Motivation to write online: Chats and Forums

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This paper reports on a hybrid second language course using three learning environments every week: one class of face-to-face communication; one class in the multi-media lab; and one class as an online component. The course was taught at the University of Victoria in Canada (L1: English; L2: German) in the fall of 2007 and 2008. The online component consisted of an exchange with the University of Kiel in Germany (L1: German; L2: English) using chat rooms as well as forums. The online component was only used in the last four weeks of the course due to varying term schedules in Canada and Germany. The course was at an advanced level of proficiency. Students from both universities participated in the chat despite the different time zones. The purpose of the study was to investigate learners' motivation in second language writing by comparing the use of chats with the use of forums by the same students. The study was based on the theory of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan 1985, 2002), which was applied to studies on CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) and SLA (Second Language Acquisition).

1. Introduction

The foreign language classroom has been subject to the testing of new technologies over the last twenty years. Most recently, there has been a rise in online exchanges in the form of hybrid courses (Swaffer & Arens 2005; Thorne & Payne 2005). These courses introduce an online hour to their regular face-to-face classroom meetings. This hour is used to supervise an exchange with students of the target language. Researchers have pointed out that online exchanges foster student participation (Beauvois & Eledge 1996; Warschauer 1996). Recently, the question has been raised how to keep students participating. In their article on telecollaborative exchanges, O'Dowd & Ritter (2006) identified ten factors that might lead to a failure of communication, distinguishing between socioinstitutional, classroom, individual and interactive levels. At the classroom level, these are teacher-teacher relationships, task design, learner-matching procedures, local group dynamics (O'Dowd & Ritter 2006: 629-632). At the interactive level, the learner's motivation and expectations play an important role in sustaining online exchanges between students of different first languages:

> Learners' motivation is likely to be high if the chosen technology (e.g., chat) is new and exciting for them in a classroom context, […]. (O'Dowd & Ritter 2006: 635)

This statement seems to be a bit bold, but it has to be seen in relation to the classroom level factors that influence the sustainability of the student-student interactions. For example, learners need to be matched with an appropriate partner or partners to work on a topic of interest to them (O'Dowd & Ritter 2006: 638). This had already been argued by Shetzer & Warschauer (2000) as well as by Stockwell (2003). Shetzer & Warschauer (2000: 177-178) explained that participants' initial euphoria using a new technology in class will fade if tasks are not perceived as relevant and if the technological tool chosen for a task is not appropriate. Stockwell (2003) carried out a study with 48 students at an Australian and 34 students at a Japanese university who engaged in two five-week exchanges. Stockwell's data (2003: 46-48) showed that a successful interaction of participants might depend on topic choice as well as topic organization in terms of threads.

Evaluating the research outlined above in the application to the practice of supervising a student-student online exchange, the following questions arise: If these factors do play a role in sustaining online exchanges, would the selection of the technology not also influence the student-student interaction, given that these technologies have a motivational value and if so, how long would that motivational value last? This paper reports on a course that was taught at the University of Victoria in Canada (L1: English; L2: German) in the fall of 2007 and 2008. The course included a four-week exchange with the University of Kiel in Germany (L1: German; L2: English) using chat rooms as well as forums. Initially, it was planned also to use wikis. However, several problems with the platform and browser while testing the wikis caused the use of that tool to be cancelled. By the summer of 2008, these problems had been solved, but the study continued using chats and forums in order to be consistent. All of these tools, which have been labeled social software, require participants to write. While chats are synchronous tools that facilitate an immediate response between participants, forums are asynchronous, allowing participants time to respond. Assuming that these tools have an initial motivational value as outlined above, assuming they are selected appropriately by the instructors for tasks meaningful to the participants, and assuming that tasks are carefully designed (topic choice and organization), the question then is: does this difference between the tools, if both tools are used by the same participants, have an impact on the sustainability of the exchange?

2. Online Writing; CMC; SLA; and Motivation

Students in a second language class are not necessarily thrilled when they find out that some of their assignments will be done online, as Winke & Goertler (2008) reported in a study on students' literacy for CALL. They carried out a survey with 911 students enrolled in basic-level French, German or Spanish at Michigan State University. The paper-based survey asked about the accessibility of technological tools, the ability to perform computer-based tasks, multimedia use for personal and class use, interest in hybrid language instruction. Winke & Goertler (2008: 494-495) found no direct transfer of students' skills in the use of technology in their personal lives to using those skills in the classroom. In some cases this could be linked to anxiety levels regarding the online components of a language course, as these require skills specific to CALL. The role of the teacher becomes critical in successfully engaging students in these types of courses. Although that is not exactly new, the study is in line with arguments that have been made for careful planning of such courses, in particular if they involve an online exchange. In addition to the planning of such an exchange by the instructor, the cooperation of students in both courses involved in such an exchange also requires attention. In this context, Würffel (2008) developed a first model on cooperative writing processes involving social software that is quite interesting. Würffel (2008: 6) distinguishes between three levels of cooperation among participants: planning; drafting and writing; evaluating and revising. Each level has a social dimension of interaction as well as a cognitive dimension of processing information. The degree of cooperation is influenced by the learning context (e.g. task design), group dynamics as well as learner characteristics (e.g. motivation). Würffel (2008: 7) names advantages and disadvantages of this type of writing process. Advantages are a shared responsibility of learners for the text they produced together, the opportunity to gain knowledge about the target language from other students, and the fact that participants are writers as well as readers. Disadvantages are group dynamics (one group might be more fluent in the target language than the partner group), the time-consuming and sometimes complex editing process, and sustaining motivation. Another study in this area (Massler 2008) investigated the use of email in an exchange between students of a grade 8 high-school class in Germany and a grade 9 high-school class in Calgary. The overall question was whether the online writing improved participants' writing competence. Students had to perform different tasks. Most interesting

were the results when students used the email exchange to create a youth magazine. One of the aspects Massler (2008: 11-13) analyzed was the type of language used in the email exchange as well as the texts created in the youth magazine. She found that the Canadian students were negligent in spelling, and often used abbreviations and many idiomatic expressions in their emails. The youth magazine texts, however, were characterized by complex syntax as well as stylistic elements. One problem with the exchange was a lack of respect towards the needs of other students, that is, to explain language and culture specific concepts of the target language to their peers. Massler therefore (2008: 14) concluded that students had to try very hard to keep the exchange alive.

It can be argued that at the grade 8 or 9 high-school level it cannot be expected that students are sensitive to the complexity of language to culture and how to engage in an exchange. Therefore, the role of the instructor is once again critical. More interestingly, all of the studies mentioned raised the question of how to keep students engaged in the online writing process. At this point, it should be mentioned that some studies have shown that students can become partners in the construction of knowledge using email and chat. For example, Belz & Vyatkina (2005) carried out a study on the teaching of German modal particles with sixteen students learning German at a large US American university who were in partnership with twenty-three students learning English at a German university. Students were engaged in an email exchange as well as in written chat sessions on topics that had been carefully chosen. The discourse students produced was entered by the researchers into a program called Telekorp to create a learner corpus. The corpus was analyzed to find instances of students using modal particles. These instances were used to create teaching materials on modal particles to be used in class. Analysis showed that students used modal particles more often and more often correctly after working with the teaching material. The interesting fact about the teaching material was that it was based on the students' contributions to the exchange.

However, the question still is how to keep students engaged in the online writing process. In an overview of using digital media in German as a foreign language, Rösler writes:

> Trotz der erweiterten Kommunikationsmöglichkeiten gilt weiterhin der Gemeinplatz:

> Wenn man sich nichts zu sagen hat, ist es egal, wie luxoriös die Lernplattform ist, in der man sich nichts zu sagen hat. Die entscheidende Frage lautet: Haben Lernende in Kooperations-projekten anderen Lerndenden etwas mitzuteilen? (Rösler 2008: 383)

A simple answer to this question would be that learners engage in exchanges if they are willing to do so and if they are willing to share information. In this context, the concept of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan 1985) is rather appealing.

Deci & Ryan (1985) carried out many experiments and eventually identified three basic needs for motivation: self-determination, competence, and interpersonal relatedness. They argued that these needs are born out of people's desire to have a need to experience control over their environment. Applying this to second language learning, learners want to have a choice in what they learn and under what circumstances they learn. In that sense they are self-determined. The energy for this learning is provided by the need for competence. Thus, intrinsic motivation, that is, the motivation from within, is based on the need for self-determined competence:

> Intrinsic motivation is in evidence whenever students' natural curiosity and interest energize their learning. When the educational environment provides optimal challenges, rich sources of stimulation, and a context of autonomy, this motivational wellspring of learning is likely to flourish. (Deci & Ryan 1985: 245)

Interestingly, Deci & Ryan's theory is in line with studies on CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) and SLA (Second Language Acquisition). Students can be motivated to participate as long as other students participate (Deci & Ryan 2002). The focus is on the process of learning, interacting, understanding those very processes.

In relation to the context of this study and to the questions raised in the introduction, the first research question was formulated: If the course is carefully planned, do email or chat function as a catalyst to trigger intrinsic motivation? In other words, are students willing enough to use those tools to engage in the online writing process and to keep writing? The second research question had to do with the tools themselves. It is important to distinguish between forums and chats. A forum is an asynchronous tool that gives participants time to reflect on what to write, therefore promoting sentences with greater syntactic complexity (Sotillo 2000). A chat is a synchronous tool that has been described as a conversation in slow-motion with a focus on content rather than form (Payne & Whitney 2002). Therefore,

the second research question was: do students prefer one tool over the other in order to feel engaged in the writing process?

3. The Course

The course can be described as a foreign language course at an advanced level of proficiency. The course provided students with three learning environments every week: one class of face-to-face communication; one class in the multi-media lab; and one class as an online component. The course was taught at the University of Victoria in Canada (L1: English; L2: German) in the fall of 2007 and 2008 for the duration of twelve weeks. In the face-to-face class, the students' role was that of a listener and speaker interacting with the instructor and other students. In the multi-media lab, students engaged in self-study working with *Audacity* and grammar exercises. During the online component, students engaged in dialogue with students from another university. The dialogue was in a written format using asynchronous (forum) as well as synchronous (chat) tools.

The exchange took place between the University of Victoria (UVic) in Canada and the University of Kiel (UKiel) in Germany. It used the web-based platform Moodle. In 2007, twenty-four students (twelve at each university) participated in the dialogue; in 2008 twenty-eight students (fourteen at each university) participated. The exchange component of the course took place during the last four weeks of the twelve-week term. This was necessary due to different term schedules in Canada and Germany, therefore the exchange took place from end of October to the beginning of December because the terms overlapped during this period. During those four weeks of the exchange, students participated in a forum once a week and in a chat once a week. The forum was asynchronous, students were given 72 hours to complete an exchange. The chat was synchronous. It was set up outside class hours because of the time difference. Four chat-rooms were used to accommodate students' class schedules. The chat was one hour long. The first chat-room was between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. Victoria time; the second between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m.; the third between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m.; the fourth between 11 a.m. and 12 a.m. The time difference between Victoria and Kiel was nine hours.

The topics discussed every week in the forum were: 'Die Fussballweltmeisterschaft 1990' (World Cup of Soccer 1990: Germany won the World Cup); Hiking in British Columbia; 'Berliner Stadtrundfahrt' (Sightseeing in Berlin); The Group of Seven (a group of Canadian artists who painted motifs of nature). The topics discussed every week in the chat were: 'Die Fussballweltmeisterschaft 2006' (World Cup of Soccer 2006: Germany hosting the World Cup); Camping in British Columbia; 'Hamburger Hafenrundfahrt' (Sightseeing in Hamburg); Emily Carr (a Canadian artist who painted motifs of British Columbia, including First Nations).

The topics were chosen for several reasons. The topics on soccer had proven to be popular with students in other classes taught at the University of Victoria. The ones on camping/hiking and sightseeing lend themselves to a discussion on what many Canadians do visiting Germany (visiting cities) and what many Germans do visiting Canada (visiting nature). The instructors hoped that these differences would elicit interesting comments from students. Finally, the topics on art were chosen because an exhibition on the Group of Seven was touring Canada at the time. Emily Carr was a local artist from Victoria and her work is displayed permanently in the museum. The instructors of both universities posted material on each topic online using the web-based platform Moodle. If the material was in German, the discussion was in German; if it was in English, the discussion was in English. For the forum as well as the chat, students were told to write at least five messages each. The forum as well as the chat took about one hour per week. After posting the material, the discussion questions, and the instructions on how to proceed, the instructors did not actively participate in the forum or chat. However, students were told that both instructors were monitoring the exchange.

The idea of this exchange was to give students the opportunity to engage with native speakers and to get to know their point of view. It provided students with an opportunity to practice writing. In a standard second language course, students usually do their writing at home because it takes up too much time in class. The feedback on their writing comes from the instructor. The online component changed this. The writing via a forum and chat was part of the class. Students received feedback from the students at the other university.

4. Methodology / Analysis

The study used a questionnaire (see Appendix) which was divided into three sections. It used example questions by Spilitopulous & Carey (2005) as well as Dörnjey (2003), which were altered to fit the purpose of this survey:

1. Section One asked about the students' experience with online learning.

2. Section Two asked about the specific use of chat and forums in relation to students' motivation.

3. Section Three asked questions about learning in the three learning environments.

The questionnaire was created online using SurveyMonkey. Students had access to the questionnaire at the end of the term to comply with regulations by the University of Victoria Ethics committee. In 2007, all 24 students participated in the survey, twelve from each university; in 2008, all 28 students participated in the survey, fourteen from each university.

All students had to fill out a form on their language background to ensure that their first language was English (UVic students) or German (Kiel students) respectively. They also had to indicate at what age they started learning German (UVic students) or English (Kiel students), where they had learned that language, and how long they had been studying. This information was gathered to avoid an imbalance among participants, e.g. that a student was a near-native speaker of German or English compared to other students who were in their third or fourth year of post-secondary education.

In addition, the form asked about students' experience using Moodle as a platform. In 2007, the survey showed that none of the students had used Moodle as a web platform before. However, half of the UVic students and two of the Kiel students had used WebCT. Students commented that they liked the user-friendly interface of Moodle and quickly found their way navigating the course site: "I liked the Moodle aspect, allowed for quick interaction and availability to other resources." (Participant 1, UVic, 2007). In 2008, six of the UVic students and ten of the Kiel students had used Moodle before, indicating an increase in the use of this platform at the universities. Students who had used Moodle before indicated that they were happy with it, students who had not had no problems working with it.

4.1 Section One

Overall, results in 2007 and 2008 were similar. Ten (2007 and 2008) of the UVic and eleven (2007) and twelve (2008) of the Kiel students felt comfortable presenting their writing online in class: "It motivates one to pay more attention to spelling and grammar" (Participant 17, Kiel, 2007); "I feel it is more relevant to societal norms' (Participant 3, UVic, 2008); "I always chat with my friends. But never in German before. Very cool. I didn't care if I made mistakes." (Participant 6, UVic, 2007). The comment of Participant 3 was repeated in question nine (comment on any aspect). As the comment of Participant 6 indicated, some students felt that the online writing reflected the writing of their first language in the sense that it was every-day writing rather than academic writing. For example, Participant 9 (UVic, 2008) commented: "I didn't understand everything the Germans wrote. It didn't matter. It was not that we were writing like an essay or something." Similarly, Participant 14 (Kiel, 2008) answered: "It was - to quote the Canadians - AWESOME. They say that all the time. Writing online was okay with me." Participant 19 (Kiel, 2007) drew an analogy to cell phones commenting that writing online was similar to texting messages. Those were rather interesting comments as they raise the question of what kind of writing students should learn first.

Questions three and four revealed that despite feeling comfortable, the majority of students did not think that their attitude and motivation towards writing differed or was improved according to whether the forum or the chat was being used. However, three (2007) and two (2008) UVic and two (2007) and three (2008) Kiel students found that practicing writing with these tools motivated them to write. For example, Participant 2 (UVic, 2007) answered: "I liked that I could see what others wrote. I am less conscious of my mistakes knowing that others make these very same mistakes also. I was not afraid to embarrass myself."

In turn, in question five some students answered that they liked the ability to read everyone's work using the forum. For example, Participant 20 (Kiel, 2007) answered: "It is good to see what other students think. I got ideas myself from that." Similarly, Participant 24 (Kiel, 2008) commented: "I like the exchange-rate. I can read ten messages but I only have to write one." Five (2007) and seven (2008) UVic and seven (2007 and 2008) Kiel students also commented that they appreciated taking more time with their answers using the forum,

e.g. "The ability to construct my opinions with more time" (Participant 13, Kiel, 2007) and "I like how I can work at my own time" (Participant 12, UVic, 2008).

In summary of the forum, some students appreciated that they could read what others had written, including mistakes others made, they felt comfortable writing online themselves and there was some indication among some students that the forum triggered intrinsic motivation ("I liked that I could see what others wrote. I am less conscious of my mistakes knowing that others make these very same mistakes also. I was not afraid to embarrass myself" Participant 2, UVic, 2007). However, there was no evidence that the motivation changed during the exchange. This is rather interesting as reading and being comfortable with responding are factors in a successful exchange as had been outlined above. However, this did not translate into a sustained exchange fuelled by a positive change in motivation. The comment on the exchange-rate of reading to writing indicates that writing might simply be less of a priority to some students. This might be linked towards the attitude of some participants towards writing (e.g. Participant 9, UVic, 2008): "It was not that we were writing like an essay or something."), which will be further discussed in sections Two and Three.

At this point, it should also be mentioned that students made no suggestions to improve the forum. There were also no suggestions to improve the chat. Answers regarding the chat were: "fun" (Participant 13 (Kiel, 2007), "stimulating" (Participant 20 (Kiel, 2008), "interactive" (Participant 21 (Kiel, 2008), "a real German experience" (Participant 1 (UVic, 2007), "awesome" (Participant 4, UVic, 2008). A few longer comments included: "I was very interactive. I kept writing to keep up with everyone. It's so fast." (Participant 18 (Kiel, 2008) and "I liked that it was casual. Although it was in German and German is not easy for me, I actually wrote a lot." (Participant 5, UVic, 2008). There was also some criticism: "The chat was dictated by the most fluent speakers. I tried to keep up but I often couldn't." (Participant 8, UVic, 2007).

In 2007, nine UVic and ten Kiel students (in 2008, ten UVic and eleven Kiel students) liked using the chat for the reasons mentioned. The comment of Participant 18 indicated that the tool itself, chat, made him/her write due to the structure of that tool. It seems he/she might have felt pressured to write. The research question, however, was to find out if the tool

triggers intrinsic motivation, that is, the motivation from within. The comment of Participant 6 (UVic, 2007) supported that ("I always chat with my friends. But never in German before. Very cool. I didn't care if I made mistakes") as well as the comment of Participant 5 (UVic, 2008): "I liked that it was casual. Although it was in German and German is not easy for me, I actually wrote a lot." However, no other evidence was found. The criticism of Participant 8 pointed in the direction of the attitude of some participants towards participation. This will be further discussed in Section Two and Three.

4.2 Section Two

In this section, students rated the questions from 1 to 5. Results in 2007 and 2008 were similar.

Table 1: Average rating questions one to six

	1	2	3	4	5	6
2007 V	3.83	3.91	3.33	3.19	3.43	3.41
2007 K	3.66	3.76	3.41	3.39	3.47	3.49
2008 V	3.76	3.99	3.45	3.18	3.50	3.54
2008 K	3.75	3.79	3.26	3.37	3.52	3.58

The abbreviations V and K are used for UVic and Kiel university. The numbers one to six refer to the questionnaire (see Appendix).

In both years, UVic and Kiel students felt somewhat encouraged to participate in the forum or chat with a mean score ranging from 3.75 to 3.99 in questions one and two. Students of both universities were neutral towards the usefulness of those tools. The forum was rated between 3.18 (UVic, 2008) and 3.39 (Kiel, 2007); the chat was rated between 3.26 (Kiel, 2008) and 3.45 (UVic, 2008). However, students expressed the view that they were able to engage in interesting discussions. The ratings in question five and six ranged from 3.41 (UVic, 2007) to 3.58 (Kiel, 2008). The interesting point about these scores was that none

was at 4.00 or higher indicating that neither tool was fascinating enough for students to be fully engaged them in online writing.

Most interesting in this section of the survey were questions seven to fourteen because they related to questions in section one. These questions asked if students felt at ease using these tools.

Table 2: Average rating questions seven to fourteen

	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
2007 V	4.17	4.00	3.79(a)	3.61(a)	2.89	2.83	2.21	2.49
2007 K	3.87	3.91	4.57(b)	4.43(b)	2.66	2.79	2.09	2.29
2008 V	4.23	4.05	3.69(a)	3.55(a)	2.81	2.78	2.16	2.45
2008 K	4.01	4.06	4.70(b)	4.51(b)	2.60	2.73	2.02	2.21

The abbreviations V and K are used for UVic and Kiel university. The numbers seven to fourteen refer to the questionnaire (see Appendix). Small (a) and (b) refer to questions 9a/b and 10a/b.

UVic students rated the forum at 4.00 and 4.05 and the chat at 4.17 and 4.23, feeling at ease to express their ideas. The rating by Kiel students was similar at 3.91 and 4.06 (forum) and 3.87 and 4.01 (chat). One difference between students at UVic and Kiel was in the use of the foreign language. UVic students said that they felt at ease using German to express their ideas in the forum (3.61 and 3.55) and chat (3.79 and 3.69). Kiel students felt at ease using English, however, their rating was higher at 4.43 and 4.51 (forum) and 4.57 and 4.70 (chat). One explanation might be that the Kiel students started learning English at the age of ten whereas UVic students did not start learning German until the age of fifteen in some cases (high-school) and eighteen (first year university) in others.

Despite feeling at ease expressing their ideas using the forum or chat, students said that they did not feel more at ease compared to expressing their ideas in a face-to-face class-room, as can be seen in the ratings of questions eleven and twelve. The ratings were below the medium score of three for both, the forum and the chat, by students at UVic as well as Kiel University in 2007 and 2008. That indicates that the classroom interaction was equally

useful to students to express ideas and to be engaged. This, in turn, might have had an influence on the students' attitudes towards writing online that, as one student put it, was not essay writing. The three learning environments – classroom, chat, forum – are discussed in Section Three.

Finally, the students did not feel that they developed a relationship with their partners during the exchange using either the forum or the chat. Only one UVic student and two Kiel students indicated that they will keep in contact with their partners once the course had finished. One possible explanation is that the length of the exchange, four weeks, was not sufficient to develop a relationship.

4.3 Section Three

In this section of the survey, results among UVic and Kiel students in both years were similar.

<u>Table 3</u>: Average ratings for questions one to four

	1c	1f	1ch	2c	2f	2ch	3c	3f	3ch	4c	4f	4ch
2007V	3.33	3.83	2.66	3.97	3.19	2.33	4.21	3.33	2.33	4.33	4.19	3.00
2007K	3.19	3.97	3.17	3.83	3.16	2.51	4.00	3.41	2.59	4.51	4.00	3.09
2008V	3.21	3.75	2.88	4.05	3.31	2.50	4.17	3.30	2.51	4.50	4.15	3.12
2008K	3.23	3.91	3.08	4.00	3.27	2.68	4.05	3.44	2.65	4.56	4.02	3.23

The abbreviations V and K are used for UVic and Kiel university. The numbers one to four refer to the questionnaire (see Appendix). Small c, f, ch refer to 'in the classrom', 'forum, 'chat'.

Students indicated that they were most active using the forum with ratings of 3.83 and 3.75 by UVic students and 3.97 and 3.91 by Kiel students. However, all students indicated that they learned most in regards to their written expression (question two), the vocabulary (question three), and cultural knowledge (question four) in the face-to-face classroom (abbreviated 'c' in the table). The forum finished second in those three questions, the chat came in last.

These results are particularly interesting in view of the comments made by some participants who felt writing online is more relevant to societal norms, it is engaging, it provides resources, it allows quick interaction and is a real experience. The exchange was full of German vocabulary UVic students had not encountered in any of the textbooks used in the previous courses before. There were also many cultural references that students in Kiel explained in great detail when other students asked about these references. In other words, the information provided by Kiel students to UVic students and vice versa was rich in vocabulary and cultural references using idioms, phrases and sometimes slang. However, despite students' own comments they did not seem to take advantage of these opportunities to be more engaged. The scores in Section Three indicated a preference of students for face-to-face classroom interaction when it came to learning written expression, vocabulary and cultural knowledge. That leaves the chat and forum out of the picture. For example, as mentioned in Section Two, some students thought of the chat and forum being casual in nature, that the tools were not particularly fascinating to work with, and online writing not to be on the same level as essay writing. In other words, the attitude of students towards the place of learning seemed to have played a large role in this study, the dimension of which had not been anticipated. This has methodological and pedagogical implications that are outlined in the discussion section.

5. Discussion

The survey showed that most students of both universities felt comfortable writing online (e.g. Participant 7 (UVic, 2008): "It's a good way to write and I liked it since it was a different and more interesting way to take a class") and they were engaged in the dialogue (e.g. Participant 22, Kiel, 2007: "I wrote more than ever before"). Interestingly, some of the answers seem to be at odds: most students indicated preferring a face-to-face class in order to learn writing skills, vocabulary, and cultural knowledge, but also answered that they were more active using the forum than in a face-to-face classroom or chat. In turn, some students also answered they often liked to read what other students posted. These readings served as a resource. The discussions that followed were interesting and engaging. However, they were not engaging enough to increase motivation to participate. The comments of a few students indicated that the tools, the chat as well as the forum, might have trig-

gered intrinsic motivation in the sense that they, the students, were less conscious making mistakes or wrote more than they had planned. At the same time, writing online was viewed as a casual enterprise. It might be plausible, although this would need further investigation, that for some students it was not academic enough to be taken seriously.

In view of studies on sustaining exchanges (Stockwell 2003) this result was rather disappointing. The first research question – If the course is carefully planned, do email or chat function as a catalyst to trigger intrinsic motivation? – was not supported sufficiently. The length of the study might have had something to do with that as it limited students in developing relationships with their partners. However, it seems that the attitude of students towards online writing played a role as well. In order to use chats or forums more successfully for online writing in relation to motivation, instructors might need to educate students more on the purpose and methodology of their pedagogical goals when writing online.

For example, the instructor could set up a couple of class sessions before the exchange starts to explain writing processes as well as different types of writing. A good start would be to use Würffel's (2008) model on writing processes, which outlines three levels of cooperation among participants: planning; drafting and writing; evaluating and revising. It also explains how interaction among participants works. Next, it might be useful to give students more information on the practical side of the exchange (topic choice, organization, number and length of messages, threading) and present one of the studies by Stockwell (2003) or Massler (2008) to show that these findings are based on actual research. This type of transparency might have a positive effect on students as they will be more integrated in the processes leading up to the exchange. Instructors could also prepare several topics and let students choose among them. Naturally this type of course preparation is very time consuming and might sound idealistic. However, as O'Dowd & Ritter (2006) put it, it might be worth trying, as social software such as chat, forum, wikis, blogs do have the potential to be used in this context if the course is planned carefully. The study presented here supports that argument. Although the chat and forums did not manage to raise motivation levels for a more sustained exchange, students were somewhat engaged in writing online. As part of this transparent approach to online writing, instructors could explain to students about different types of writing and their purpose, e.g. essay writing (structure of an essay, evaluation criteria, references used) versus written chat (speed of chat, abbreviations used, oral

speech resemblance). More importantly, the value of online writing for practice and to improve writing skills could be emphasized. Instructors could draw students' attention to cultural references, idioms, phrases, slang, abbreviations that are expressed through language. An introduction on the relation of language to culture, in particular the socio-linguistic variation of language use, might encourage students to use these sources for their own online writing. Along the same line, it might be helpful to familiarize students with the concept of student-student learning.

The analysis in regards to the second research question – do students prefer one tool over the other to be engaged in the writing process? – showed that there was no particular preference for either using a forum or a chat. Some students thought the chat was more fun, others appreciated that the forum allowed them more time to respond. It would be interesting to repeat the study using other social software such as wikis. Wikis require a high degree of cooperation. Future studies could investigate if that translates into a higher motivation to keep the cooperation alive. In combination with the methodology of online writing outlined above, in particular before an exchange begins, writing online might have a future after all.

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Appendix: Survey

<u>Section One</u>

1.   Have you used electronic tools such as a Forum or Chat or any other in a second language classroom before? If so, describe your experience.

2.   How do you feel about presenting your writing online in a class or school?

3.   Have your attitudes and motivation towards writing differed or improved over the course of this term by using the FORUM? If so, how and why?

4.   Have your attitudes and motivation towards writing differed or improved over the course of this term by using CHAT? If so, how and why?

5.   What did you like or not like about using the FORUM?

6.   What did you like or not like about using CHAT?

7.   How can the FORUM be improved to meet your needs?

8.   How can the CHAT be improved to meet your needs?

9. Please feel free to comment on any aspects of using the FORUM or CHAT:

<u>Section Two</u>

1. I felt encouraged to participate in the CHAT discussions:

     Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

2. I felt encouraged to participate in the FORUM discussions:

     Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

3. I found the CHAT to be a useful tool for discussions with my partners:

     Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

4. I found the FORUM to be a useful tool for discussions with my partners:

     Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

5. I was able to engage in interesting discussions using the CHAT:

      Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

6. I was able to engage in interesting discussions using the FORUM:

      Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

7. I felt at ease expressing my ideas using the CHAT:

      Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

8. I felt at ease expressing my ideas using the FORUM:

      Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

For UVic students:

9a. I felt at ease using German to express my ideas in the CHAT:

      Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

10a. I felt at ease using German to express my ideas in the FORUM:

      Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

For UKiel students:

9b. I felt at ease using English to express my ideas in the CHAT:

      Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

10b. I felt at ease using English to express my ideas in the FORUM:

      Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

All students:

11. I express myself with more ease using the CHAT than I would in a face-to-face class-room:

      Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

12. I express myself with more ease using the FORUM than I would in a face-to-face class-room:

      Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

13. I developed a relationship with my partners during the exchange using the CHAT:

      Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

14. I developed a relationship with my partners during the exchange using the FORUM:

      Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

15. I will try to keep in contact with my partners by using the following tools:

Section Three

1.   Regarding your **own initiative**, where were you most active? Please circle one number.

      In the classroom

      Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

      Online: Forum

      Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

      Online: Chat

      Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

      Other………………………………………………………………………

2.   With regard to **written expression** in which learning environment did you learn the most? Please circle one number.

      In the classroom

      Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

Online: Forum

Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

Online: Chat

Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

Other…………………………………………………………………………

3. With regard to your **vocabulary**, in which environment did you learn the most? Please circle one number.

In the classroom

Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

Online: Forum

Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

Online: Chat

Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

Other…………………………………………………………………………

4. With regard to **cultural knowledge** in which learning environment did you learn the most? Please circle one number.

In the classroom

Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

Online: Forum

Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

Online: Chat

Nothing   1   2   3   4   5   a great deal

Other……………………………………………………………………………

Biodata

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