

Using Electronic Discussions to Develop Skills in the Language Classroom

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This paper offers language teachers insights into the nature of electronic discussion and information exchange through a study of writing in an environment which extends beyond the traditional use of pen and paper among young people who may be separated in time and space from each other. The focus is on how participants in an electronic discussion forum (EDF) for young people engage with each other in discussion on a range of topics. Of specific interest is the nature of computer-mediated agreement and disagreement among participants within an online asynchronous environment. Through an analysis of electronic message content, specific discourse features and strategies are identified which shape the dynamics and levels of electronic discussion. Pedagogical implications are highlighted for the classroom practitioner in the hope of raising language teachers' awareness of the dynamics involved in the electronic exchange of viewpoints and opinions, and to better empower them to help students engage with each other more effectively in this fast-changing, dynamic age of information and communications technology (ICT).