

# *An Intercultural E-Mail Exchange: Student Attitudes and Perceptions*

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**T**his study describes an intercultural e-mail exchange between a beginning Spanish course at Juniata College and an intermediate English class at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) in Mexico City. I will explain why and how the exchange was initiated and will then describe Juniata students' attitudes toward their own and Mexican cultures and their perceptions of the exchange itself. Finally, I will offer suggestions for implementing a similar exchange, applicable to courses from a variety of disciplines.

## WHY IMPLEMENT AN E-MAIL EXCHANGE?

Previous accounts of e-mail exchanges used in second language classrooms have described the numerous potential benefits of such intercultural exchanges, perhaps the most compelling being an increased student awareness and appreciation of target language cultures. Corresponding regularly with a member of a target culture may help students challenge stereotypes and preconceptions they have about that culture. As discussed by Jogan, Heredia and Aguilera, e-mail exchanges allow for direct, personal-

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ized interaction with someone from the target culture, rather than indirect dissemination of knowledge from the instructor or the textbook.<sup>1</sup> It takes students beyond the classroom and allows them to access information and viewpoints independently of their instructor. Lee asserts that an e-mail exchange is, by nature, a student-centered activity.<sup>2</sup> Students must play an active rather than a passive role in the learning process. They initiate and discuss topics that are of interest and relevant to them, resulting in a highly individualized interaction.

I also anticipated that such a student-centered exchange would motivate students to learn more about the target culture, as well as the target language. Lee found that students' motivation for learning the target culture and language increased as a result of the use of the Internet and an e-mail exchange. Students in her study seemed to realize that learning culture was an important aspect of acquiring a second language.<sup>3</sup> Kern also affirms that regular contact with native speakers via e-mail can motivate students to learn the target language and foster more personal involvement with the language.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to motivation, another affective factor that may be positively influenced by an e-mail exchange is anxiety. Because e-mail is self-paced, private, and non-threatening, it may lower students' anxiety levels, and as a result, promote intercultural awareness and language acquisition.<sup>5</sup>

When students receive messages in the target language, they are also receiving valuable authentic input that not only develops reading comprehension skills, but also promotes language acquisition.<sup>6</sup> Students corresponding in the target language are actually using the language for meaningful communication in an authentic context. They are also likely to use a wide range of communicative purposes (e.g., persuading, informing).<sup>7</sup> These purposes are "real," and may help students realize that their second language is not just a classroom artifact, that it is actually used to "get things done" in real life.

E-mail as a medium of communication also has the advantage of being efficient and immediate. Similar "snail mail" exchanges have been used in the profession for decades, but the sense of immediacy created by e-mail enhances the exchange and allows for frequent correspondence between participants. In addition to its

speed, researchers have commented on the accessibility and low cost of e-mail.<sup>8</sup> E-mail is becoming increasingly accessible to students and teachers around the world, particularly in institutions of higher learning, and as a result it is relatively easy to find partner classes in numerous countries.

Given these many potential benefits, I decided to implement an e-mail exchange with my Spanish I class in the spring semester, 2001. Because previous accounts of e-mail exchanges have been primarily descriptive in nature rather than data-based, I also determined to collect both quantitative and qualitative data regarding students' attitudes toward Mexican and U.S. cultures and toward the e-mail exchange experience.

### INITIATING THE PRESENT STUDY

My purpose for initiating the present exchange was cultural rather than linguistic, given that the learners were beginners and thus could not produce or comprehend Spanish at the beginning of the semester. While some learners had studied 1-2 years of Spanish in high school, many had no previous experience with Spanish, and none was assumed. I developed this action research project to determine whether learners' attitudes toward Mexican culture and the Spanish language would be influenced by a cross-cultural e-mail exchange. I was also interested in students' attitudes toward the exchange experience itself and I wanted to use students' post-exchange recommendations, along with my own, to aid instructors considering the implementation of an e-mail exchange in the future.

I initiated the exchange using the Intercultural E-mail Classroom Connections ListServ, a service provided by [Teaching.com](http://Teaching.com), and initiated by St. Olaf College in 1992. It is available on the Internet at: [www.teaching.com/IECC](http://www.teaching.com/IECC). The teacher of a Mexican English as a second language class requested a partner class in the U.S. and I responded via e-mail.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE CLASSES

I discuss data from 13 learners in this article. Eight other students participated in the exchange but are not included here either because they were international students or they did not complete all of the tasks. As previously mentioned, participants were students in a first semester Spanish course at Juniata College. While

this specific course was not required, it did fulfill humanities and international distribution requirements. The mean age of students was 20, ranging from 18-22. Students' programs of emphasis included the following: 7 sciences, 1 social work, 1 psychology, 1 business, 1 math/secondary education, 1 information technology, and 1 political science. Seven of the students had studied Spanish in high school while 6 had studied French, German or Latin. Eleven of the 13 were born and raised in Pennsylvania and 2 in New York State. The students had little travel experience outside of the United States. Regarding experience with Mexican culture, 8 reported none (excepting movies and restaurants), 4 reported contact with Mexican high school classmates, and 1 reported having a Mexican friend who immigrated to the U.S.

The Mexican class was an intermediate level English writing class at UNAM, a large public university in Mexico City. The undergraduate students in this class were studying a wide variety of disciplines and the course was required for all of them.

## SETTING UP THE EXCHANGE

The Mexican teacher and I instructed our students that they were to write weekly e-mail messages to their partners. We determined that the primary language of communication would be English, due to the low level of Spanish proficiency of the Juniata class. (Despite this, however, 9 of 13 of the Juniata students and 7 of 13 of the Mexican students used some Spanish in their correspondence.) The content of the messages was open-ended, that is, students were to initiate topics of their choosing. In addition, both classes were periodically instructed to ask their partners about topics related to course content, such as holidays, current events and cultural stereotypes.

In addition to e-mail correspondence, the classes exchanged a video, small gifts, letters and postcards at mid-semester. I traveled to Mexico City during spring break and the Mexican teacher and I met and exchanged these items.

The Juniata students were assigned two reflection papers, to be turned in at mid-semester and the end of the semester. The syllabus stated that the students were to analyze and reflect on what they learned about Mexican culture through their partners. With the reflection papers students were required to turn in hard copies of all

messages sent and received. Students also completed a pre-and post-exchange survey regarding their attitudes toward Mexican and U.S. cultures and toward the exchange. Some items were adapted from surveys used by Carlson and Widaman and Clavijo.<sup>9</sup>

## U.S. STUDENTS' CULTURAL ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS: SURVEY RESULTS

Students' pre- and post-exchange survey responses were compared by conducting paired samples t-tests. The t-tests were used to determine whether pre-exchange means were significantly different from post-exchange means for each item. Table 1 below displays the results; items for which  $p < .05$  indicate significant differences. I will comment on each item, further illustrating the discussion with quotations taken from students' reflection papers and post-exchange survey statements. Additional items were included in the survey, but I limit this discussion to the most interesting and relevant results.

Table 1: Student attitudes and beliefs: T-test results (n=13)

Item	Mean (Pre/Post)	sd	t	p
In your opinion, how much difference is there between Mexican and U.S....way of life? (1=much the same...5=very different)	3.75 2.83	.62 .94	2.73	.02
...family life?	3.33 3.33	1.15 1.07	.00	1.0
...religious and philosophical attitudes?	3.75 3.42	.97 1.16	1.17	.27
Rate you own ...interest in learning Spanish (1=nonexistent, 2=slight, 3=fair, 4=considerable, 5=great)	4.58 4.38	.70 .77	.77	.46
...interest in Mexican culture	3.83 3.75	.94 1.06	.36	.72
...knowledge of Mexican culture	2.85 3.00	1.46 .71	-.43	.67
...respect for Mexican cultural traditions and achievements	4.38 4.62	.65 .65	-1.39	.19

...desire to meet and interact with Mexican people	3.85 4.15	.80 .90	-1.30	.22
...desire to travel and/or live in Mexico	3.46 3.54	1.20	-3.20	.75
...awareness of problems common to many nations	2.62 3.00	.65 .71	-2.74	.02
...concern with problems of Third World countries	2.62 3.15	.96 1.14	-2.21	.05

### *Similar Way of Life*

Although students remained neutral regarding differences between family life in the two cultures, and they did not change significantly regarding perceptions of religious and philosophical attitudes, the quantitative survey did reveal a significant decrease in student perceptions of the difference between Mexican and U.S. ways of life. This belief in the similarity between the two cultures was also evidenced in many students' reflection papers, several examples of which are seen below. All names have been changed to protect participants' anonymity.

I was able to see that college students in Mexico have many of the same likes, dislikes, and day-to-day struggles as we do. As students, we both struggle daily with getting work completed and still making time for other activities.

I learned that Mexico, and Mexican students are very similar to those in America. My pen pal is like me in that she works and goes to classes at the same time. She also tells me that she goes under a lot of stress when she has a lot of work to get done. In her free time she likes to do many of the things that Americans enjoy as well. She likes to go for walks, go to museums and she likes to go to nightclubs and dance. The way she talked about these things made it seem like they are pretty common in Mexico.

One of the least surprising similarities is the love of basketball. (...) Another surprising similarity is Pedro's interest as well as his country's interest in all styles of music. I think one of the common stereotypes is that Latin America only listens to Latino music. As far as I can tell, we are dead wrong.

I learned a lot about the Mexican culture. In many instances it is a lot like ours. Raquel has the same basic family structure that I have. I even learned that they have something similar to our Spring Break. I have also discovered that college students all over the world basically do the same things! (...) I once held a preconceived notion that all Mexicans were devote (sic) Catholics/Christians, and I learned that like in the United States, there are those who are devote (sic) and those who aren't.

Viewing the video of the Mexican class particularly influenced some students' perceptions of the similarities between U.S. and Mexican culture, as evidenced in the statements below.

I liked the video exchange that we did with the class from Mexico. It gave us a chance to see that they were similar to us. Some of the students were outgoing, some were shy and some were comfortable. It seemed as if these kids were completely different from us when we didn't have any visual contact, then once we saw the video, I felt more able to relate with the students.

Luis is very much like me. He has goals, he is going to college, he has a family whom he loves, and he is learning a new language. I learned that the school system (as in elementary school, high school, and college) in Mexico is very similar to the system in the U.S. Also, Luis dresses a lot like students in the U.S. dress. Seeing him in the video that his class made for our class was sort of surprising, because he wasn't that much different than any of us. Of course he and his classmates have different customs and traditions than we have, but their lives are very much like our lives.

Except for their language and a few different customs, from the video it looked like their class was exactly like an American class. Clothes were very similar, the classroom setting and how they conducted themselves. Just like in our classes, there were students who liked to talk a lot, those who tried to hide in the back, the clown who always tries to get a joke in, etc. From the video alone, many of my generalizations of Mexico were nullified. I thought they wore somewhat of a ridiculous outfit everyday, but it turns out those are just for special occasions.

Jogan et al. also found that many students, in written reflection statements, were impressed by similarities in their own and their partners' ways of life.<sup>10</sup> Given that the students in both exchanges were college students of the same age group, it is not surprising that they found many commonalities. On the other

hand, this strong tendency to focus on cultural similarities is noteworthy, given that cultural differences do exist, and are significant to understanding any culture.

### *Interest in Learning Spanish and in Mexican Culture*

As seen in Table 1, neither students' interest in learning Spanish nor their interest in Mexican culture changed significantly over the course of the exchange. However, note that at both the beginning and end of the semester, students rated their interest in learning the language as "considerable" or "great," and their interest in Mexican culture as "considerable." Thus the students' high interest at the beginning of the semester (recall that they were not required to enroll in the course) remained high, although this may or may not be related to the exchange. Likewise, the exchange, as expected, did not miraculously produce "great" interest in all students.

### *Respect for and Knowledge of Mexican Culture*

Similarly, students rated their "respect for Mexican cultural traditions and achievements" as "considerable" or "great" both at the beginning and end of the semester. While the mean increased from 4.38 to 4.62, this increase was not statistically significant. Students rated themselves as "fair" with regard to their knowledge of Mexican culture in both the pre-and post-survey. While this may seem surprising, or even discouraging, statements made in the post-survey and the reflection papers reveal that students did learn about Mexican culture from the exchange, but that they also realized how much more they still had to learn.

My little knowledge about Mexicans is good. I respect their people, culture, and traditions. They have a unique culture in which they have a lot of pride.

I feel that I know more about Mexicans and their culture now than what I had before, but I still don't think I know much at all.

We have talked about many topics—ranging from the topography of our countries to the work ethics of the people along with the poverty levels. I have learned a lot about Mexican culture that I was not aware of before. For example, I always assumed that Mexicans ate Mexican food, but I was very wrong. They have foreign food restaurants just like the U.S. This may seem trite, but

it is something that is very important. Suddenly I realized that they are not just Mexicans living in a Mexican culture, but they are part of this modern, transcultural world, just like we are, interacting with all the various cultures.

### *Desire to Meet Mexican People and to Travel to Mexico*

While there was no significant increase in students' desire "to meet and interact with Mexican people" or "to travel and/or live in Mexico," several students expressed an increased desire to do so in reflection papers and post-surveys.

I would like to visit Mexico and study abroad because I love to travel and I would love to meet the people I've been learning about and because I would like to see the world from their perspectives.

I would love to visit Mexico...I want to incorporate more of their culture into my life.

Sara sent me some pictures of Mexico...I always pictured Mexico as a desert, but it is not. The pictures she sent me were very beautiful. Felipe described what his town and the area around it looked like. It sounds like a very beautiful place to visit. Because of communicating with them it has made me want to go to Mexico to visit.

Statements from one student's pre- and post-surveys show a change in his feelings about visiting Mexico. In his pre-exchange survey he indicated that he had recently traveled with his family to Cancun and had had a negative experience, while in the post-survey he articulated a desire to travel to Mexico. In another statement this same student expressed surprise and happiness that his partner had invited him to his home in Mexico City.

I'm not sure at the present moment (if I'd like to visit Mexico). I have a bad feeling since I returned from Cancun. I realize this is not a good example, but it still burns. (pre-survey)

I would like to visit Mexico and this time in a non-tourist area. I want to see how a true Mexican family lives. (post-survey)

### *Awareness of and Concern with World Problems*

While it was neither the goal nor the focus of the exchange,

there was a significant increase in students' perceived "awareness of problems common to many nations" and "concern with problems of Third World countries." Whether this is a result of the exchange cannot be determined, and there are no quotes to support it, but it is certainly a desirable change.

### *Stereotypes*

Although cultural stereotypes were not included as a specific survey item, one of the students' assignments was to inform their partners of stereotypes and perceptions of Mexicans that exist in the U.S. and to find out what stereotypes Mexicans have of people from the U.S. Numerous students commented in their post-exchange surveys and papers that their own stereotypes of Mexicans had changed as a result of the exchange. Several students commented that their Mexican partners were much more hard-working than they had expected.

I do feel that many of my stereotypes have been proven wrong though, such as lazy, dirty, non-advanced, etc. I think they are almost the exact opposite of that now.

I thought that they were primitive in a way compared to the U.S. but obviously if we communicate through email and videotapes they are much more advanced than I thought. They definitely don't seem to be a lazy culture like I had once perceived.

One stereotype that was proven false to me was that Adrián seemed incredibly hard working. Many people feel that Mexican people are usually more laid back and not as interested with rigorous work as Americans are. But Adrián seemed to be hard-working and incredibly concerned with his studies.

Some students also registered surprise regarding the stereotypes that Mexicans have of people from the U.S., as the following quote illustrates:

I was very surprised by the stereotypes that Mexicans have of us. I never would have thought that people would assume that Americans would eat a lot of hot dogs, hamburgers, and pancakes. I know that Americans are often ridiculed for going to so many fast food restaurants, but I still found it interesting that she mentioned meat and especially that she mentioned pancakes. Also that we are

thought of as being friendly and hard working was interesting to me because I am always used to hearing how Americans are going here and there and never stop and talk to people, etc.

## STUDENTS' REACTIONS TO THE EXCHANGE

The post-exchange survey also included questions, both quantitative and open-ended, regarding the exchange itself. Means and standard deviations for the Likert scale items are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Post-exchange survey means (n=13)

Statement (5=strongly agree, 1=strongly disagree)	Mean (sd)
This pen-pal exchange was not beneficial to me.	2.83 (1.33)
I learned a great deal about Mexican culture from this exchange.	3.38 (1.04)
The exchange did not help me improve my Spanish.	3.15 (1.21)
I learned more about how Mexicans view U.S. culture/people.	3.15 (1.46)
I will not continue to correspond with my e-mail partner after the semester ends.	2.23 (1.17)
I would recommend that similar exchanges be done in future classes.	4.31 (1.03)
I would like the exchange to have more structure, with topics assigned for each week.	3.38 (1.33)
I did not learn from the video that the Mexican students made.	1.23 (0.44)
I enjoyed watching the video.	4.92 (1.04)
I feel that the exchange changed my attitudes toward Mexicans.	3.85 (1.41)
The exchange did not change how I view my own culture.	2.85 (0.99)
Overall, I enjoyed the e-mail exchange.	4.23 (1.01)

Means taken from the post-exchange survey revealed that students generally felt that the exchange was beneficial and enjoyable, and they recommended that similar exchanges be done in future classes. Students also noted, both in this section of the post-survey and in their final reflection papers, the benefits of learning about Mexican culture “first hand,” rather than only indirectly, through the textbook or the instructor. The following quotations exemplify this sentiment:

As a whole, I think this email exchange should be continued throughout the years to come. I feel that I have learned many

important things about Mexican life and culture through Maribel. I was also glad to have someone to help answer my questions first-hand. I really hope to continue writing to Maribel at least through next year when I am in Spanish II.

I liked that we were able to learn about a culture directly from a source who is part of the culture.

This project was very enjoyable and allowed me to learn “first hand” what Mexican culture is like without being there. It was also nice to be able to teach someone who lives in another country about the United States. Miguel was very nice and wonderful about helping me with my Spanish and with any questions I had. It was wonderful to see that we are not that different after all.

Overall, I feel the email partner program is a great aspect of the Spanish course and gives us a more real way to experience another culture without actually traveling there.

Students also indicated disagreement with the statement “I will not continue to correspond with my e-mail partner after the semester ends,” and several students expressed their desire and intent to continue the correspondence after the class ended.

Students responded neutrally to several items. While they were neutral with regard to having learned “a great deal about Mexican culture,” as mentioned previously, students did comment on learning about Mexican culture but recognized the limited amount they could learn in one semester from one correspondent. Students were also neutral with respect to the exchange helping them with their Spanish, which was to be expected given that they wrote primarily in English given their low Spanish proficiency. The exchange did, however, seem to make some students reflect upon language learning issues, and in some cases, encouraged students in their language learning endeavors.

The video also made me realize that English is just as hard for them to learn as Spanish is for us!

Also, he was worried about his ability to write in English, however I found his English to be quite well (sic), considering it is not his first language. It also put me at ease, because even though he has learned much more English than I have learned Spanish, he is still learning.

I have no problems understanding what either of them mean in English or Spanish for the most part. They seem to understand what I am saying as well, although when I write in Spanish that we have not learned in class, I find myself struggling a little. They always seem to understand what I mean.

Laura's English was very good, and barely needed corrected (sic). This gave me hope that at some point I will be that fluent in Spanish.

They were also neutral in response to the item "I learned more about how Mexicans view U.S. culture/people." Notice however, the high standard deviation (1.46) for this item. The assignment regarding Mexicans' perceptions/stereotypes of U.S. people was given toward the end of the semester, and many students had not yet received a response from their partners regarding this topic. Thus those students likely rated the item low, while students who had received an answer likely rated it high. Finally, students were neutral with regard to desiring more structure and weekly assigned topics. This is discussed further in the "Recommendations for Future Exchanges" section.

The means in Table 2 also show that reactions to the video were overwhelmingly positive; students felt that they both learned from the video and enjoyed viewing it. This is further evidenced by numerous positive comments. The video seemed to be perceived as more "real" and tangible to students than the written e-mail messages.

I think that the video was the most beneficial thing from the exchange. (...) It showed me many different things about their culture.

Their letters (and gifts) were also a really nice touch, in addition to the video, because it allowed us to see them and have a piece of Mexico. Seeing whom we were writing to made it more exciting. It made them more than just some words in an email.

While students felt that the exchange changed their attitudes toward Mexicans ( $x=3.85$ ), they were neutral as to whether it changed how they viewed their own culture ( $x=2.85$ ). In addition, in answer to the open-ended survey question "Do you feel that the exchange affected your attitudes toward your own or Mexican cultures?" students revealed the following:

I learned a lot of good and bad things of both (cultures)...I lost respect for my culture while gaining respect for their culture.

My attitude or more like my perception has changed. (Mexicans) are much more modern than I thought, and more educated.

I think my feelings toward Mexicans have changed. I have a great respect for them and their culture. Also, I see my country in a different light. I think we are too close-minded and stuck on ourselves too much. We need to think of other people in different countries as humans just like us.

I am more open-minded towards the Mexican culture than I used to be.

I think it cleared some stereotypes up and allowed me to understand Mexican culture more so than just studying it out of a book.

I realized that American society is very ethnocentric. I believed that our country is so different from others, and while the government system may be, there are many similarities between the two cultures.

These quotes also illustrate several previously mentioned ideas salient in the surveys and reflection papers. As a result of the exchange, students tended to perceive their own and Mexican cultures to be more similar than different and to question their own stereotypes of Mexican culture, and perhaps their view of their own culture. While a one-semester exchange is obviously limited in scope and depth, it succeeded in making many students examine their cultural beliefs and attitudes, and provided them with a direct connection to someone from another culture.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE EXCHANGES

In addition to questions regarding students' cultural attitudes and opinions of the exchange, the post-survey requested student suggestions for improving future exchanges. While the quantitative survey item revealed that students were neutral with respect to the need for more structure, some students did comment that they would have liked more assigned topics, saying that it was sometimes difficult to think of topics every week. Rather than assigning weekly topics throughout the semester as recommended by some students, I agree with Liaw's suggestion of having students brain-

storm potential topics early in the semester and then distributing that list.<sup>11</sup> This would allow students to generate the topics and would maintain a learner-centered approach to the exchange. Jogan et al. also used student-generated themes.<sup>12</sup>

A student also recommended implementing e-mail deadlines for both classes each week. While 9 of 13 students reported sending approximately one message per week, several reported difficulties receiving a response at the beginning of the semester, and three of these were assigned another partner. This suggestion should be considered by teachers setting up an exchange, but may be difficult (and time-consuming) to enforce.

Students also suggested that the exchange be made mandatory for the Mexican students. While it indeed was a required component of the class, some Mexican students did not respond promptly, did not answer questions, or wrote brief, uninformative e-mail messages. In order to ensure that no student experience such a failed exchange, the instructor may have students carbon copy him/her on each message (including the previous message from their partner at the bottom of their message). This would allow the instructor to monitor the regularity of the correspondence throughout the semester, although again, it would require an additional time commitment. Ruhe also makes several suggestions for avoiding non-response, including: pairing partners of similar ages, genders and interests; in-class rather than out of class e-mail writing; and committing students to a “contract.”<sup>13</sup>

I believe, however, that the most crucial component of an exchange is open and frequent communication between the two instructors. This communication can serve to make expectations (of the exchange and the students) clear and to ensure that both instructors are equally committed to the success of the exchange.

It would also be beneficial to incorporate what students learn in the exchange into classroom discussions on a regular basis. While this was done spontaneously for the present exchange, it was not part of the course calendar. Jogan et al. dedicated one class hour every two weeks to the analysis of language and culture learned from the partner class and also used topics discussed in the exchange in oral interviews.<sup>14</sup> Incorporating the exchange into class discussion would not only give the instructor an early indication as to the content and success of the correspondence, but it

would also serve to inform students of multiple viewpoints and to provide students whose partners do not write frequently with additional cultural input. Students might also give brief presentations on information learned from their partners. However the exchange is incorporated into the course, it is important that it be made a significant portion of the grade for both classes.

To further ensure the success of an exchange, the instructors can prepare students for the exchange by providing them with thorough guidelines. The IECC homepage includes a page on e-mail etiquette, addressing issues such as: responding promptly, answering questions, paraphrasing, developing ideas fully, asking for opinions/advice, and acknowledging helpful comments. Additionally, the International E-Mail Tandem Network (<http://www.slfl.ruhr-unibochum.de/email/idx-eng00.html>) includes useful tips for: introducing oneself, adapting the level of communication to the appropriate level, understanding one's partner (reading strategies), and learning from corrections/correcting a partner's errors.

It is also advisable to combine an e-mail exchange with other cultural activities. Kern comments on the limitations of e-mail messages, given that they are often brief and unelaborated. Thus he suggests that exchanges be supplemented with prepared essays to provide more content and to encourage more reflection. Kern cautions against the exclusive use of e-mail messages to teach culture, given their personal, and thus limited frame of reference. He suggests incorporating readings in textbooks and other sources to provide learners multiple cultural perspectives.<sup>15</sup>

I also recommend supplementing an e-mail exchange with other technologies whenever possible. This could include: video exchange, videoconferencing, web-based chatting/instant messenger services. While a video (and letter/gift) exchange would take longer to arrive, given the positive reaction from the students in this study, it would be well worth the time and effort. If the exchange institution has the necessary technology, videoconferencing can be a valuable addition to an e-mail exchange. I have used videoconferences with two other classes, and communicating in real time and seeing their partners has proven exciting and motivating for all involved. I have not utilized chatting/instant messenger services, but as it becomes increasingly popular with students here and abroad, it could also be a useful communicative tool.

When implementing an exchange in a second language class, the language of the exchange is another important issue. In this case it was necessary to use English, but with more advanced students a choice must be made. The International E-Mail Tandem Network recommends that each student write half of his/her message in the first language and half in the second so that all students both provide and receive second language input. Allowing students to write part of their message in their first language also enables them to include more complex and perhaps interesting information. Jogan et al. suggested two exchanges per week, one in English and the other in Spanish.<sup>16</sup> The students participating in their exchange, advanced U.S. students of Spanish, also were required to highlight new vocabulary, structures, discourse strategies, etc., and to create a list of these new linguistic elements, further promoting language acquisition.

#### FINDING A PARTNER CLASS

As previously mentioned, I found the Mexican class using the Intercultural E-mail Classroom Connections ListServ: [www.teaching.com/IECC](http://www.teaching.com/IECC). At last count more than 7650 teachers in 82 countries were participating in one or more of the IECC lists, which include K-12 and higher education lists. One can also find a partner class through this service by looking at digests of requests on-line.

There are numerous other sites available to assist in finding a partner class, one of which is E-Pals Classroom Exchange: [www.epals.com](http://www.epals.com). The E-Pals site states that 3.5 million teachers and students have used E-pals, with approximately 300-700 profiles added each month (and 50,000 in their database). A prospective teacher can submit a profile or search those submitted by others, at all levels of education (elementary, middle, high school or higher education).

Both the IEEC and the E-Pals websites include a wide variety of disciplines and countries. Exchanges are certainly not limited to second language classes, given that students in many disciplines can benefit from an international perspective. Examples of recent classes soliciting partners include (with the country in parentheses): business (Finland), economics (Germany), corporate economics (Germany), information technology (Germany), corporate communication (Belgium), world novels (Taiwan), intercultural communications (Mexico and France), comparative cultures

(Japan), journalism (Peru), elementary education (Australia).

Another option for finding a partner class, particularly for those in higher education, is contacting instructors at exchange institutions abroad. I recently did this myself by contacting an ESL instructor at Juniata's exchange institution in Puebla, Mexico (Universidad de las Américas). Corresponding with students at a partner institution also has the potential added benefit of enticing students to study abroad at that institution in the future.

I encourage colleagues in all disciplines to explore the possibility of implementing an intercultural e-mail exchange in their courses. This student-centered endeavor has the potential to change cultural attitudes and to increase students' knowledge and awareness of other cultures.



#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> M. Karen Jogan, Ana Heredia H., and Gladys Aguilera M., "Cross-Cultural E-Mail: Providing Cultural Input for the Advanced Foreign Language Student," *Foreign Language Annals*, 34 (2001): 341-354.

<sup>2</sup> Lina Lee, "Using Internet Tools as an Enhancement of C2 Teaching and Learning," *Foreign Language Annals*, 30 (1997): 410-424.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Kern, "Technology, Social Interaction, and FL Literacy," in Judith A. Muyskens, ed., *New Ways of Learning and Teaching: Focus on Technology and Foreign Language Education* (Boston: Heinle, 1998), pp. 57-92.

<sup>5</sup> Jogan et al., "Cross-Cultural E-Mail"; Stephen Krashen, *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition* (New York: Pergamon, 1982); Lee, "Using Internet Tools"; Valerie Ruhe, "E-mail Exchanges: Teaching Language, Culture and Technology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *TESL Canada Journal/La Revue TESL du Canada*, 16 (1998): 88-95.

<sup>6</sup> Kern, "Technology, Social Interaction, and FL Literacy"; Krashen, *Principles and Practices in Second Language Acquisition*.

<sup>7</sup> Kern, "Technology, Social Interaction, and FL Literacy."

<sup>8</sup> Ibid; Jogan et al., "Cross-Cultural E-Mail."

<sup>9</sup> Jerry S. Carlson and Keith F. Widaman, "The Effects of Study Abroad during College on Attitudes toward Other Cultures," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 12 (1988): 1-17; Fabio J. Clavijo, "Effects of Teaching Culture on Attitude Change," *Hispania*, 67 (1984): 88-91.

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<sup>11</sup> Meei-Ling Liaw, "Using Electronic Mail for English as a Foreign Language Instruction," *System*, 26 (1998): 335-351.

<sup>12</sup> Jogan et al., "Cross-Cultural E-Mail."

<sup>13</sup> Ruhe, "E-mail Exchanges."

<sup>14</sup> Jogan et al., "Cross-Cultural E-Mail."

<sup>15</sup> Kern, "Technology, Social Interaction, and FL Literacy."

<sup>16</sup> Jogan et al., "Cross-Cultural E-Mail."