"Because We Are Shy and Fear Mistaking": Computer Mediated Communication with EFL Writers

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ABSTRACT: This article describes an experiment in Computer Mediated Communication conducted in two English as a Foreign Language (EFL) academic writing classes in rural Japan. In this online course for EFL writers, there were positive changes in attitudes, motivation, and relationships for both the instructor and the students.

For a writing teacher who envisions herself building a safe community in a classroom where interaction and collaboration blossom and thrive, where meaningful and achievable language learning goals are articulated and enacted, where risks are taken, and time is invested in and outside the class, my first face-to-face meetings with my university students in Japan, hit me with the force of a blow to the solar plexus. I'm sure that for my students it was no less painful.

These students, university sophomores, had passed a rigorous entrance examination to gain admittance to one of the top 100 (out of 500 or so) universities in Japan. Their performance on this examination demonstrated their proficiency in English grammar, knowledge of vocabulary, and reading comprehension. However, since they had learned English through the traditional *yakudoku* (grammar/translation) method, their knowledge of English was similar to an American high school student's knowledge of Latin. They could not understand me when I spoke

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to them and, in fact, did not expect me to address them in English. They struggled to speak a few words of English and were shocked that I knew no Japanese. They had very little experience writing essays, in Japanese or in English. My course was called Academic Writing Two.

I had been warned by my colleagues that because this is a specialized university, with majors in Computer Science and Computer Engineering only, these students tended to be "geeks," loosely defined as people who prefer working with computers and mathematical formulas to working with people. This turned out to be an understatement, as an early entry in my journal illustrates. Note that it also illustrates my extreme culture shock. I include this slightly hyperbolic description because it demonstrates so vividly how utterly unsuited for each other my students and I seemed to be, at the outset.

At this particular university, classrooms are male places. Young male places. These boys have been forced to wear uniforms and keep their hair short and uncolored and now they can wear whatever the hell they want and do whatever the hell they want with their hair and stop washing.

When the boys come to my class it is a miserable time of day for them. Sometimes I am there waiting and sometimes I come in after they do, depending how much I dread seeing them that day. They all push in at once, rushing toward their seats, the furthest from me they can find, running, some of them, to the seats in the last row, the seats near the windows. They gallop to their seats, see me, abruptly avert their eyes and sit down where they are standing, as if the sight of me has turned them to stone. Each student sits in exactly the same seat each time if he can. I know which seat they consider theirs by the horrified look on their faces when someone else is occupying it.

They are crammed, jammed into their too-small seats, their over-sized pants and untied shoes like prison wear, their hair a uniform orange—the color their hair gets when it is bleached—and hanging in slender threads across their eyes. In October, the classroom is a cold place with only the heat of our bodies to warm us.

The boys slide into their seats, shivering as the cold of the plastic seeps through the thin fabric of their jeans. They don't know each other yet, so they do not talk. They have already had two other

classes and lunch before they get to my class, so one of my biggest jobs is keeping them awake. I do this by trying to get them to talk to each other.

Even when I ask them to, they cannot turn away from the front of the classroom to face each other, as if their heads were locked in place, like cows in stanchions. "Turn your heads," I tell them, smiling. "Turn toward the person next to you." It is as if they were made of glass and their necks would snap. "Say hello," I tell them. Then say, "Listen to this," and read your freewriting aloud. They shudder. I may as well have told them to take a giant pair of pliers and start pulling out their own teeth.

What does a Western teacher do with a group of Japanese students who may very well believe that their days applying themselves to studying English are over? I had also been warned by my colleagues that my students, recently recovering from *shiken jigoku*, or examination hell, would be passive, unmotivated, and possibly resistant to studying English. In Japan, every student who attends a university must pass the university's entrance examination. High school students usually spend a great deal of time, energy, and family resources—for tutoring—to pass these examinations (Brown and Yamashita). Once they have entered a university, however, they become the teacher's responsibility. Teachers are expected to pass their students, and if they don't, they are blamed for their students' failure. To further complicate matters, students can get jobs after attending a university regardless of their grades (Hadley and Evans).

My teaching experience had been primarily ESL (English as a Second Language) rather than EFL (English as a Foreign Language) in New York and California, where there was a heterogeneous, immigrant population with a wide variety of attitudes and motivations toward learning English. In Japan, I started by considering what I *did* know about my students. They were all majoring in Computer Engineering and Computer Science. There were enough computers at the university for every student and every instrutor to be working at one at all times. We were all extremely uncomfortable in each others' physical presence. Perhaps teaching them via Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) was a way to begin. This move was also inspired in part by a very positive reaction to CMC I had had previously from one very quiet Japanese student who was in a class I taught in California. She described her experience as follows:

I don't miss my turn anymore! I realized today that I don't have to worry about turn-taking when communicating online. I can finally say something in class without hesitation. Turn-taking in class has been a stressful and unpleasant experience for me since I started studying in California. I always miss my turn when I have something to say. And when I have nothing to say, I get the floor. I sometimes feel so dumb just sitting in class listening to people talking. What is wrong with me? What is it that stops me from participating like the others in class? I have been asking myself these questions even though I had known that some factors such as cultural differences, my personality, and my English proficiency level would prevent me from speaking up in class. I was thinking how many times I spoke during the first half of this class. Probably a few times. I don't know how many times I have posted my comments since the online segment started, but I feel like I am saying a lot more than before. I don't think I have missed my turn yet! (Cummings et al.)

Much has been written about intercultural clashes between Western teachers and their Japanese students, with students being described as silent, unmotivated, and hostile, and teachers as overeager to impose their values and as making inappropriate demands on the students (Akimoto-Sugimori; Cohen; Miyoshi; Paul). I did not want to fall into the trap, where, according to Baumann, "whatever any 'Asian' informant was reported to have said or done was interpreted with stunning regularity as a consequence of their 'Asianness', their 'ethnic identity', or the 'culture' or their 'community'" (1). Feeling some trepidation, I moved out of the physical classroom and into CMC, to see if our intercultural clashes and inhibitions might be reduced there.

This article describes the road toward communication through writing for a group of basic writers and their teacher in the deep north of Japan. It is action research in that I perceived and wanted to reflect on a problem in my own classroom. For whatever reasons, my students and I were silencing each other. I had one potential solution at my fingertips—I was a trained, experienced CMC writing teacher, and my students were majoring in Computer Engineering and Computer Science. The action I decided to take was to try teaching them through CMC for a semester and see if the situation

improved. My student writers were familiar with the conventions of CMC text display, could navigate using computer keyboards and mice, and understood—better than I did—the workings of software, operating systems, and web pages. They could work with different forms of texts, such as multimedia documents and hyperlinks, which they occasionally included in their submissions for the class. I reasoned that a good starting place for addressing what seemed to be a major teaching problem might be Computer Mediated Communication, since it was a place where the students felt at least as competent as I did.

REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

This review of the literature includes four strands. In recent years, much has been written about the importance of interaction in language learning in general and writing in particular, about the importance of motivation in language learning, and about the kinds of interaction available in Computer Mediated Communication and whether this interaction enhances language learning. Finally, in reference to this study, the link between literacy and CMC will be examined.

Sociocultural Theory, Interaction, and Communities of Practice

For Vygotsky, learning, even learning to think, starts with interaction. He argued that the role of schools was to help learners develop their thought processes through collaboration with others. Collaborative learning leads us to create knowledge through interaction, and writing is learned through collaboration, problem-solving, and the expression of our own ideas (Bruffee). Learning a language also entails the development of a new identity through "negotiated experience [in which we] define who we are by the way we experience ourselves through participation" (Wenger 149). Pavlenko and Lantolf suggest that we "reconceptualise L2 learning as an intrinsically social—rather than simply cognitive—process of socialisation into specific communities of practices, also referred to as 'situated learning'" (157) (see also Lave and Wenger). In describing academic writing, Casanave uses the game metaphor to describe the importance of students' participation in the communities of practice they wish to become members of. That is, players must understand the rules of the game from the inside, as participants, rather than from the outside, as spectators. She also

emphasizes that "[f]irst-hand accounts" give us "vivid description of social practice" spotlighting "the diversity and unpredictability of individual experience" (15).

Attitude and Motivation

The literature in this domain is vast. Motivation has been studied in psychology and education (Dörnyei *Teaching*), probably because there is a commonsense relationship between student motivation and success in school (Dörnyei "New Themes"). In the field of second language acquisition, motivation has been viewed via Gardner's socio-educational model (Gardner and MacIntyre), arguing that "Teachers, instructional aids, curricula, and the like clearly have an effect on what is learned and how students react to the experience" (9). In other words, there are things we can do in the classroom that will influence student motivation. This depends, of course, on the context in which one is working. Critics of Gardner's model (Crookes and Schmidt; Dörnyei *Teaching*) have pointed out that it more accurately describes learners in an ESL rather than an EFL context. Dörnyei and Ottó suggest that for second-language students motivation is "dynamically changing" and "initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritised, operationalised and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out" (65). This is a much more thorough definition albeit less subject to a teacher's influence. Students in Japan, who have had English hammered into them in order to pass entrance examinations, may find themselves in the position described by Deci: "When people feel pressured, compliance or defiance results. Compliance produces change that is not likely to be maintained, and defiance blocks change in the first place" (196). That is, they may have caved in to the pressure enough to pass the exam and subsequently refuse to learn more. In reporting the findings of a number of research studies, Deci states that "students who learned in order to put the material to active use displayed considerably greater conceptual understanding of the material than did students who learned in order to be tested" (47).

Computer Mediated Communication

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), for example, using computers to facilitate interaction between people, has become increasingly common in higher education (Nunan). CMC has been credited with increasing student motivation, enhancing cooperation and collaboration between

students, and changing the nature of turn-taking in courses (Bowers; Cummings et al.). It is seen as a powerful way "to link learners" (Warschauer "Computer-Mediated" 477). CMC has been described as a bridge between speaking and writing and as an enabling and empowering tool that combines expression, interaction, reflection, problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaboration (Egbert and Hanson-Smith; Chapelle). In addition, CMC, accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, increases opportunities for communication (Warschauer "Computer-Mediated"; Gonglewski, Meloni, and Brant). Furthermore, CMC is interactive, promoting dialogue (Warschauer "Computer-Mediated") while at the same time encouraging more complex language than face-to-face communication (Matsuda et al.). CMC is less face threatening than face-to-face interaction, allowing students to voice opinions more freely (Cummings et al.). According to Nunan, "good" online courses promote interaction (i.e., are student-centered rather than teacher-led), are conducted by a professor who responds rapidly and thoroughly to student needs as they are expressed online, and foster a climate in which all students are encouraged to respond.

Research has demonstrated that students express more complex thoughts and feelings in CMC than in other forms of written composition (Warschauer, Shetzer, and Meloni). Participation increases because pragmatic aspects of conversation such as turn-taking and interrupting are irrelevant (Cummings et al.; Sullivan and Pratt). In addition, Gonglewski, Meloni, and Brant found that motivation was higher among learners who communicated with people they did not know and whom they knew they would not meet.

Literacy, Writing Development, and Computer Mediated Communication

First, in Computer Mediated Communication, everyone has more time to work. Not everyone chooses to take advantage of it, but writers have time to compose (Sullivan and Pratt) and teachers have time to demonstrate processes (Day and Batson). CMC provides a variety of audiences for student writers instead of just one, the teacher (DiMatteo; Warschauer "Motivational"). Possibly, the CMC environment is less intimidating because the audience, including the teacher, is invisible (Cummings et al.). Students who are shy or who have other reasons for not wanting to participate in face-to-face classrooms may find CMC classes easier to participate in

(Scattergood).

DESIGN AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

My goal, in moving away from the face-to-face classroom was to increase interaction and motivation, which in turn, I hoped, would increase second-language acquisition, enhancing student writing. To do this, I looked for ways to lower my students' and my own inhibitions, which included moving to an environment that was familiar to all of us, CMC. The value of Computer Mediated Communication in general and with relevance to literacy and the teaching of writing pertains directly to this study.

Nunan's description of his study could well describe this one:

> The aim of the study was to generate insights rather than to test hypotheses. . . . In keeping with recent approaches to case study in educational research, this study is particularistic and descriptive, adopts a heuristic approach to data, and relies heavily on inductive reasoning. (53)

Following Warschauer ("On-line"), I set out to investigate how the use of CMC could alleviate stress and improve the quality and quantity of the written communication between these basic writers and me. In addition to our already mentioned inability to communicate aurally/orally, the stress of our time together was compounded by two other facts. First, our time together was limited. We met for 90 minutes, once a week for fourteen weeks. Second, we had so much to accomplish. In three short years (approximately 80 hours of writing instruction), students were to begin doing original research that would lead to the writing and presentation of their graduation theses in English. Granted, the thesis was only 4-6 pages. But for most of these students, it would require an effort of monumental proportions.

Through this action research, I hoped to answer the following questions: Would moving this particular group of students away from face-to-face interaction into Computer Mediated Communication do any of the following: 1) increase interaction, 2) lower inhibition, 3) increase motivation, 4) increase awareness of audience, or 5) enhance the teaching and learning of writing? Previous experience and a review of the literature had led me to believe that the answers to these questions might be yes.

I set up an asynchronous Internet classroom using http://www.nicenet.org and also communicated with the students through the campus e-mail system. After the first two class meetings, we did not see each other again until the last class, in the fourteenth week.

At my university, students are required to take ten semesters of English, including two courses in listening and speaking, one in pronunciation, and two in technical reading. There are four writing courses: Academic Writing One and Two, Technical Writing, and Thesis Writing. The course described in this article is Academic Writing Two (see Appendix A for the syllabus). The obvious difference from typical academic writing courses is the online nature of the course. To the best of my knowledge, at the time of the study no one else at the university was teaching a course exclusively online.

A total of 50 college sophomores in two classes participated in this study. Most of the students (90% of them) participated actively, completing between 85 and 100% of the written assignments. Almost all of the learners were under 20 years old and 90% of them were male. The writing ability of the students was basic (see Appendix B for pretest samples). One unusual feature of this study was that the students, because of their very busy schedules, usually met together in the designated computer lab at the regularly scheduled time, but without the instructor. This is not the way online instruction usually happens (Warschauer "On-line").

Procedure and Data Collection

Students were required to read and respond to eight readings over approximately fourteen weeks. In this course I piloted materials that were later adapted for *Inspired to Write* (Withrow, Brookes, and Cummings). Students submitted their weekly assignments to nicenet.org. In addition, they answered questions in two questionnaires about their experiences with and attitudes toward English, writing in general, and this course in particular.

At the beginning of the course, students answered a set of "First Day Questions" adapted from Mlynarczyk and Haber (see Appendix C). Relevant answers to these questions include the following. In answer to question 5, "What do you hope to do after you graduate?" only three students mentioned the possibility of studying more English, and only one said he wanted to get a job using English. In answer to questions 6 and 7,

asking for good and bad past experiences with writing, most of the answers were about writing in Japanese; bad experiences far outnumbered good. In 32% of the responses, the concept of shame was included, as in "I am ashamed about mistaking word." The students' technological interests were reflected in other answers about bad experiences with writing. They described instances of writing an e-mail that was not sent due to technical difficulties, or pushing the wrong key on a mobile phone when trying to send an e-mail message. Several typical responses are given below. These responses indicate that students saw the value of writing as a tool for personal interaction, and a heuristic device for memorization. They also suggest that students remember what they are praised for.

In response to "Describe a good experience you have had with writing," students wrote:

- When I was high school student, I have a girl friend. We wrote each together. It was much fun for me! I thought it was interesting to write a letter then.
- I was sometimes praised at my English writings at my English class in junior high school (though I wasn't praised at my Japanese writings. . .). So I made an efforts. And my English grade was good. I think I didn't hate English thanks to this.
- It is difficult to memorize things only by seeing. We can memorize things by writing. Moreover we can say freely by writing. Example it is Email and so on.

Bad experiences with writing mentioned by students included failing the English section examination (although there is no writing required on the examination), disliking writing in general (even writing in Japanese), experiencing difficulty mastering Chinese characters (one of the three alphabets used in Japanese writing), and being perceived as a messy writer (I think that we can safely translate "dirty" as "messy" and that possibly messiness is considered proof of incompetence):

- I failed in the entrance examination at twice because I had no knowledge of English writing and reading.
- Basically, I don't like write. I couldn't write a Japanese essay well. So my Japanese test score with essay was generally low. Homework of a composition also worried me.
- When I was 10 years old, I was punished by teacher. And that teacher forced me to write KANJI 3600 words. I don't want to remember it.
- Because I often mistake to write a character, I was got angry by parents. When writing an English sentence, I am worry. I mis-

take a character in Japanese or English.

These sample responses suggest, that for these students, writing is an activity that leads to punishment, shame, and revelations of incompetence.

One salient difference between face-to-face classes and this online class is that the online students asked many more personal questions and offered more personal information than in face-to-face classes, where most students wrote "Nothing" in answer to questions 13 ("What questions do you have right now?") and 14 ("What else would you like to tell me about yourself?"). A few students in the face-to-face course asked questions about my grading policy and why there were no final exams, but most had no questions and nothing to tell. On the other hand, at the beginning of the CMC class, it seemed that students were responding to the lack of restraint and possibly emboldened by reading one another's responses. For whatever reasons, the quality and quantity of the responses were different.

In answer to question 13 ("What questions do you have right now?"), I received responses like the following.

About language learning:
- Have you ever studied foreign language? If so, would you tell me a key to making progress quickly?
- Aren't you studying Japanese? And if you are studying Japanese, how are you studying?
- When I will be able to feel actually I make progress?

About American culture (not always entirely serious, I think):
- I heard that Manhattan's people don't have umbrella. Any shop sales no umbrella. Is it really?

About places where their lives and mine might intersect:
- Nowadays I exercise with my friends in SRLU (University weight room). Don't you exercise with us?

Questions like these gave me the sense that the students were genuinely interested in improving their English skills and saw me as someone who might be able to provide them with guidance on how to proceed. But amid these friendly voices came one anxious voice:
- I'm afraid why do you use this online lecture system? Does the system completely safe? I'm afraid do you really read all sent documents by students? Can the system identify students completely?

This response shows a mix of knowledge and distrust of the computer mediated world we were entering. I responded to this student by reassuring him with what I did know about the system and asking questions in order to allow him to demonstrate his expertise.

In response to question 14 ("What else would you like to tell me about yourself?"), students told me what they liked:

- I like the movie. The most favorite movie is "Brave heart". Please see, if you like a movie.
- I like punk rock. But I can't play electric guiter. I want to play, but I think that I can't. And I like movie. I like acter - Michel Douglas, Robert De Niro, Jodie Foster, Tea Leoni-

And also expressed their fears:

- I am very afraid of writing because I don't have confidence my grammar power. I am afraid of getting bad score in writing test.

I reminded this student that there were no tests in my course, and that if he did his best, he would pass. The point is that in a face-to-face class no student had ever expressed such a fear.

During the course, because of the students' previous experience with studying English through rote memorization for the sole purpose of passing an examination, it seemed important to make the transition to using English for interaction with native speakers of English. Therefore, the key assignment of the course was to interview, via e-mail, a native speaker of English in their chosen field who lived outside of Japan and to write an essay describing that person. This assignment was based on what I learned from Mlynarczyk and Haber as well as Rafoth. In order to prepare for the interview, students worked in teams, investigating websites that described professions, finding appropriate interviewees, and then writing lists of possible questions. To begin the assignment, they read and responded to two essays based on interviews, "The Model Medic" and "No Laughing Matter," both now published in *Inspired to Write* (Withrow, Brookes, and Cummings). In reading these two example essays, I wanted the students to see that other people's writing could be used as a model without resorting to plagiarism. I strongly support Pavlenko and Lantolf's notion that "the initial step toward . . . reconstruction of a self [in a new language] . . . is the appropriation of others' voices. . ." (167).

One of the convenient features of many Internet classrooms, including nicenet.org, is that hyperlinks may be created, allowing students to access interesting and appropriate web pages with one click of the mouse.

Setting up the links took quite a bit of time, but eventually I had a page of hyperlinks that I thought would be helpful to the students and could be re-used the following semesters (although links to web pages must always be checked to make sure they are still active).

The steps in the interview assignment, which were conducted by teams of four students, were as follows:

1) Investigate one or more websites describing careers until you find a career that interests you (for example, http://www.bls.gov/oco/oco1002.htm).

2) Investigate one or more of the websites describing companies that employ people in the career you are interested in (for example, http://www.allgraphicdesign.com/jobs.html).

3) Find the name and e-mail address of a person doing the job you are interested in.

4) Find out all you can about the person by studying his/her homepage and/or looking him/her up on Google.com or a similar search engine.

5) Write a list of questions you would like to ask this person.

6) Post your questions to our website and ask another team and Professor Martha to comment on your questions (Are they interesting? Clear? Grammatically correct?).

7) Send a very polite and apologetic e-mail explaining the assignment to your prospective interviewee, including a tentative deadline for his/her response. [I provided a template for this message, then decided that in future semesters I will ask students to compose this politely intrusive message themselves as it is a useful writing task.]

8) Wait one week. If you do not get a reply, politely remind the recipient of your request.

9) Wait two weeks. If you still have no reply, go back to the hyperlinks and choose another potential interviewee. Start the process again.

10) When you get a reply, draft an essay modeled on one of the two examples.

The reader may cringe at the thought of these e-mail requests for interviews going out into the world, both for the sake of the students (What if the students don't get a reply?) as well as for the sake of the recipients (Imagine receiving such an e-mail request from a group of students in

another country. How tempted you would be to delete it! How guilty you would feel if you did!)

Once the assignment was fully understood, it created considerable tension in our CMC classroom, but it was the tension of anticipation rather than anxiety. The high point of the semester was when the first team of students posted the message, "We got a reply!" with the details of who they had written to and what the person had said. For most of these students, this was their first contact with a native speaker of English they didn't know personally. While two teams never received replies from anyone, ten others had thoughtful and generous replies from computer scientists all over the world, providing them with material from which they were able to compose enjoyable and well-written essays (see Appendix D for an example).

Results of the Online Course

I cannot state that the students' written work was measurably better during and after the 14-week CMC course compared to similar courses I was teaching and have taught face to face. Their essays were not longer, more developed, more unified, more coherent, or generally more free from error than those of their face-to-face counterparts. What did seem to change, however, were the students' attitudes: toward writing, learning English, accuracy, and communicating with each other, their instructor, and native speakers of English in general.

By the middle of the semester, in response to my assignments, students were beginning to write more than was required of them. When I asked them to react to what one person had written in response to a reading, often an online conversation would ensue, as in the following example:

> **Student A:** When I read your essay, I remember some thing. My family proceed one year to eat "sukiyaki," not to eat "tosikosisoba," this tradition is success from my grandfather to my father, but . . . I don't like it so much, before it, would I have a familly?
> **Student B:** I want to eat sukiyaki too. I think sukiyaki is very very delicious!! Specially saying, I want to eat sukiyaki which my father cook. My father is master of coffee lounge. So my father is very nice cook. This writing makes me hungry too!! How about your father's cooking?
> **Student C:** I wanna eat them too. I agree with your theory that the meal which is made by one's family is very delicious. I wanna eat my mother's dishes too.

Student D: I want to eat my mother's dishes too. When I was my home, I thought I can cook dishes more good than my mother. But it was wrong. Nowaday, I think that my mother's dishes may be best deshes for me. Someone said the most important thing of cooking is love. I didn't agree it, but I can agree it now. How do you think, A?

Student A responded and the conversation continued. I was delighted. This may not seem like much to those who are used to working with native speakers of English, but for these students, engaging in this kind of banter in English was accomplishing two enormous tasks. First, it was transforming English from a dead language to be memorized for the purpose of passing examinations into a communication tool it was possible to have fun with. Second, it was transforming the students, in my eyes, from sullen, silent, frightened, non-communicative young men and women into real people with whom I had a great deal in common.

In addition to communicating with each other, these students began to communicate with me. Again, keeping in mind that not once in two years did a student ask me a question in a face-to-face class, I was surprised and pleased to be receiving e-mails like these:

Hello! I'm X from your Academic Writing 2 class. I have some question. The homework that was written in your Email "The Model Medic." I don't know what to do. Your e-mail told me to write the first draft of my interview and use "The Model Medic" as a model for this essay. I think "The Model Medic" is an essay. And this 200 words homework makes me easy to think I should write an essay. Should I write the first draft of my interview or an essay? Could you tell me detailed what to do?

I was even more gratified to receive this request:

I'm in your Thursday, third period, Academic Writing student. By the way, I have posted free writing in Conferencing Topics "Freewriting 4/22 - 5/6" about twenty times. These days I have had a question. Would you tell me if the box of "Freewriting 4/22 - 5/6" have limit to be posted, or not? And if there is the limit, Could I continue to post my free writing? See you.

I quickly replied that there was no limit, and that the student was welcome to write as much and as often as he liked, reassuring him that I would respond to all of his freewriting. During the second half of the semester, this student and another challenged each other to freewrite every day, and this one actually succeeded.

The net result of these interactions was twofold. The students realized that knowing how to use English to communicate in writing got them results. I realized that the students were eager to participate in the course, fulfill the requirements, and communicate with me and with other native speakers.

At the end of the semester, the students completed two questionnaires, one for me and one for the University, evaluating the course. I was particularly interested in what they perceived as the benefits of CMC versus the benefits of face-to-face instruction, so I asked them to comment on each. To keep the process completely anonymous, I created a new Internet classroom for the sole purpose of completing these evaluations. The students, overloaded with preparation for final exams in their computer courses and realizing that I would have no way of knowing who had responded and who hadn't, answered briefly, if at all. Based on these anonymous responses, the benefits of computer mediated instruction can be divided into three categories:

Learning from each other:

- I read other student writing! I learned much diversity of grammar and words. As we are beginner, we tend to use the same words and the same grammar again and again. That is not a good thing. If you don't force us to give a feedback to partners, maybe we will not read other's writing, so this is good assignment.
- Each people have diferent opinion. So, from this I notice that I don't ever notice things. [Meaning, I think, I noticed things I hadn't ever noticed.]

Communicating with native speakers:

- We can learn a great deal ONLINE. The way of writing a letter and contacting with a foreigner.
- There will not be differentiation between Japanese and foreigner in future. I will have to use English. Then, it will be useful what I learned in this class.
- I don't have experience to send a foregn man E-mail. I was very excited.

Communicating with the instructor:

- By writing E-mail, I asked to professor question or displeasure that I have. It was pleasure for me that I could communicate with professor.

On the other hand, students seemed to be saying that they missed some of the benefits of face-to-face instruction such as companionship, seeing others' facial expressions, and the motivation of having a "live" person to be accountable to:

- I don't want to not meet Professor Cummings.
- I would like to be able to discuss with people face to face.
- It has good tension.
- We can tell our opinion in direct.
- We can see people's expressive.
- We will take the course more serious.

In the students' anonymous evaluations of the course required by the university, in addition to giving the course the highest numerical evaluations one of my courses at this university had received so far, 4.6 and 4.8 out of 5, on a scale from 1 to 5, some students wrote optional comments. Most did not. Perhaps they felt they had already commented enough. However, to the question, "Would you recommend this course to your friends?" one strongly negative comment appeared here and nowhere else: "I don't think this is a class. Are we in the deep mountain? You should explain this in advance. I have been discouraged."

This was certainly a justifiable complaint. This gregarious student felt cheated of the opportunity for face-to-face intereaction with his peers and teacher. After reading what he wrote, I went to the head of my program to ask if the course could be listed as a Computer Mediated Communication course in the university catalog, but he was quick to remind me that students at this university do not have the opportunity to choose which section of a course they want to take, but are assigned to courses in alphabetical blocks.

Despite this one negative voice, in this online course for EFL writers, attitudes, motivation, and relationships changed. Students learned from each other, communicated with each other and native speakers of English, and grew to see English as a tool for communication with the world. As the instructor, I learned that behind the silent façade in the face-to-face class-room, there were people with the same yearnings for fulfillment and for a sense of competence that I had. Perhaps this is enough.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING

There is much to discover about ways that EFL writers can change their perceptions of English writing from being a boring school subject, a trap, a tedious chore imposed from the outside to becoming a tool for international communication. If the size of the sample had been larger, surely the findings could be stated more persuasively. If different groups of EFL writers from different settings were compared with these native speakers of Japanese in rural Japan, we could learn still more. Also of interest would be a longitudinal study of EFL writers involved in Computer Mediated Communication designed to study how their attitudes and actual writing abilities evolved over a period of several years.

One unexpected outcome of the study was the impact that it had on me, the instructor. I found out things about my students that I would not have learned in the face-to-face classroom, causing my attitude toward them to change. I learned that they were in fact motivated, lively, curious about me and my culture, eager to share their culture, as well as their hopes and dreams, with me. These were not passive, unmotivated survivors of grueling entrance examinations with no energy left to give to learning to write in English. Knowing this gave me back my own motivation to interact and collaborate with these young, enthusiastic, vulnerable student writers.

Since this was a case of action research involving my own students and me, I would be interested in studying other instructors teaching groups of students they found particularly stressful to deal with face to face, to see if working with them in a CMC environment relieved some of the stress and/or gave the teachers a different perspective on their students.

Perhaps one of the most promising avenues for further research that emerges from this study is the need to analyze the ways in which CMC allows teachers and students to develop relationships with or attitudes toward each other that they would not otherwise have developed and to find out if these attitudes are maintained toward the next groups of students or instructors they meet.

This inquiry confirms what we already know but often forget. There is more to EFL writers than meets the eye. They have a lot to say and great difficulty in saying it. Computer Mediated Communication, standing half-way between speech and writing, might provide a place for interaction to begin.

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APPENDIX A
Course Syllabus

Course Goals

This course will help you improve your fluency in the kinds of reading and writing that will be required at this University. Reading and writing are not discrete skills, studied and learned separately. They are linked and best learned together. Through this course, you will become a more proficient reader and writer in English and you will learn to enjoy reading and writing more.

In this course we will review the basic components of good writing, that is, prewriting, planning, writing and revising drafts, paragraph structure, unity and coherence, kinds of logical order, and patterns of organization. We will also study and apply the techniques of professional writers, both fiction and non-fiction, to make our writing more powerful and meaningful to our readers.

In this course you will learn to write, critically evaluate your own writing, then get feedback from both your classmates and from your instructor. In addition, we will cover how to use outside references and how to use the Internet to do research. Depending on the needs of the group, we may also review sentence-level grammar.

Instructional Procedures

Each week, you will receive your assignments and submit them via the Internet. After the first class meeting, we will meet online only.

Here is the website for our course. Please go to http://www.nicenet.org and click on "join a class." You will go to a window where there is a box that says "Class Key." Please enter this number in the box:

[Number deleted; the course still exists.]

Go to the next window and give yourself a username and password. Don't forget your password! Please fill in your email address and your name. I have posted the first assignment under "documents." Please post your answers to the First Day Questions in Conferencing: First Day Questions. I strongly recommend that you write your responses in your favorite word processing program first, then cut and paste them into the response box in the conference.

Sometimes you will have short reading assignments selected by the professor. You will find these in the "Documents" section. You will read the assignment and write in response in the "Conferencing" section.

Evaluation and Grading Policy

Your writing will be evaluated on how much time and effort, how much thought, and how much care you put into it.

You will get a B in this course if you:

- Submit each assignment by the day and time the class would normally meet
- Participate in class by completing all tasks and assignments
- Help your classmates with their writing (I will show you how)
- Read and write all required reading and writing, giving the task your full attention
- Proofread and spell-check all final drafts

If you make an exceptional effort and do excellent work, you will get an A.

If you do less than everything on the above list, you will get a C.

If you do less than half of the work, you will fail the course.

APPENDIX B

Academic Writing 2: Pretest

Prompt

"Recently the quality of life has been improving in Japan." Write an essay agreeing or disagreeing with the above statement. You have 30 minutes to complete your essay. Do not use a dictionary.

Student One

I disagree this statement because it have been increasing some people which can not work. So, the quality of life has not been improving in Japan. And, Japan became dangerous by war and BSE [mad cow disease]. So, life didn't become safe in Japan, and I afraid future. I hope peace in the world.

Student Two

I disagree with. What is the quality of life? I think it decides on that how much stress we feel. We have studied and worked to be happier, more productive, more intelligent, and more peaceful. But we have made new many problems, so human beings

Student Three

I disagree recently the quality of life in Japan. I think president Koizumi is fool. He said, Now Japan better than that Japan, but Japan is NO CHANGING! I don't say "Recently the quality of life has been improving in Japan." I'm disappointed. Recently, Japan is poor, therefore decrease jobs. Can not work, therefore can not get money, people are hard. The Japan is little chaos now.

APPENDIX C
First Day Questions
Spring 2003
Academic Writing Two

Post your answers in the Conferencing Topic called "First Day Questions."
Write at least 4 sentences for questions 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12.

1) Name and number
2) E-mail address
3) Place of birth
4) What do you hope to learn in this class?
5) What will you do after you graduate?
6) Write about a good experience you had with writing, in English or in Japanese.
7) Write about a bad experience you had with writing.
8) Have you ever done any writing for yourself only—journals, diaries, poems, stories? If so, explain how this writing was different from the writing you did for school.
9) What is your image of a person who likes to write a lot? In other words, close your eyes and picture someone who loves to write. What do you see?
10) What suggestions would you make for how to teach writing to a class like this one?
11) What do you think is good about your writing? (Don't say "nothing." There is something! Think!)
12) What do you think is bad about your writing?
13) What questions do you have right now?
14) What else would you like to tell me about yourself?

APPENDIX D
Sample Student Essay Based on an Online Interview

Lindsay Shippee is Systems Analyst in the University of Arizona. We got interested in the fields of computer science and information technology, and took contact to him this time.

A Systems Analyst is responsible for designing, building, testing, and implementing computer systems. This includes analyzing client business requirements, writing system specifications, programming and unit testing application programs, system testing, putting systems into production, and training system users. Sometimes a large project can take several years to complete, and involve hundreds, even thousands, of programs. Lindsay once worked on a five-year systems project with a team of 186 programmers and analysts.

He became a systems analyst by accident. He attended college to become a history teacher, but when he could not find a job. So he studied for a year at a technical college and learned several computer programming languages. When he applied for work, his first employer thought he would make a good systems analyst, and offered him a job. That was how it began.

The most fun he ever had programming was when he wrote a series of complex mathematical programs for a large insurance company. They were at the heart of a big system Lindsay and other building, but nobody else on the team wanted to write them. They were too difficult. So he worked a lot of extra hours to make them work properly, and he was very proud when they were finished.

Recently, he helps maintain about 400 desktop computers and servers for the College of Humanities at the University of Arizona. He loves working in a university environment. Because, it is fun to work with professors and students, and he is learning a lot.

We got a message from Lindsay, most programmers in large business corporation work in team. When we become a senior programmer-analyst, we are often offered the position of team leader, and we must coordinate and plan the work of other team members according to the project. We are responsible to getting the work done on time, yet most of the work is being done by other people. It is not easy to be a good leader. But it is a very challenging job. We thought we are the University of . . . student studying some programming and high level computer sciences. So we will be team leader of programmers. We should get more skills of computer science to success our futures.