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METHODOLOGY
CLIL, MOTIVATION, PRONUNCIATION

ICT
E-MAILS, DIARIES, WEB TOOLS

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES
ROLE PLAYS, LABS

APAC ELT JOURNAL

Editor's Note

It's that time of year again!

As you can see from this issue's front page picture, we have the annual APAC ELT Convention right around the corner! It's been thirty years since the association began "connecting the dots," and we are eager to celebrate it. We're working on special things, like five years ago when we published a monograph in celebration of our 25th anniversary. Stay tuned!!! This year also marks 400 years since Shakespeare shuffled off this mortal coil, and he will also be featured in this year's convention, from the Opening Session to the workshops, as different presenters will strut and fret their hour upon the stage and give us ideas for learners of all ages.

The current issue continues with proceedings from the 2015 Convention, with the first seven articles from talks and workshops given last February. The first one, by Mireia Trenchs, stems from our commitment to include research in our convention. It's important to have information on

Pleasure and action make the hours seem short.

W. Shakespeare

background issues that have a bearing on our classes. In this case, Dr. Trenchs gives us a glimpse into the lives of Latin American and Chinese students and how they perceive and deal with having to learn up to three new languages upon their arrival here. This is helpful in enabling us to understand their points of view on what we are trying to teach them and to find approaches that might better fit their needs.

The next 6 articles are of a much more hands-on nature. "In a Real Job" shows how English can be made an integral part of Vocational Education courses, both in English language classes and in core subjects of a given specialization. "My Diary" also deals with English in the curriculum, this time in a project which students (and parents) engage in every year from pre-school through sixth grade, and with a spin-off project that the whole school participates in throughout every academic year.

"Fictitious E-mails" also deals with a primary-school project, motivating pupils to work together, giving them more self-confidence, and increasing their willingness to communicate in a foreign language. And "Recipes for Creative Writing" sheds light on how to be creative and offers a plethora of activity types to spur students on to becoming much more imaginative.

"Keep It Up" discusses some very interesting and useful activities that ESO and Baccalaureate students have carried out and that have fostered their growth in many ways: in language, in motivation, in empathy, and in group cohesion. And "Motivation through Pronunciation" calls on us to remember to put some focus on pronunciation in every lesson if possible. It offers ideas for brief, 10-minute activities that can help learners improve in stress, intonation and sounds, with some proposals aimed at young learners and other more suitable for older ones.

The last two articles are non-convention submissions and are quite interesting. "Improving Students' Writing" provides some good advice on how to set up writing tasks and a model for analyzing the feedback that is given to students throughout the writing process. And, last but not least, "Managing Conflict" offers keen insight into how to approach different situations of discord, and defuse them rather than contribute to making them grow into clashes. The author, Tom Maguire, will be delving deeper into this topic in this year's Convention.

So, we hope to see you there in a few weeks. Don't wait to read about it in the next APAC ELT Journal. As Shakespeare once wrote: "Let every eye negotiate for itself and trust no agent."

P.S. Test yourself: try to guess where the different Shakespeare quotations in the journal come from, like the one you've just read, then click on them and see if you're right.

Fictitious Emails and Their Use as a Motivational Strategy

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Abstract

This article aims to show how a fictitious email persona and fictitious email correspondence can be used to motivate students within the English classroom, thus helping to achieve curriculum objectives while also fostering an active and stimulating environment. Practicum activities carried out in the upper stages of a state primary school in Catalonia are presented as an illustrative case study which provides various examples of how to deploy the kind of motivational strategies proposed by Zoltán Dörnyei (2001) in *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom.*

Introduction

Given the increasing accessibility of ICT resources, it is not surprising that teachers-in-training are making more and more use of such resources when designing potential teaching/learning activities as part of their assessed work. The pedagogical justification for such activities often rests on a simple claim that they are entertaining, dynamic, innovative, motivating and so on. Over recent years there has been a notable shift towards what could be deemed an overuse of such resources or, to be more precise, to an uncritical use of them which overemphasises aspects such as innovation and motivation over and above the pedagogical justification for deploying a particular strategy or resource. The importance given to innovation and originality (by an innovation-obsessed society in general and by potentially misleading assessment criteria within the university setting) sometimes exacerbates this problem and misdirects students' focus of attention. Instead of considering how the activities they design meet curriculum objectives or may contribute towards generating positive learning outcomes, the question, instead, becomes 'Is it innovative enough?'

This trend notwithstanding, an interesting and effective use of ICT resources has recently emerged, which provides the focal point of this paper. This use involves the creation of a fictitious virtual persona to frame a teaching proposal. The idea is that the virtual persona and not the teacher is the one who introduces students to a new topic or invites them to embark on a new project. The teacher then mediates what follows, but the instigator of the action is the virtual (and fictitious) persona. Throughout the project, this persona reappears periodically via email correspondence or through a webquest to provide further instructions, guidelines, feedback and other information, and to maintain the guiding thread which frames the overall project.

The most successful example of this seen to date was observed in the context of Practicum activities in 2014. This case provides an illustrative example to help identify the significance of such a strategy in terms of 1) engaging students; 2) providing a structure for effective classroom organisation; 3) facilitating learning by doing in a learner-centred way; and 4) completing a set of activities that develop basic skills.

This paper will present this case as an illustrative example of an effective motivational strategy, while also suggesting that the use of a fictitious email persona opens up interesting questions

related to existing theories on motivation and, in particular, to the concept of willingness to communicate.

Theoretical framework: Willingness to communicate

According to MacIntyre et al. (1998, p. 547), 'the ultimate goal of the learning process should be to engender in language students the willingness to seek out communication opportunities and the willingness actually to communicate in them.' The creation of *willingness to communicate* (hereinafter WTC) is thus seen as a proper objective of L2 education and one whose absence from teaching programmes may be indicative of their failure. The concept of WTC was first introduced in relation to first language communication by McCroskey and Richmond (Willingness to Communicate Scale 1985, 1987, and 1992), who conceptualise it as a personality construct (1990, p. 21). Thus, while they consider WTC to be 'a volitional choice which is cognitively processed,' it is the personality of the individual that ultimately acts as the main factor in determining how the choice is made and what decision they reach (to communicate or not to communicate). This construct therefore posits personality traits such as anxiety, communication apprehension, shyness, introversion and reticence (underpinning an unwillingness to communicate) in opposition to other traits such as talkativeness, self-confidence, and extroversion, which are understood to underpin and promote WTC.

It is clear, however, that many other factors come into play when considering WTC in relation to second language learning, and most authors agree that its manifestation in L2 cannot be viewed as a simple extension of its manifestation in L1. Self-perceived competence is just one of the factors that can play a significant role in determining willingness or unwillingness to communicate, as McCroskey points out (1992, p. 22). Despite such qualifications, the model still remains heavily biased towards a personality-based approach. By contrast, and in a way which is particularly pertinent to the study of second languages, MacIntyre et al. (1998) argue that WTC need not be limited to a trait-like variable and can be treated, instead, as a 'situational variable with both transient and enduring influences.' In a move which is of interest to our present study, they also set out to extend the focus beyond that of merely speaking, to take into account the influence of WTC on other modes of production, including writing and comprehension of spoken and written language forms (1998, p. 82).

The importance of conceptualising WTC as a situational rather than personality-based variable cannot be underestimated in L2 learning insofar as classroom situations can be moulded, framed, created and manipulated by teachers in order to optimise WTC among their students. In the model presented by MacIntyre et al. (1998), two immediate precursors of WTC are proposed as situational antecedents to communication: (a) the desire to communicate with a specific person and (b) state self-confidence. Although the latter may at first sight recall the personality-based model, it is not intended to describe a general personality trait but, instead, a transient state within a given situation (thus we may find a 'shy' child entering into a state of self-confidence if the situation manages to foster this). It is, however, the first antecedent — the desire to communicate with a specific person — that will provide the main focus of our study here. According to MacIntyre et al., the majority of communication episodes in which this desire to communicate is manifested can be explained by the interpersonal purposes of *control* and *affiliation*, where *control* is conceived of as a motivational orientation which instigates communication and establishes its parameters and limits, and where *affiliation* depends on the interest in establishing a relationship with the interlocutor and is prompted by personal characteristics of the interlocutor, such as attractiveness, similarity, physical proximity, and repeated exposure (1998, p. 550).

The case study presented here provides a clear example of a teaching proposal which effectively created WTC among students by providing the situational antecedents to communicate indicated by MacIntyre et al.: (a) the desire to communicate with a specific person and (b) state self-confidence. In the case of the first antecedent, the fact that the specific person is a fictitious persona introduces a new element into the concepts of *control* and *affiliation* that will be discussed later. And in the case of state self-confidence, we will show how this is created and maintained through the deployment of a series of carefully planned motivational strategies.

The case

The case discussed was a real experience implemented by a student (the second author of this article) of the Primary School Education degree of the University of Girona during her fourth year of Practicum in the 2013-2014 academic year.

Context

After observing classes and talking with the class teacher about the content the pupils were going to work on during the term, the student teacher designed a teaching unit according to the pupils' needs and interests. The unit plan, called *Password Inspectors,* was designed for fifth-year primary students and consisted in a webquest to be used to develop English language skills. The webquest can be viewed at https://sites.google.com/site/webqueeest .

The main idea of the unit is that someone (Mr. Kalvin) sends an email to the students because he needs some help: his computer is locked and he cannot unlock it. His password has been stolen by a hacker. The hacker tells Mr. Kalvin that if he wants his password back, he has to find and solve some clues. But these clues are hidden in a school in Catalonia. Since it is impossible for the professor to go to the school, he is asking the fifth graders from the school for their help.

The proposal was carried out with a group of ten students in El Rodonell school, located in Corçà (Baix Empordà, Catalonia). Although the level of English in this group is generally high, abilities and attitudes at an individual level vary considerably, with some who are eager to take on new challenges and activate their existing knowledge, and others who are more reluctant to speak up in class and have more difficulties completing tasks than their classmates.

Different stages of implementation

The unit was carried out once a week on Fridays, during the usual English class period of one and a half hours, over a period of six weeks. The activities took up about one hour of class time, with half an hour being left over for free reading activities at the end of class. A description of the activities and the sequence in which they were carried out can be seen in Table 1. In general, however, the proposal has three stages of implementation, which are detailed below.

**Table 1.** Sequencing and grouping of unit activities.

SEQUENCE OF ACTIVITIES	GROUPING	TIMING (approx.)
Introduction to the webquest. Reading of the received email.	Whole group	40'
Are you ready to take up the challenge? Reading of the agreement paper and acceptance of the conditions.	Whole group	10'
Let's guess the first clue. Follow the instructions.	Groups of 3-4	20'
Guessing the meaning of the pictograms, putting them together to get the first clue.	Groups of 3-4 Whole group	25'
Let's guess the second clue! Riddles, scrambled sentences and pictograms.	Groups of 3-4 Whole group	45'
What's the third clue? Read the instructions posted on the webquest.	Whole group	10'
Team work: solving the quiz!	Groups of 3-4	25'
Compiling the list of aquatic animals and sending it to the hacker.	Groups of 3-4	15'
Revision: Is the mysterious animal on the lists?	Whole group	10'
The last clue, reading of the message received in the webquest/email.	Whole group	10'
Following the instructions	Groups of 3-4	10'
Reading the instructions found inside the envelope and solving the brain teaser.	Groups of 3-4	30'
Sending the answer, the password, to the hacker briefly explaining the process followed and their impressions.	Groups of 3-4	15'
Final activity: delivery of diploma	Whole group	5'
Self assessment and evaluation of the Unit.	Whole group	15'

First stage: introduction and request for help. Are you ready to take the challenge?

Here the new topic is introduced by a virtual persona, in this case Mr. Kalvin. He invites the students to take the challenge of looking for clues and solving them in order to retrieve a stolen password. The teacher acts as mediator between the students and the fictitious character (who has previously been created by the teacher). In this first stage, Mr. Kalvin contacts the students via email asking for their help. This activity is carried out as a whole group as indicated in Table 1.

The teacher therefore mediates, telling the students they have received an email, opening it on the projector/smartboard and reading through it as a whole-class activity (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Initial email from Mr Kalvin.
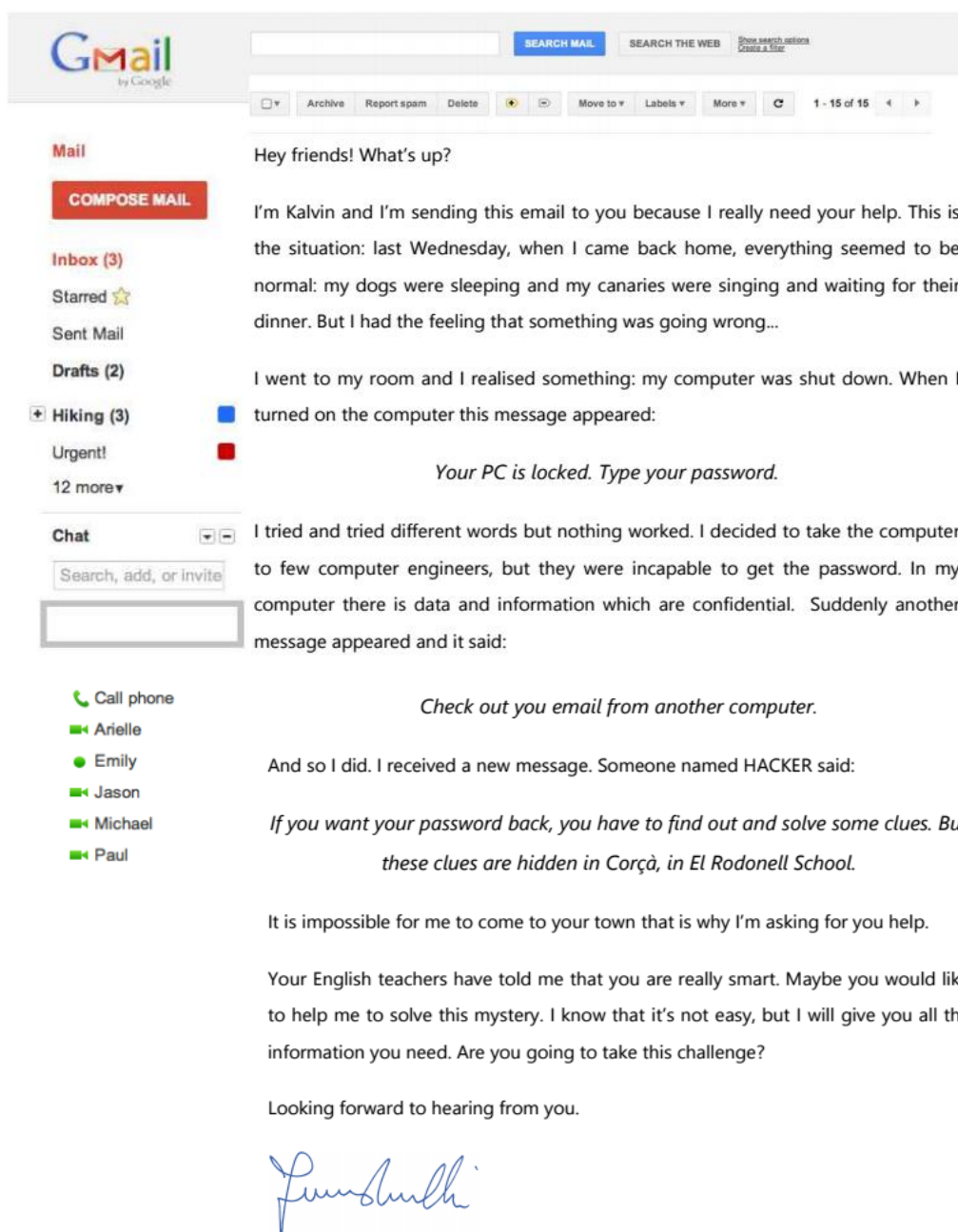
During this activity the student teacher checked that the pupils understood the meaning of the written text by asking them comprehension questions while reading through the email. Having understood what they were being asked to do, the students then read and signed an agreement contract (Figure 2) before proceeding further.

Figure 2. Contract with students.

AGREEMENT PAPER

INSPECTOR'S TEAM NAME:

Names of the members:

We sign this paper because we agree and we will work as a team following the points stated below:

☐ Start and end the tasks on time.

☐ Use Internet tools (or others) to find information.

☐ Don't interrupt when a person is talking.

☐ Respect the views of all participants.

☐ Everyone needs to participate.

☐ Each person takes responsibility for his/her actions and results.

☐ Speak openly and honestly.

☐ Members can disagree without fear. Disagree with what was said, but not with who said it.

☐ Give specific positive feedback (recognition).

☐ Give negative feedback appropriately.

☐ If you don't understand something, ask for clarification.

☐ If you see a problem that others haven't noticed, bring it to someone's attention.

☐ The information needs to be circulated to everyone in the group. This is a team work.

☐ Use the task time and keep the activity focused on the group's final objective.

Date:

Signature of all team members:

Second stage: development of the project and solving of the clues.

In this phase, the students are in contact with a second virtual persona, the hacker. He reappears periodically during this stage via email correspondence to provide the students with the clues to solve the mystery, various instructions and constant feedback. This character is crucial because he maintains the guiding thread throughout the unit.

Third stage: recovering the password.

The last stage is when the students have solved the final clue and they have sent the discovered password to the hacker, briefly explaining the process followed and their impressions. This is the last contact they have with him via email. When the password is confirmed by the hacker, the students then send this new password to Mr. Kalvin. As a sign of gratitude, he sends them a Master Inspector Certification (see Figure 3). To close the unit, the students self-assess their work and evaluate the project.

Figure 3. Certificate received by students.

Motivational results of the experience

State self-confidence

Returning to the two antecedents to WTC discussed above, the second of these — state self-confidence — is effectively promoted in the case described above in a variety of ways. The dynamic nature of the project in itself helps to foster an active and stimulating environment which promotes students' state confidence by the fact that it relates so closely to their own interests (internet, games, etc.) and also includes an element of intrigue and challenge. Apart from the overall framework, we can also identify particular points at which specific motivational strategies are used to maintain motivation throughout the project in a way which corresponds to Dörnyei's recommendations (2001).

Dörnyei's *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom* offers teachers 35 different strategies that can be used to motivate students in the language classroom. Some of the strategies carried out in the teaching experience described above clearly correspond to Dörnyei's proposals and thus provide a good illustrative example of how such strategies can be deployed with children

in the language classroom. In the first place, the overall presentation of the tasks corresponds to *Strategy 18*, which suggests 'making learning stimulating and enjoyable for the learner by increasing the attractiveness of the tasks' (2001, 77). After having set up the project in an interesting and attractive way, different motivational strategies are then deployed at key moments.

During the initial stage, when the students are invited to help Mr. Kalvin, the email from him states that 'we've been told you're smart.' This corresponds to *Strategy 24*, which advocates building learners' confidence by providing regular encouragement (2001, p. 91). The students' attention is immediately drawn to their own strengths, and their confidence is boosted by knowing that their teacher has spoken about them in such a positive way with a third party (Mr. Kalvin). In this sense, the effect generated is probably more powerful than if the teacher told them directly that they were capable of completing the tasks. The word 'smart' is also important here as it alludes to other skills and abilities (investigative, collaborative, social, etc.) over and above specific linguistic skills. Value is therefore ascribed to these different skills, and the students are encouraged to imagine how their own 'smartness' may contribute towards solving the mystery. The simple comment 'we've been told you're smart' thus has the twofold effect of recruiting the students and ensuring their full participation in the tasks, while also boosting their confidence and encouraging them to focus on their own individual strengths and abilities.

Once the learners have agreed to help Mr. Kalvin, they are asked to follow the first instruction, which involves reading and signing an Agreement Paper (Figure 2). This corresponds to *Strategies 21* and *22*, which propose the use of contracting methods to formalise goal commitments (2001, p. 86). The goals listed in the Agreement Paper focus, above all, on the promotion of positive group work and key social skills. Behavioural expectations are established and the act of signing the Agreement encourages the students to feel committed to abiding by them. Hanging the Agreement Paper on the classroom wall gives the students a visible reminder of these expectations and helps to promote a positive classroom climate and constructive group behaviour. If, for example, some students are participating much more than others in the completion of group tasks, the teacher draws their attention to the Agreement Paper and reminds them that 'everyone needs to participate' as they initially agreed upon. This is therefore a very effective strategy which involves students in the classroom management process and in the monitoring and promotion of positive behaviour, as well as attending to the difficult task of ensuring that all students of all levels participate in group tasks.

Although the students are focused on the ultimate goal of retrieving Mr. Kalvin's lost password, their mission is broken down into smaller learning experiences which offer regular opportunities for completing tasks and experiencing frequent doses of success, as advocated by *Strategy 23* of Dörnyei's proposal. The successful completion of the tasks, which entail different degrees of difficulty and also draw on a range of abilities, encourages students to identify their strengths while also pointing out areas for improvement. The students are therefore committed at each stage of the process, and this commitment is rewarded on a regular basis. Their sense of achievement upon finally completing the mission and retrieving the lost password is evident. To provide a visual record of this sense of achievement, the groups are presented with a Master Inspector Certificate in recognition of their work. In line with *Strategy 34*, this ensures that students are rewarded in a motivational way which provides them with a lasting visual representation of the experience.

Through the careful deployment of the different motivating strategies described here, state self-confidence was boosted significantly, with WTC being effectively maximised. Students participated fully and enthusiastically in tasks which were consistent with curriculum objectives for this age group: reading and understanding short written texts; writing their own short texts;

using ICT as a tool, and interacting in oral communication. The meaningful context provided ensured that students were not only willing to communicate, but were in fact eager to do so. Proof of this was evident when the university tutor (first author of this article) visited the school to observe the student teacher. The visit was carried out in the afternoon when pupils came back to school after lunch, a time when pupils often lack motivation and when energy levels can be on the low side. The tutor was greeted by the sight of enthusiastic students running up to the student teacher, asking if she had received an answer back from the hacker. Pupils were eagerly awaiting class and anticipating the next step on their mission.

Affiliation and control

With regard to the first antecedent to WTC — the desire to communicate with a specific person — the case described here brings into question some of the premises upon which current theoretical models are based. *Affiliation* is conceived of in the literature as being dependent on personal characteristics of the interlocutor such as attractiveness, similarity, physical proximity, and so on. In our case, the action was instigated by a fictitious persona whose personal characteristics remained a mystery to the students and whose presence was only ever virtual. Nevertheless, an immediate affiliation was established and the students responded enthusiastically to the call. With regard to *control*, the parameters of the tasks are set and limited by the fictitious persona who instigates the project (Mr. Kalvin) and subsequently by the second fictitious persona, the hacker. In this scenario, the power dynamics and hierarchical relationships associated with control, and which are commonly present in the classroom, are altered significantly. The teacher becomes the mediator in an environment in which the students have committed fully to carrying out whatever tasks need to be done. The fact that the students engaged so wholeheartedly is highly indicative of a 'willingness/propensity to be motivated' even in the absence of power or coercion as understood in previous models.

Conclusion

When designing dynamic and innovative activities, as much attention needs to be paid to what students actually do and what their learning outcomes are as to the question of whether they are motivated or not. It is not just a question, then, of *if* they are motivated, but *how* this state of being motivated is effectively exploited for pedagogical purposes. In the intervention described in this paper we see clear examples of how the students' state of being motivated was fully exploited and put to pedagogical use by the teacher. This required careful preparation, effective classroom management, the design of clearly structured tasks and careful monitoring and observation of these tasks.

The strategic use of fictitious email personas discussed here has prompted us to reconsider existing theories on the concept of WTC. Further research is required to develop these ideas more completely and to explore the interesting questions that come to light in view of the more complex interpersonal relationships that are emerging with the increasing use of ICT in classrooms.

Finally, on the question of ICT use, an important issue should be highlighted here in relation to the question of internet safety. The project described involves young students communicating with a stranger online. This should immediately raise alarms and prompt questions about entering into relationships with strangers and believing the accounts and stories they present to us. Rather than seeing this as a reason not to introduce fictitious personas in the classroom, it can in fact be viewed as a way of providing a real opportunity for raising these issues, for increasing students'

awareness of the dangers of entering into such relationships, and for emphasising the importance of talking through their concerns and checking with an adult if they are in doubt in any way about the authenticity of or intentions behind online communications. As mediator in this particular instance, the teacher can model an appropriate and responsible use of the Internet while successfully developing students' English language skills in a motivating and rewarding manner.

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Biodata

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"The play's the thing wherein I'll catch conscience of the king."

"… be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em."