indicate that someone is shouting (i.e., angry) so it's better not to use them unless you really are angry.

>I am shocked , too.

I guess you really are angry.

>Please understand my effort. I spend my rest times for
>correcting and doing what you advised about my questions. You
>gave me much good advice and I tried to do so.

I'm glad you explained your situation. Maybe I wasn't understanding enough. I appreciate your efforts and I know that the unfamiliarity of using a computer puts additional pressure on you.

>However, I could not explain my opinions in English. So, first
>of all, I tried to correct my mistakes. After that, I sent you
>my survey and you told me to make more corrections. Then I
>sent it to LIST.

Okay. I can see now that you tried. I may have been mistaken in thinking that the survey you sent to the IECC-SURVEYS list was exactly the same as your original one.

>Now please don't say that you wasted your time. I tried to do
>what you advised me even though you were disappointed. I am
>sorry that I made your feel bad.

Actually, I wrote the message to you very late at night when I was tired and it's easy for me to get angry at such times. Don't take it too seriously! I really do appreciate your efforts.

Sincerely,

Joseph

It may also be easier for teachers to admit mistakes privately through email. The offending message, M's reaction to it, and my apology all took place over three days, none of which fell on our regular class meeting day. This illustrates the ability of CMC to extend opportunities for interchange among class participants beyond the limits of a 90-minute period. Teachers can come to know students better. Ideally, an atmosphere is created where misunderstandings are less likely, and, when they do occur, repair can quickly be employed, staving off festering ill feeling.

Stage Ten: Teacher as Student

From a teacher's perspective, a truly rewarding course and project teaches her something she did not already know at the outset. In planning for their video productions, students had to do independent research and design their video around that investigation. In the final stage, the teachers act as students, learning from the nicely packaged findings: videos and summarized survey results. Students and teachers on both sides of the exchange can then provide mutual feedback. The following message came from the teacher in Utah, who served as the spokesperson for her class after viewing our video.

```
Subject: We enjoyed your wonderful video!
Date: 15 Jan 1997 09:33:41 MDT
From: "JILL HASLAM" <JHASLAM@ADMIN.VHS.DAVIS.UT.US>
To: Joseph Dias <jodias@cc.aoyama.ac.jp>

We were very pleased with your video and could see all the hard
work that must have gone into it. Here are some comments we
have about particular segments:

** To the "Part-time jobs" group **

We're glad you showed sensitivity to the audience by explaining
everything clearly and converting all the yen wages into dol-
lars. Although it was clear that most of your interviews were
rehearsed, it is good that some (the one with the teacher, for
example) were spontaneous.

** To the "Buddhism" group **

Your video is definitely the most interesting visually. It was
great that you were able to videotape a Buddhist temple _in
action_ and interview the priest. It's too bad you couldn't
have interviewed some of the baseball-playing monks as well.
Your way of interpreting the Japanese interview into English
was very clever and well done.

You should have explained the custom of "omikuji" in more de-
tail. It's not clear from your video why the student was tying
the 'omikuji' to the branch of a tree. We wonder about its con-
nection to the Buddhist faith.

** To the "Tennis and Kendo" group **

It would have been interesting to include a kendo match in the
video since most people in Utah have not seen kendo. You organ-
ized the video effectively and compared different aspects of
the two sports well.

[several paragraphs deleted]
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Conclusion

This reenactment of course-integrated email exchange projects illustrates ten roles played by teachers: integrator, solicitor/salesperson, negotiator, news reporter, confidant to students, nervous parent, teacher of her craft, troubleshooter, human being (with human foibles), and student. The roles are not static but in a constant state of flux. They change with the stages of the projects and are, in a sense, defined by them. The roles are not always ones the teacher (or student) envisions, or even desires, at the outset.

The teacher's traditional role as advisor and final arbiter is not precluded. For example, in these projects, although students were provided mechanisms for peer feedback, it was felt necessary—admittedly, more for fear of parading dirty laundry than a desire to educate—for students to send their surveys and scripts to the teacher to check for organizational or grammatical problems.

One can imagine settings without CMC or computers that still allow teachers to exercise some of the roles explicated here. However, I would contend that CMC opens up a range of roles and relationships that might never emerge in a traditional classroom. It also allows the more frequent and intensive exercise of such roles as news reporter and teacher of teaching. For these reasons, teachers who use CMC—despite its inherent problems and the additional work it creates for the now omnipresent teacher—cannot countenance the idea of reverting to the relatively role-delimited existence they once had.

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