

including "chat" rooms where text is exchanged live, or "conferencing" where email is collected and scrolled in one long document. See Appendix A, for a detailed definition of e-mail.

The two most popular uses of email are: person to person private mail, just like letters of old; and Listserves, or mailing lists, which let a group of people broadcast messages among a group.

We will explore each of these uses in terms of the way they humanize technology and the effects that has on the user.

Person to Person

The most basic type of e-mail usage is the sending and receiving of messages between two individuals. Johnny sends his friend Gail a letter and she replies. Like letter writing and sending via the post office, or "snailmail", kid to kid e-mail lets the student edit and shape their thoughts before sending, and file letters for later reference. Unlike snailmail, kid to kid e-mail in schools is free, usually instant, and not effected by distance (Cotton, 1997). These characteristics combine to make kid to kid e-mail very attractive to kids because it's exciting "meeting" new people, simulates real-life learning from a writing perspective, and is easy to learn how to do (Cotton, 97). In addition, as Cotton (1997) points out, e-mail is basically "electronic travel", and travel is not only educational, but fun.

Assuming you have a classroom capable of e-mail there are some basic ways a teacher could go about facilitating kid to kid e-mail as part of a curriculum. The most basic is to find another classroom, preferably in different part of the world, that is also wired and also wants to work e-mail into their curriculum. A commonly used name for this kind of e-mail use is "Key Pals", or "Keypals". One Web site that facilitates such exchanges had 2,447 entries of schools willing to participate in KeyPAL projects at the time of this writing (ECE, 1997). Below is a random entry of a teacher looking for Keypals on one such Web site.

"French Grade 7 and 8. I am interested in a keypal exchange with another class in the grade 7 and 8 age group of 10 to 13 years. I will have 33 students in September of 1997. Our school is Precious Blood, Exeter, Ontario, Canada. I would like the exchange to be in French. We study French as a second language for 40 minutes each day. Elaine Coxon, elaine.coxon@odyssey.on.ca, 5 August 1997." (Rigby, 1997)

The goals of setting up a class with Keypals are to expand the student's world, increase higher level thinking skills, and facilitate civil communications with other human beings (Cotton 1997). It is in this last point that we see part of the reason kids love e-mail and learn to use it without prodding and in a flurry of excitement. Cotton (1997) identified

without producing a high level of excitement. Cotton (1997) identified another motivation as well, that a letter waiting in a kid's e-mail mailbox is enticing because it says someone out there is wants to talk to you, read your words, see what you're thinking. As far as age is concerned there is ample evidence that it is rarely too early to teach a kid to use e-mail. First graders have energetically embraced e-mail (Cotton, 1997) and been observed to have it increase their desire to want to learn to read and type better (Oakes, 1996).

Listserve

Listserve are the next level in e-mail skills because they require some additional technology and management. A Listserve is remarkably close to what you might guess it is from the word - a "list" of people that are "served" each others e-mail. A Listserve is a grouping of people who have all subscribed to a list. When any one person sends a message to the list's single address, the message is automatically sent to all the people on the list. There are thousands of Listserve, more commonly called "mailing lists", on every subject from the Calcium Interest Group list, to the Kids Talking to Kids About Asthma list (Walter 1997).

An example of the effective use of a mailing list with kids is the KIDLINK project that took place during the Gulf War. The goal of the project was to create a global conversation between kids ages 10 to 15 from all around the world to discuss the Gulf War, while it happened. KIDLINK had several different mailing lists, including some for the adult organizers, with names like KIDCAFE and KIDPEACE. KIDPEACE was the forum for discussing the Gulf War. With teacher's help KIDPEACE attracted Kids from Norway to South Africa and thousands of letters, to the point where the creation of an index became necessary to be able to read the daily postings (Wheeler 1992).

Reading kid's messages from KIDPEACE showed a great amount of emotional energy coupled with genuine love and caring. Disagreements about the war were common, with children in Italy feeling differently than ones in New Jersey who had fathers fighting in the war. But just as common was strong evidence of serious thought and a willingness to hear each other out, to engage in meaningful dialog amidst the disagreements. KIDPEACE became a place for kids to express their feelings, whatever they were

(Wheeler 1992).

The Dangers

Some people have compared e-mail to the telephone. This might cause one to wonder why we would want e-mail in the classroom. After all we don't provide students with phones to use to call people all over the world during class time (imagine the bill)

class time (imagine the bill!).

While the future may find e-mail acting more like the telephone in its ease of use and widespread adoption by the population, the basic difference between the two is that e-mail forces one to write and compose their thoughts alone. This is a big difference and one that will remain. And now, as we ride out the big waves of the information revolution, e-mail gives us a very powerful way to use the excitement of the revolution to teach kids valuable skills they'll need in the new world.

But the concerns about the social aspects between the two are valid. There is a danger of in class e-mail taking on a purely social party kind of atmosphere. To avoid this it is the teacher's responsibility to set up tasks and goals from the beginning, like Keypals (Cotton 1997) that keep things from straying into gossipville. Another problem is increased usage by the world's population of the Internet which, like cars, creates traffic.

As more and more people get wired to the Internet and can join mailing lists, new problems appear as well, one of which is keeping the numbers of posts to a readable level by controlling the number of members. The other is "flame wars". As a member of many mailing lists I can attest to this personally and show single marks if necessary. A "flame" is message that insults, or baits, someone to let fly an emotional counter attack, basically a fist-fight with words.

One of the challenges of anyone facilitating a large mailing list, which I have also done, is to put out flames out before they become flame wars and either drag everybody into the brawl, or drive everybody off the list. An example of diffusing flames would be stepping in and encouraging the flammers to take the discussion "off-line", meaning moving it to person to person private communications. If we continue with the fist fight metaphor this would be like a bar bouncer saying, "take it outside". Another way is to try and diffuse flammers by privately asking them to make up and let things go, or publicly searching for common ground and acting as a mediator.

In terms of kid's, flames are less of a concern because of the teachers presence, authority, and hopefully structure, around which the kids are e-mailing. But flames are something to watch out for none the less.

It is a testament to e-mail's ability to humanize that flame wars even exist. After all, fighting is very human.

Conclusion

If we compare a student madly typing away so their voice be heard, with that same student writing a "what I did on my summer break" assignment

using a word processing program, some stunning chasms in humanistic elements, motivation and relevancy to the learner become evident. In addition to motivation and relevancy, e-mails humanistic qualities lead to the intrinsic rewards for the learner that come from making friends, learning from peers and the joy of being listened to.

The byproduct of all this blitzing about of e-mail and also is long term memory storage of how to use, and learn about, computers, due to e-mail's inherent rehearsal and encoding activities of sending, checking, filing, checking, checking again, sending, etc.

Given the proper environment e-mail will teach kids how to not only write and communicate, but how to use computers and the Internet without them even realizing they're learning.

If you can let the e-mail flow, do it. You'll see students formally intimidated by the computer lab, bopping in to the lab, turning on the computer, booting up the software and checking their e-mail with only the sparkle of excitement and anticipation in their eyes.

[Introduction](#) | [Person to Person](#) | [Listserve](#) | [Dangers](#) | [Conclusion](#)
[References](#) | [More Info](#) | [Definition of E-mail](#)

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[Introduction](#) | [Person to Person](#) | [Listserve](#) | [Dangers](#) | [Conclusion](#)
[References](#) | [More Info](#) | [Definition of E-mail](#)

APPENDIX A

Sources of more information on the Web.

The Email Classroom Exchange, or ECE
Searchable index of over 2000 schools willing to form email Keypal projects.
<http://www.iglou.com/xchange/ece/index>

The Comprehensive Internet Reference to Discussion Lists
Search for mailing lists of all kinds:
<http://tile.net/lists/>

Rigby Heinemann Inc. Keypals
A small site with detailed listings of Keypal opportunities and Keypal etiquette info.
<http://www.reedbooks.com.au/heinemann/global/keypalt>

[Introduction](#) | [Person to Person](#) | [Listserve](#) | [Dangers](#) | [Conclusion](#)
[References](#) | [More Info](#) | [Definition of E-mail](#)

APPENDIX B

The definition of e-mail.

From The Free On-line Dictionary of Computing at:
<http://wagner.princeton.edu/foldoc/contents>

(e-mail -> electronic mail)

<messaging> (e-mail) Messages automatically passed from one computer user to another, often through computer networks and/or via modems over telephone lines.

A message, especially one following the common RFC 822 standard, begins with several lines of headers, followed by a blank line, and the body of the message. An increasing number of e-mail systems support the MIME standard which allows the message body to contain "attachments" of different kinds rather than just one block of plain ASCII text. It is conventional for the body to end with a signature.

Headers give the name and electronic mail address of the sender and recipient(s), the time and date when it was sent and a subject. There are many other headers which may get added by different message handling systems during delivery.

The message is "composed" by the sender, often using a special program - a "Mail User Agent" (MUA). It is then passed to some kind of "Message Transfer Agent" (MTA) - a program which is responsible for either delivering the message locally or passing it to another MTA, probably on another host. MTAs on different hosts on a network often communicate using SMTP. The message is eventually delivered to the recipient's mailbox - normally a file on his computer - from where he can read it using a mail reading program (which may or may not be the same MUA as used by the sender).

reading program (which may or may not be the same MUA as used by the sender).

Contrast snail-mail, paper-net, voice-net.

The form "email" is also seen, but is less common and less suggestive of the correct pronunciation and derivation than "e-mail".

Oddly enough, the word "emailed" is actually listed in the Oxford English Dictionary. It means "embossed (with a raised pattern) or arranged in a net work". A use from 1480 is given. The word is derived from French "emmaillage", network. Also "email" is German for enamel.

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