

Bringing Teenagers into the World Democratic Society through E-Mail

Natalva Mussina

North Kazakhstan Library Petropavlovsk, Kazakhstan

. Am I too late to make any discoveries?

Only the decade of democracy brought Internet to the schools of (azakhstan-thanks to international financial assistance, thanks to the universal goal of integration.

. The exciting feeling of freedom, filled the hearts of those working with the young generation. We enjoyed this freedom of learning, thinking, and speaking to the utmost. We felt obliged to educate our students to be better persons than ourselves, more fit for living in the changed society. Like most of my responsible colleagues, I personally did not feel prepared to teach about living in a democratic society. Not possessing the necessary flexibility or consciousness of a world-wide citizen myself, I looked for other sources ready to share these values with my students. The frantic urge to change my own personality, the way I lived, and the way I worked brought me to the activities of the International Educational and Resource Network (I*EARN).

Just being a fan of this virtual organization gives me no right to enter this conference, of course. I am acquainted with a number of I*EARN veterans both in this country and abroad, who carry wider correspondence than I and have obtained greater experience than I have. The world certainly new of the electronic communication before I had discovered it for myself.

Moreover, the world knew of the necessity of changes in the educational systems of new independent states. The very lyceum where I work represents an experimental ground, having received three grants for "search in the fields of new pedagogy. So I live under an impression that almost every educator in the world is concerned with working out the principles of the democratic pedagogy, yet nobody is able to give a clear definition or idea of it.

What I am trying to investigate and prove is the resource of electronic communication as a model of an open society and a training ground of practical democracy. It is evident that the experience of working in I*EARN and other projects was significant and useful for my students as well as for many more young people all over the world. This experience, in my opinion, could be more widely spread still, in NIS especially, if only its attraction and access were brought home for the present generation of teachers. Unfortunately, many of them are afraid of approaching a computer. Many of them are equally reluctant to change their approach to teaching and to life in general.

This is an attempt to analyze the causes and nature of this educational activity's success from the point of view of psychology of youth.

Psychological science believes that teenagers' behavior is determined by two major and contradictory needs: on one hand, to belong to a group of peers, whose opinion is significant for a young person, and to enjoy this unity; on the other hand, to claim one's individuality, to be unique in some way or other. In my opinion, well-organized telecommunication between young people, teenagers especially, is able to serve both these needs, thus serving as an attractive and powerful means of training in practical democracy. If not interesting in themselves, my thoughts might be an illustration of a personal democratic evolution within the Decade of Changes.

II. Is it my job to train in practical democracy?

Speaking frankly, I do not regard schoolchildren any special breed of people who are formed by clever pedagogues and prepared for a distant and vague "future life." They are just people, only more sensitive and flexible ones, living their actual lives beside us. I wholly agree with the words of the great son of Poland, Yanush Korczak: "It is one of the worst mistakes to believe that pedagogy researches on children, not people. There are no children—here are people, but of different scale of notions, of different experience backgrounds, of different aspirations, of different play of feelings." Having chosen the profession of a teacher, I love them and concern. Being a citizen, I love the love and concern for children to the state.

One of the first privileges presented by perestroika was the freedom not to press everybody into the same shape and not to quote the party's documents in every other sentence. And, at the same time, I remember my own sincere pain of being disappointed in the ideas and events of which I used to be proud. We, grown-up intellectuals, were lost in the storm of opinions, and the moral education of a whole generation of young people was formless and even neglected at the time. It took me time to perceive authentic information about the way the world lived, to compare it with the past and the present of my country. Eventually I came to support democratic ideas in general and be concerned about their particular development in Kazakhstan. My younger fellow citizens, who are in their teens or even younger, might be able to secure the right to a dignified life for everybody in the future. Now I do not view it as my duty as a teacher to instruct these citizens in democracy as the current ideology. I understand it as my civil right to involve my younger fellow citizens in democratic training, because I lay my personal and social hopes in them.

Is the present teaching of democracy any different from ideological brain-washing practiced by totalitarian states? First of all, it differs in results: the resulting mentality, the way of thinking, and the ability to express oneself are different. The formation of communist morality was achieved by force, by means of public pressure upon a personality. Education in principles of humane morality can be provided by correctly organized activities in a democratic surrounding. Previously, the classroom served as the main arena for molding a child into a shape convenient for a totalitarian state. The

democratic surrounding, in my opinion, is larger than a classroom, or school or school neighborhood. Any child, like any person, belongs to the wide, world.

Democratic education does not presuppose the simple acquaintance of people with basic notions of democracy; it is also aimed at the education of moral, independent people of a broad, world outlook, able to think critically. In order to provide reliable democratic education, we need to find or create

such kinds of practical activities that answer actual modern needs and aspirations of the young age. What are the ways to achieve this? A scientist of the ninth-to-tenth centuries, highly valued by the Kazakh people, Al-Farabi, wrote: "The training can be achieved by oral speech, by transferring knowledge, but the education only by means of practical activity and experience." I also tend to favor student-centered education, when knowledge

eagerly researched, not reluctantly received, shared but not crammed. Children are influenced by everything happening around. All the events and relationships in which they are involved become a part of their education. They can learn through all kinds of activities and all kinds of responsibilities and duties. They can learn through provided freedom and through restrictive ties. If educators are not interested in students' social life, they are not really interested in their inner well-being and spiritual comfort. Academic knowledge is to be supported by practical social skills for a person to feel independent and efficient. Those who doubt the practical significance of education should just remember the strict and energetic control that totalitarian regimes forced through mass media and educational institutions. There is no use arguing with the fact that a growing child's position is determined, on the one hand, by objective needs of the society; and on the other hand, by models of his/her image that exist in the society. These models are historically conditioned.

I want my kids to grow up with the safe notion of their human rights; first of all, with the knowledge that their lives and dignity are respected. They should understand that their opinions are significant and respectful and should grow accustomed to this understanding. Naturally, this understanding is to be achieved through multiple experiences of exchange of opinions. By this, I mean both opinion exchanges within the closest environment and within wider circles of communication: students' self-governing bodies, press, correspondence. A distant partner's standpoint is often more valued just because young souls are romantic and they long for faraway countries and far known friends rather than common everyday surroundings.

At the present time, our entire country is learning to live up to the world's democratic standards. And it is vitally important for a young person

to get prepared for this new way of life for which his/her parents have not been prepared. I regard this as just one more manifestation of the right to education. Both parents and children understand they need English to enter the world, and this is the great privilege of my job today, because even if learning the English language is personally significant for the students, it is effective. But it is much more important to learn to live in the democratic

world even if not all students and parents understand it. The question is, how to make democratic training personally significant.

Speaking in terms of means, the existence of International Educational And Resource Network (I*EARN) was a recent discovery for me in this field. In September 1997 I took part in an I*EARN workshop held in Almaty by the trainers from Hungary and Lithuania with the support of Soros-Kazakhstan Foundation. The trainers shared with me the idea of I*EARN as a model of the open society and a training ground of practical democracy. This is a virtual organization that enables students of schools and colleges from the USA, Europe, Asia, Australia and Africa to correspond with their peers on meaningful and challenging topics, to do joint research, to exchange ideas and learning materials. You only need to get acquainted with the variety of I*EARN conferences and learning circles to choose a topic up to your students' interests and abilities. It can be "Discussion on Technology in Education," "Roles of Families in the Communities," "Global Art Exchange,"

etc. The experience of participation in the electronic conference "The Holocaust Genocide Project" might serve as a special example of the inter-influence of mentalities. Stories of the Great Patriotic War, as we are accustomed to call WW II, are traditionally kept in every family in the countries of the former USSR. When I suggested to my senior grade students that they write about the Great War for the conference run by Matt London, they declared they had re-written enough grandfathers' reminiscences in school years, beginning from primary school. Only one student, Irina Moiseyeva, was carried away with the task. The memory of her great-grandfather-who had escaped from a concentration camp, joined the army again and survived to Victory Day to be arrested by secret organs at home-was special in her family. She wrote a good composition, not very detailed, as the events were distant, but sincere and persuasive. Her writing was published in the magazine "An End to Intolerance" and she received emotional, admiring responses to her work, from Australia especially. It was a shock to learn how hard and awesome our history seemed to these young Australians. The class grew excited after this, and everybody began to tell war stories to their classmates and me, none of which was less impressive than Irina's story. The process of association with the world had begun. Only after reading the papers from this conference, did the students first learn of the special tragedy of the Jewish people in the Holocaust of the WW II. School textbooks had not provided them with the understanding of this side of history. On the one hand, the students evidently came to understand the backgrounds to our present social order, and the heritage that we all still have to outlive. On the other hand, they felt proud of their forefathers who survived under tyranny and kept defending their native land. It is certainly great to find sources of glory in your Motherland's past, as the present is not constantly inspiring. I came to the conclusion that to raise a free resourceful person, a child should be able to glory in his own achievements, his family's reputation, and his country's history. That is how he or she will find a place in the world.

. Consequently, I did my best to share the ideas of such correspondence and its crucial difference from old pen-friend clubs of Soviet days with my eighth-grade student. This class was the first to appreciate the attractions of its innovation and enjoy the satisfaction of a really developing and useful computer. Younger grades are apt to imitate the seniors trustfully, as soon as a beginning becomes popular. So the new wave of followers made it necessary to establish a club. There are always quiet enthusiasts ready to do

... technical work: correction, typing, sending and sorting out mail. There are voted organizers, ready for advertising, explanation and support. There are elected leaders, able to create the buoyant atmosphere of attraction, privileged perspective. They're all socially busy and happy. Psychologists say that this is the only effective way to be a personality.

Speaking in terms of human rights, I believe that the ideas of freedom of thinking and of speech, freedom of associations and gatherings, and equality between people are not the only ideal that our club activities teach. There are mighty manifestations of the right to a valuable education. If a teenager reads the conferences "My Street, My River" or "Faces of War" or "New Ways to Teach about and with Asia" or "Expeditions of Helen and Bill

Myer," he is sure to get a more vivid and convincing knowledge of geography and history than he could get from a textbook. There is even a reference within I*EARN, called "Discussion on Technology in Education." I visited R. Franz from Sunny Side Elementary school, Washington State, USA writes: "I*EARN is the main resource for social studies, geography, reading

. I'm writing....The student have a great sense of how technology connects them to people and place around the world." This may be the case because teenagers are likely to believe their peers more than adults.

Adults, for example, are rarely inclined to talk to teenagers on such

social topics as teenage pregnancy or attitude towards abortions. Moreover, the sides might feel uneasy and sound unconvincing in carrying out such a conversation. On the contrary, the discussion of these topics in the "Inside View" virtual magazine aroused sincere interest and eager participation. No doubt, for teenagers it was a more daring manifestation of the right to think for oneself than even a review of political issues. Those who did not dare to participate or just did not have a steady position to share were very interested

-comparing situations and approaches, defining the most common outlook, giving it their own view. On one hand, both minds and emotions were engaged and developed. On the other hand, it was a step in moral education of young generation on a global scale. The young were learning from each other, as they believed each other and enjoyed communication. They taught each other to be more responsible and more tolerant, to be braver and kinder. IS was one example of an animated exchange of opinions that I had cherished. My students grew acquainted with the variety of opinions on such

difficult and complicated questions as "Culture vs. Mass Media," "Is God 11?," "Gender Discrimination," and "Is the Death Penalty Justified?"

Of course, there are other ways to involve students in discussions, including debate clubs if not lessons, but reading electronic conferences and

writing to them highlights particular problems. Young people feel that they are not alone in their mental labor, and that their doubts and concerns are typical for people of their age in the most distant points of the globe. The quick response provided by Internet gives impetus to the discussion and bring people closer together. Exchanging Ideas, they inevitably influence each other, helping each other grow more mature. As a form of practical democracy, working in e-mail projects develops in the young souls a deep understanding of morality, civic responsibility, and keen interest in bettering the level of life in which they live: in the neighborhood, in the city, in the country, in the whole world. Even learning small everyday news from peers abroad, and calling everyone by their first names, makes our world a smaller, more familiar, and friendlier place in which to live. There was a project entitled "One Day of My Life," which gave a wonderfully clear idea of the ways and levels of life of schoolchildren and students in different countries. Writings to another conference described the view seen from the author's window. Does not it help to feel the globe our common home? And the virtual magazine "Inside View" is a ground for sharing feelings, doubts and aspirations of the young. I would like to quote here two opinions—one from a student, the other from an adult—on the personal impact of I*EARN practices. Suzi Novak, a student at Brighton High School, Rochester, New York, USA, wrote: "I have quickly fallen out of the hazy, self-oriented shell of adolescence and recognized my place in this world ... I want to be remembered for not only what I used to do, but for what has changed because of me." The words of Andrew Hocking, a teacher from Broadford Secondary College, Australia, sounded in tune with Suzi's words: "My students came back on a real high and felt as if they had really achieved something and had helped someone else....I*EARN gives the motivation and the impetus for students and teachers to make a meaningful difference to the world." This feeling of actual achievement is, in my opinion, crucial in practical democracy training.

As Thomas Jefferson wrote, societies cannot be born with the ability for self-governing—it is the result of habit and long preparation. And it is high time for our citizens, both young and old, to begin working out this habit of sharing public responsibility and public government. From a young age, students tend to find their place and opportunities in public life as a necessary component of democracy. I believe this to be a characteristic feature of a responsible citizen. The best of my students are not just getting ready for public life in the future, they are participating in it now, becoming more mature with every step. I want to speak here about a virtual March Against Child Labor. Every message to the address of the March was regarded as a mile of the way around the globe. I suggested submitting messages as a kind of voluntary home task. Frankly speaking, I was not really surprised when everybody from grades six to eleven was eager to write a few lines. The chance of a small practical participation in public life was very attractive for schoolchildren.

E-mail projects are successfully developing all over the world: we receive messages from small settlements in Africa and large cities in the USA. Among the humane values that are worked out in the international projects, I would name tolerance, pragmatism, collaboration skills, and compromise techniques, as they bring together people of different national and social backgrounds. These are the words of Zheng Zhou, a Chinese student: "I already feel myself better prepared than most students in facing a more diverse and international community. I have to thank I*EARN for helping me . to grow." Participants learn to evaluate other people's work, to discuss problems, and to come to mutually satisfactory conclusions also in the course of games like ThinkQuest. Established in 1995 by Advanced Network & Services, a private, non-profit corporation in Armonk, New York, the ThinkQuest program is designed to expand the use of Internet as a learning tool. It encourages and rewards secondary school students for developing educational materials on the Internet for use by other schools everywhere.

Participants can choose from a variety of subjects ranging from sciences to arts and the humanities, from sport and health issues to social sciences and interdisciplinary subjects. The number of topics provides the freedom of choice. The students are not playing real life here, they are participating in it. And their efforts deserve not a paternal praise, but sincere respect and gratitude. I can only quote Korchak again: "The main thought: a child is our equal-a valuable person."

That is the way to add to the world's variability and to participate practically in making the world better. Further on, this project favors greatly the habits of collaboration. It involves two-or three-member teams of young people, 12 to 19 years of age, from diverse backgrounds and distant places, to use their creative, technical, and intellectual capacities in joint work, sharing, discussing, arguing, and looking for compromise and for perfection. After a strict selection, three teams are working at our lyceum now. They include students from grades 7 to 11 (two are from schools other than ours), teachers, former students acting as coaches. So it's a small open society. One team is JUsy with the ecological map of Kazakhstan, another with the role of sports in human life. The team "School and democracy" includes the lyceum director as an equal member. They hope to present the experience of school parliament :md of different -age student bodies to the world community through Internet. these winners acquire further leadership and get used to their right to be leard, to participate in actually important events of this life. This activity also :rains students in the ability to take decisions, to analyze information received :rom mass media, and to do interviews with contemporaries.

II. On Attractions and Results

In the course of time in the course of reviewing my own outlook on :he world and, consequently, my professional goals, I cam~ t~ the nece.ssi.ty of .raining my students in democracy. The absence of a totahtan~ state In Itself

does not mean the existence of a strong, constant, and effective democracy.

Democracy is not automatically able to teach people democratic values. Citizens are to acquire habits, goals, and values favorable for the existence of democracy. It is only if every generation acquires such values and habits, that the democracy will be safe. In some sense, education is the forming of needs that are valuable for society. If I want my fellow citizen to take conscious decisions in the course of elections, to understand and value the lawful order, to work readily for the society's perfection, to become honest politicians and active citizens, I should take my chance of training them while they are young and perceptive. As I wrote before, I do not regard my own experience sufficient for this responsible objective. The science of psychology gives us grounds to believe that electronic correspondence-meaningful correspondence, like in I*EARN or ThinkQuest projects-is more favorable. To make sure of this, we are to research the inner world of students. As Yanush Korchak wrote: "Working on the perception of a child as a person and a group of children as a society, an educator grows to understand important and valuable truths." I would like to choose the senior school age, as they are the closest to conscious participation in social life of a democratic state. Furthermore, teenagers show the most sincere interest in electronic correspondence. Having started to think of psychological grounds of the attractions of telecommunications, I reviewed my diploma papers of my student days and a compact and intensive book by L. Fridman and M. Kulagina, entitled "Psychological Guide for Teachers." Now I am going to illustrate some statements with practical examples. Adolescence is characterized by a number of features: self-sufficiency grows, social relations become more variable and meaningful, and the field of activity becomes wider. In general, this period denotes the transfer of a young person, who starts to think of him-/herself as a member of society, into a new-quality social position. Parents, teachers, and the surrounding social milieu are not always aware of a young person's new thirst. Participation in the activities of an electronic correspondence club gives teenagers the desired opportunity to be heard and to hear of meaningful issues. The range of I*EARN conferences is very wide: from Mathematics Problems to a Water Monitoring project, from a Teddy Bear project for the youngest to a Contemporary Magazine for those interested in serious problems. I do not speak here about personal participation from a home computer, which could be, of course, very convenient for the most discreet students. As a matter of fact, none of our lyceum students (none of them poor, as ours is a private school) possesses a computer connected to Internet. I do not have one either, as the level of teachers' salaries does not allow large purchases like computers. At the edge of youth (the age differs from 11 to 14 for different personalities) people define the sphere of their interests, which aims at constancy in the course of time. This sphere of interests is the basis of motivation for everyday behavior. We can observe the growth of the interest in world outlook, religion, morality, and topics of aesthetics. Teenagers become more keen on their own and other people's feelings. I remember the

success of Marina Torokhtiy's essay about her own origin. She wrote down the romantic story of her forefathers for the conference "Kindred," supervised by Judy Barr, and later allowed me to distribute it to her class as well. Everybody was astonished to learn that her great-great-grandmother lived in Hungary and rebelled against a marriage without love. On her wedding day she eloped from her house with the man she loved, and they came to live in Ukraine. The following animated argument in the classroom demonstrated the keen interest in moral questions. The tenth-graders spoke of courage and love,

of obedience to parents, of parents' right to control and choose, of contradiction between obligation (mind the unhappy bridegroom's position!) and love They even declared that they began to understand Marina's own emotional, striking, brave personality better. Grade 10 has remembered this unusual lesson for a long time, because the pupils experienced the pleasure of communication, of analysis, of penetrating other people's inner world. The activity was successful, because it served to satisfy an existing need.

I firmly believe in the defining role of a motive in any activity. Neither mind nor will in themselves are able to change the hierarchy of motives, as only another need can withstand a need.

There can be no activity without a motive. There can be hidden motives only. Activity is always connected with a need of some kind. A need prompts personality for action. Here is one more example of the teenager need for self-research and self-evaluation.

Unfortunately, I did not keep a copy of Marina's writing, but this story had a continuation. I used copies of her letter as distribution material in Grade 8, not really intending to involve them much. Being too young to associate themselves with the heroes, children actually apprehended it as a funny, easy-reading story. But Dana Kasimova felt excited; the story was relevant to her own emotions. She wrote a long and thoughtful story, called "My Complicated Origin." She was trying sincerely to define her own place in the world, her own nationality, and cultural belonging from the point of view of family history—a history of breaking religious and national imitations generation after generation. You can read this story in the supplement to this work. I firmly believe that the main means of self-research for a teenager is comparing oneself with other people. And if there are means to satisfy this need at our disposal, we should put them into action.

Dana's story is, in fact, very typical in terms of Soviet history. Analyzing family stories on the historical background, young people learn to generalize, to rise from small affairs to major events. This is a real

~
 Achievement of the conference "Kindred." I feel obliged to say a few more words about great work Judy Barr has done, answering every smallest letter the conference achieved. She was skillful at engaging an able and active team of helpers, who composed answers. Those were not just formal replies, but interested, eager, and frank letters. This work could not be so significant for my students, if the emotional interaction had not been provided. Any practical psychologist would value this contact highly. We know that when it is not possible to satisfy the need in emotional contact, children feel alienated and it

can lead to personality deformation. Even adding a funny face like © or ® to a letter creates an atmosphere of emotional contact.

Speaking about the emotional possibilities of e-mail communication, I will relate the story of Alyona Lavrova's letter. She wrote a simple story from her great grandmother's childhood. It was a story that involved an encounter with ghosts, one of those stories children like very much and I do not. Consequently, I took my time sending it, until in a few days Alyona came up to me and shared the sad news: her granny was dead. The girl wanted me to attach this news to her letter. If her faraway friends had not been significant for her, she would not have asked me. Of course, she received good comforting letters and was planning to keep them forever.

Carol A. Takacs wrote: "It is very important for a school-age child to have a friend of the same age and sex.~" I could add that sometimes a teenager longs to find a friend of the opposite sex as well. And if a young person has communication problems, he or she might feel more comfortable in virtual company, not seeing and showing faces. Of course, I do not propose eloping into the virtual world from the real one. It can only be an additional communication resource and training ground. And, furthermore, information received in international communication might be interesting for a teenager's direct surrounding and give it meaningful content. The more so, because the lack of conditions favorable for satisfying the keen need in social confirmation can lead to a crisis of self-esteem. To finish the topic of interaction of emotions and motives, I would say that an emotion, prompting an action, can be regarded as its motive. A motive is always rooted in a personally significant emotion.

Communication with peers acquires major significance at this age. The teenager is overwhelmed with the longing for the standard, for being "like everybody." And at the same time, this age is characteristic of the absence of norms, of disproportion. Teenagers are not satisfied with being treated like children. In some sense, they are oriented toward the future more than the present. They want equality. Serious respectable communication with older people is one of manifestations of new equality for teenagers. Working in electronic conferences, students sometimes do not know what is the exact age of the person who has sent a message. They grow accustomed to treating grown-ups as equal partners, each of whom can help and enrich another. We understand that communication is the process of human interaction, where the counterpart influences each other's aspirations, goals, thoughts, and feelings through their images and behavior. Consequently, positive communication favors the development of socially valuable citizens.

To demonstrate the teenagers' ability to do difficult, serious work, I choose to describe the procedure of preparing submissions for a conference. We begin by reading other participants' writings or the invitation. If I feel the topic is attractive, I suggest that everybody write a kind of essay at home. Speaking frankly, my kids' English is far from being perfect. So after the first reading, I correct the worst grammatical mistakes (just to make the text understandable) and give primary literary recommendations. If students have ~

difficulties with composition, they may consult our teacher of Literature if they need historical or geographical reference, they may approach other members involved in our club's activities. After the second reading, sometimes comes the third and the fourth one, until the work is polished to our mutual satisfaction. By the way, messages to conferences are composed in the English language. The discussions are mostly held in English and English acts as a means of a fascinating and resourceful activity, not an objective of it. Students' practice in forming and expressing their opinions, in arguing and respecting each other's grounds. And I, as a teacher of English, enjoy their keen interest in my subject. My experience of extra-curricular activities taught me that both education and training are most effective when they succeed in carrying away the students' imagination. Sometimes students are so much satisfied with the creative process itself that they forget about marks to be put into registers. There is a more significant reward for this hard work—the feeling of achievement and success. I believe in the thought of a great Russian pedagogue, Ushinsky, that every student deserves his own moment of glory and beauty. It helps the child to grow. Children take pride in their perfect work, especially when they get responses to their writings. One of the club's hits was a letter by Nabi Nabiev describing a traditional Kazakh wedding. It is the result of his collaboration with his parents and teachers of Kazakh, English and Literature, full of good humor and authentic information. Younger students, inspired by Nabi's efforts, followed the research on Kazakh traditions. Asan Bekenov wrote about the holidays in our country, Kanat Shamutdinov—about the holiday of Nauryz. In my opinion, a good piece of research or creative writing gives the experience of success, a chance to express one's soul and brain. There is one more letter that I personally value highly. Sasha Jegashov, an eighth-grader, wrote a story of his great-grandparents, being persecuted by Stalin's regime. They succeeded to escape from the exile, displaying miracles of courage and enterprise. This story, both adventurous and bitter, lacked details: names, dates, etc. In fact, it lacked character. Sasha spared no effort and time, interviewing his relatives, investigating family archives, and re-writing his essay. He not only learned his family history letter, he exercised a powerful motive for learning the country history. He also brought his classmates to feel the "live breath of history." I want to highlight the significance of motive: learning history is personally interesting here, which is why it is effective. Likewise, participation in international correspondence is a motive for persistent learning of English. I would like to dwell once again on motives and needs. Needs are additionally qualified into biological, social and ideal ones. So-called need to belong to a social group and to occupy a certain place in it, to enjoy attention and affection of the environment. The need to defend one's own rights—the "for myself" need is encountered and at the same time interacts with the need to perform duties—the "for others" need. The degree of each of

these needs are regulated by social standards, having been formed by a complicated balance of historical, economical, national and other factors.

Moreover, scientists say that teenagers behavior is determined by two major and contradictory needs. Contradictorily, they want to belong to a group of peers, whose opinion is more significant for them than that of grown-ups. Teenagers evidently enjoy this unity. The need to belong to a group, to be one of "our people" brings teenagers to sport and tourist clubs, to fan societies, musical bands, or criminal groups. It depends on who is the first to make use of the existing need and to acquire leadership over young souls. At the same time, teenagers need to claim their individuality, to be unique in

some way or other. I*EARN joins teenagers to the world democratic community of the young, gives an opportunity to associate oneself with the wide world. Social maturity is developed by means of involvement into socially valuable activity and, consequently, personality development is directed in a positive way. I have listed enough examples of joint work of young people on socially important, challenging issues. There is one more form of I*EARN activities worth mentioning in this connection-Learning Circles. We participated in it during the first semester of this year. Each of three English teachers of our lyceum worked with her group of enthusiasts. They sent application to Margaret Riel, the coordinator of the project. Later she sent us the list of circles' topics and the rules of participation. One group chose Places and Perspectives, two groups chose Mind Works, but of different age levels. Consequently each group found itself included into a circle together with six to eight partners from abroad. These small communities exchanged mail once a week, satisfying each other's information demands. This develops the idea of our world as our mutual home. And the successful writings of Nabi, Marina, Irina and others gave them a chance to display their uniqueness in some point or another, thus satisfying one of the major needs. Lena Kiryakova tried to be singled out from her surrounding, telling a mysterious story from her early childhood. Sergey Shinshinov investigated the historical period of collectivization using the example of his native village. Vitaly Zakharov interviewed his grandfather on the famous period of exploration of idle lands in Kazakhstan. Nastya Sidorenko wrote a funny piece of prose, describing her father's first trip abroad. These literary efforts-my favorite kind of creativity-help teenagers to present themselves to the world. Teenagers see the perspective of their future use for others in the enrichment of their own individuality. As a clever teacher Carol A. Takacs wrote: "Find words of support for a child's creative beginnings, avoid criticizing his first experiences ... the child aims at creation not for his own sake only, he is presenting himself to the world." It is very important to remember that adolescence is the age during which self-esteem is being formed. A deserved praise helps the self-evaluation of a teenager to grow. Feeling adequate to his/her surrounding, a young person is more likely to develop into an active responsible member of

society. As I wrote before, a praise from peers is especially valued. The more so, if this praise came from thousands of kilometers' distance.

And there is one more reason for the attraction of electronic communication: the present keen interest in new technologies. Teenagers visit Playstation or Sony game rooms more than libraries. It is not achievement, but it is reality of our time. Every teenager thinks him/herself an expert on computer technologies and knows differences of computer kinds. He or she enjoys dropping words like these in a company: "I received some interesting material through Internet. ... " If there is a chance to employ this interest as a tool of learning and practical democracy training, why should we neglect it?

IV. On Results and Objectives

In conclusion, I want to reiterate two major ideas: electronic communication is a powerful instrument of practical democracy training and a source of motivation in student-centered learning; the resource of this effectiveness lies in the favorable psychological grounds of young age. I believe that, thanks to the experience of electronic correspondence, a person can become free to be oneself, feeling adequate to the surrounding world. He or she will not feel any need of psychological protection, being self-sufficient. In my opinion, the functioning of the electronic conversation club supports our lyceum's general approach: we need pedagogy aimed at training young people to understand each other and to live together. We need a real humane community of people. The community of teachers and students, who are all working at the joint goal: to learn to live in an open society. The curriculum of our lyceum includes practical economy, more hours of English, and Computing and Society Studies due to the same goal. We firmly believe that if a child feels comfortable in the surrounding society and masters sciences necessary for adapting in the democratic public life, he will grow to be an educated free person. If since childhood he or she feels humiliated and suppressed and does not receive vitally important education, the psychology of a slave is formed. And we have had enough of that in our history. I personally am sure I will not be ever able to get rid of the slave psychology. I am even not sure my present students will be able to, as they are influenced by me and people from my generation.

But I feel responsible for helping the students to grow to be better than me. I think that electronic correspondence is my mighty support in this goal. I just hope that telecommunications will continue to spread more widely the ideas of an open society in schools of Kazakhstan and other new independent states.

