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Developing a Multilevel Language Learning in a Powerful Environment: A Case Study

Learning a foreign language should not simply be reduced to a matter of acquiring basic skills but calls for a broader literacy that it is essential to preparing future generations who will have to live in a complex society characterized by increased “internationalization” and “interculturalization”. Technology can play such a crucial role.

Computer-based collaboration tools, enabling students to work together in groups, greatly increase the contexts of meta-reflection on what it means to become “literate” or an “educated citizen.”

Introduction

The implementation of CMC in language teaching has expanded over the last few years. Several teaching experiences following Cultural Project (Fustenberg 2001, Beltz 2000) have created different learning environments and collaborative intercultural contexts. These experiences have achieved different results related to the environments, group collaboration strategies, language acquisition theories, and goal setting. This article is a description of a specific project based on a complex environment, which includes classrooms and various CMC implementations. More specifically, the study analyzes the reciprocal influence that can occur between learning environment and learning process in terms of social behavior and actions related to the Ecological Approach (van Lier 1996, 2002; Kramsch 1994, 2002; Bakhtin 1981, Vygotsky 1986), and the language acquisition theory according to van Lier's AAA (Awareness, Authenticity, Autonomy). A number of benefits for students have been reported:

a) awareness of learning strategies and cultural issues,

b) awareness of linguistic and social skills,

c) autonomy and authenticity of learning because it is a student-centered process.

Learners became independent by monitoring their identity repertory (Kramsch 2002, Scollon 2002) and multilingual repertory (Lemke 2002).

The *Incontro* project

The teaching experiences in CMC mentioned above indicate that studying a foreign language does not simply mean the acquisition of basic skills but calls for broader literacy that is essential to prepare future generations who will have to live in a complex society characterized by increased “internationalization” and “interculturalization”. This is where technology plays such a crucial role. Computer-based collaboration tools, enabling students to work together in groups, greatly increase the scope of meta-reflection on what it means to become “literate” or an “educated citizen.” Thus the main aim of the *Incontro* Project was to create an intercultural ground where the interaction of different worldviews

can evaluate and minimize differences in socio-cultural behavior, ideologies, and the ways of communicating concepts. To this purpose an online connection was established between the Advanced Italian Language students of Smith College in the Usa and the University of Venice's Computer-Assisted Learning Language and Teaching course students in Italy. Participants were asked to choose a specific socio-cultural subject (e.g., immigration/racism, gender studies, educational systems, etc). and then they had to produce a final project. They worked in groups of four (two Italians and two Americans). Each group analyzed a different topic and designed a website on it by interacting and by sharing information from two different cultural perspectives – Italian students examined the subject in the United States, while American students examined it in Italy. The final websites were the result of this negotiation of cultural identities which did not represent the American or the Italian community's perspective but the shared cultural knowledge built in the common space, the idioculture (Smagorinsky and O'Donnel-Allen, 2000) of every single micro-community identified by the name each group gave itself. The Virtual Learning Environment laid the foundation for an intensive and articulated interaction using and adapting open resource tools (forums, bulletin board, email, etc.) The first phase focused mainly on what Riel called “the getting ready phase” (1992), adapted, in this new context, to the students' knowledge of collaborative and learning processes. They discussed group dynamics and the learning process in a virtual environment, analyzing literature provided by the teachers. During the project constant evaluation was carried out through online and classroom meetings, self and group evaluation questionnaires and final

questionnaires, focused on relational dynamics between participants in an electronic environment. The data collected and a final plenary discussion through videoconference stressed the importance of the participants' critical cultural awareness (Candlin 1987, Byram 1997) which the project had enhanced. More importantly, it gave Italian students, trained to be teachers, a crucial opportunity to experiment with this virtual environment and to reflect on new ways to improve teaching and learning in electronic communities.

16,18,27):

- a) getting ready,
- b) opening the circle,
- c) project planning, d) exchanging the work ,
- e) creating the publication and f) closing the circle.

This process oriented students from a personal to a more complex social exchange and collaborative work in a multiple space. Each phase occurred in a specific environment: the classroom, specific forums, a videoconference. As mentioned above, phase (a) was a preparatory stage. During phase (b) students got to know each other through communicative activities. Afterwards they selected topics for their final project, phase (c), and they divided into specific work groups. To accomplish their final project they planned tasks and exchanged materials on the selected subject, phase (d). The conclusion of this work consisted of the construction

of an intercultural website, phase (e), and a shared metareflection on their learning process through a videoconference, phase (f). Figure 1 illustrates the multiple level of the model of language learning approach which this pedagogical path is based on.

The multidimensional learning environment and the activities-based projects involved multiple worlds inside and outside the institution (multi scale process) requiring a personalization of cultural and linguistic experiences and integrating their different learning styles (multimodal learning). Most

importantly, this complex environment offered learners an opportunity to experiment with multilingual exchanges through different social tasks.

The Multidimensional Environment

Over the last fifteen years a large amount of research in learning has been devoted to the definition of effective and powerful learning environments (Jonassen and Land 2000, De Corte, Verschaffel, Entwistle and van Merriënboer 2003, Wenger 1998, Lave and Wenger 1991).

New approaches to learning such as constructivist approach and the socio-cultural theory, (Land and Hannafin 2000:3), point out that the main goal of this process has to be the construction of shared knowledge through collaboration and dialogue. In order to support these new perspectives there is the need of building an appropriate learning environment. This new setting should facilitate a collaborative, active and reflective work through meaningful tasks (Jonassen 1999).

According to Land and Hannafin (2000:6) learning environment, in order to be powerful, has to support

“individuals or groups as they attempt to negotiate multiple rather than singular points of view, reconcile competing and conflicting perspectives and beliefs and construct personally relevant meaning.”

The effectiveness of such environment is also determined by the integration of different contexts which includes classroom, the outside world, virtual spaces, etc.

To this purpose, technology can offer a great support if we consider it as a space where we

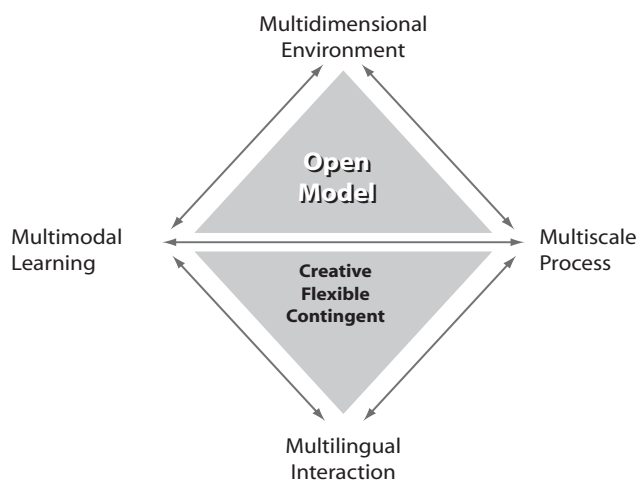


Figure 1

Language Acquisition: An Open Model

The complex environment created for this project is based on a theoretical model of acquisition which is open, creative, flexible and contingent. Participants organized their individual learning process. They adapted the syllabus (*flexibility*) to their unexpected needs (*contingency*) and added tasks to accomplish their goals and final project (*creativity*).

Learners explored new social behavior patterns through activity-based projects following six phases that Riel defines (1992:

"move from learners interaction with computer to interaction with other humans via computer" (Warschauer 2000).

asynchronous discussion forum in which the Italian teacher and students shared opinions, found solutions for the project main tasks, and defined strategies to improve group work and to solve conflicts. In this environment they reflected upon their future as teachers and their behavior as students in this specific learning context.

It includes Presentiamoci and Bar caffè, asynchronous forums built to enhance the social interaction. In these forums students meet off task, and talk about their lives and interests.

In CSCL open dialogue and social interaction are essential to enable cognitive processes which allow the collaborative building of knowledge (Wegerif 1998). This is particularly important when, in a CSCL, there is the encounter of learners from heterogeneous cultures, as in the Incontro project. Tools for the illusion of social presence have been only partially developed. Students could use their photos as icons which appear on each message they sent, but few of them used this tool, while others use different avatars to identify themselves.

The forums *Gruppi* are the on-task forums, where the students, divided into small groups of four or five, worked on the website. Each forum dealt with a topic: immigration, young generations, education, politics. Only students belonging to the group were allowed to write in their forums, but everyone could enter and read the discussions.

The forum *Film* is an on-task forum in which students discussed movies showed during the course. Movies were related to the topics chosen by groups, and they represented an additional source of information for their websites.

The videoconference is a synchronous environment planned at the end of this project. In this context students were able to reflect upon their learning experience in this specific environment.

All these environments were in-

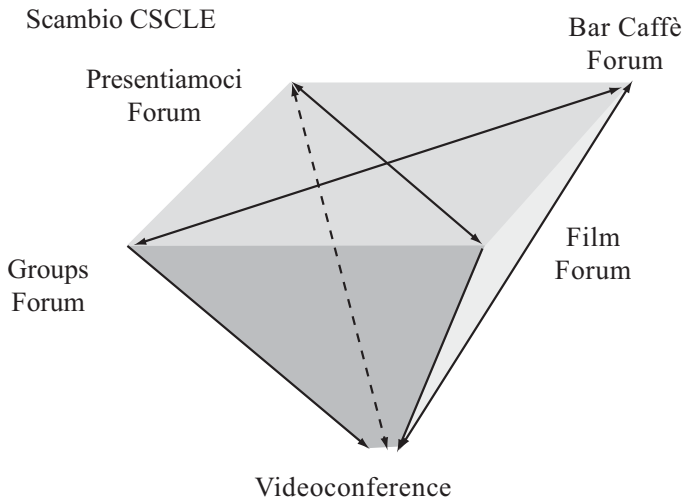


Figure 2

The *Incontro* project environment has been developed according to this new perspective. It is multidimensional since it includes different environments in which learners can accomplish different learning tasks.

Classroom Smith and Classroom Venice (fig. 2) represent "traditional" classrooms where students and teacher meet.

These two classes had two different goals: American students should enhance their linguistic and intercultural competence while Computer Assisted Language Teaching students should experiment the use of technology as a training to teach languages with this tool. They did not focus on the English language and culture learning but rather on theories and practices of CALL methodology.

CSCLE Smith has the structure and the tools of a typical VLE, with asynchronous discussion forums. Teacher used this environment to collect syllabus, resources and materials related to the course, to communicate with her students and to supervise their work.

CSCLE Venice consists of an

CSCLE Teachers mainly is composed of asynchronous email exchanges and meeting phone calls between the two teachers/supervisors. In this environment, teachers made decisions to enhance their project.

External environment includes all the involved contexts beyond the *Incontro* environment such as home, multimedia rooms, libraries, and other resources useful to gather information for students' work, for instance friends, experts, organizations, etc.

CSCLE Scambio is the environment in which students accomplished the main task: the organization and the construction of their website.

This environment is in itself a multilevel CSCL (Fig. 3).

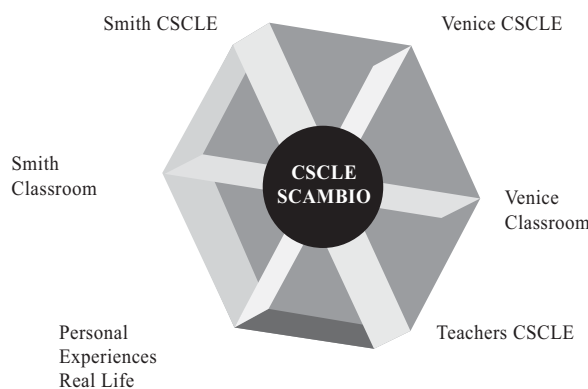


Figure 2

tegrated. For instance, some students used the forum *Presentiamoci* to submit a questionnaire and to do a survey which was useful for their group; the forum film discussions were useful to exchange ideas on the main subject of different website; the external world was useful to contact expert, to ask for technical help, and to gather information for surveys; private e-mails were fruitful to correct language mistakes and to revise website materials, etc.

Multiple identities

According to Kramsch,

“language learners develop multiple scale identities through the lower and higher scale-level responses they engage in with their environment” (2002:6).

The adaptive response to this multiple social context, which manipulates the structure of a standard classroom, asks learners to refer to their wide range of social identities with their values, beliefs, and practices (Lemke 2002). The dialogical and symmetric communication among participants led them to play a variety of roles such as novice or expert, insider or outsider of a cultural community, educator or educated, friend or colleague etc. Learner identity can thus be considered as work-in-progress (Lemke 2002:73) and as a result of this process students could experiment with – and gradually be more conscious of – their potential identity repertory (Lemke 2002:76). At the beginning of their work, students of *Incontro* project played specific roles required by the particular environment (in the forum *Presentiamoci* they were “friends”, in the Forums gruppi they were “novice” regarding the foreign culture and “expert” of target culture, etc.). Once they became more sensitive to the dynamics of the social system and tested a variety of interactional structures, they be-

came more and more aware of their identity repertory and played different roles even within the same message.

The following examples show a dynamic switching of roles:

Delle domande e chiarificazione: Per le classi italiane, l'esame e la valutazione unico? Non c'è temi, voti per partecipazione, ecc? C'è un limite per la numero di volti uno studente può dare un esame? Tutti gli esami sono orali, o avete gli esami scritti per dei soggetti? Grazie! Lavorerò sulle mie pagine questa settimana. Se avete altre domane, me li domandate! Mary

(I would like to ask you some questions and clarifications: is there only one exam and a final grade? Are there other criteria of assessment like participation, etc.? Do you have just oral exams or do you also have written exams for specific topics? Thank you! I am working on my pages this week, if you have other questions ask me! Mary)

Proverò a rispondere brevemente alle tue domande: – In genere non viene dato un voto per la partecipazione (ma spesso durante l'esame l'insegnante tiene conto della partecipazione di uno studente a lezione) – Il numero di volte in cui si può ripetere un esame è stabilito dalle singole università e ci sono molte differenze. Ad esempio a Lingue a Venezia un esame può essere ripetuto solo 3 volte, mentre a Lingue a Padova 6 volte. Questo non è affatto giusto! – Gli esami sono prevalentemente orali, però con la riforma molti professori preferiscono fare anche esami scritti (multiple-choice or student-produced responses) Invece come si svolgono gli esami in USA? Michele

(I will try to answer your questions: generally we are not graded on participation but the professor often takes our attendance into account, every single university decides how many times you can take the same exam if you fail. There are a lot of differences. For instance, at the

University of Venice you can take an exam three times, at Padua six times. This is unfair! Generally we have oral exams but with the reform many professors prefer to submit written exams. What happens in the USA? Michele

Thank you for the information! In the US the grading system varies from class to class. A language class, for example, usually is graded on participation, daily homework, quizzes, and written assignments. Classes such as literature and philosophy are usually graded on several papers, and sometimes student presentations. Science classes are graded on the mid-term exam, the final, quizzes, and lab reports.

There are almost no oral exams here – our “finals” (exams at the end of the semester) are either written exams or long papers. Mary

Thank you, Mary! As usual you're a good informant! D Have you any other questions about Italian system of evaluation? If so, write them to me! Ciao! Michele

In these exchanges learners played their roles as novices, asking questions about a system they do not know and experts, providing information related to their personal life and cultural experience. They also represented the “direct voices” of their culture; the use of different languages defines the roles of outsider (“I speak your language when I ask questions about your cultural system”) and insider (“I speak my language when I talk about my cultural system”). Participants not only changed roles but they recognized and selected them (“you're a good informant!”).

Supporting each other in this role exchange, learners became aware of their cultural and linguistic knowledge and how this knowledge could be useful for their peers. The following is an example of tutoring in linguistic issues:

Oh, yesterday I learnt other things while watching "Il dottor T e le donne" (not such a good movie...): to say "lo sistemo io" you can say "I'll fix him", doesn't it sound good?! And then instead of saying "I'm sure" the main character kept on saying "I'm positive"!!! Isn't it weird? Am I right, American girls? Are the two expressions synonyms? Michele

Haaa Michele you are AWESOME. I can't stand Richard Gere. He' a terrible actor isn't he?

Yes "I'm sure" and "I'm positive" are synonyms UNLESS the person using "I'm sure" was saying it in a sarcastic tone. In that case saying "I'm sure" is saying that you do not believe that person because you don't trust them.

For example:

Girl 1: Why did you light my house on fire?

Girl 2: I thought you wanted me to light your house on fire.

Girl 1: I'm sure!

Very sarcastic.

ciao ciao,

Claire

This student's e-mail shows how learners started to adopt teaching strategies such as giving explanations, using examples in context, etc. They realized they could contribute to the shared learning process even through the active role of *educator*.

Multimodal learning

As mentioned previously, an open model of acquisition is non-linear and depends on the multi-levels of interaction, which occur between language, learner, and environment. This complex context of different communities, interactions, and exchanges makes different ways of learning possible and, consequently, the acquisition of new learning behavior through simulation and repetition. It represents the "scaffolding" defined by Bruner (1983:60). The activities were determined by the

learners themselves to accomplish their tasks. They became problem solvers and they helped each other to reach their goal, which was the final project. In the process they discovered their peers' learning styles. The following examples demonstrate that from initial group work managed by a single leader, learners gradually moved to collaborative work through a symmetrical participation simulating their leader's behavior.

Care ragazze,

è giunto il momento di considerare tutto il materiale che abbiamo e decidere come organizzarlo.

Innanzitutto: siamo tutte soddisfatte di quello che abbiamo oppure sarebbe meglio avere più materiale?

Esprimiamo tutte la nostra opinione a riguardo per avere entro la fine della settimana un panorama completo.

Buon lavoro!!!E' impegnativo, ma ce la stiamo cavando bene...che ne dite?

Daniela

(Hi girls, now we need to consider all our material and we need to decide how to organize it. First of all: are we all satisfied about what we have done or it would be better to collect more materials? Let's give all our opinion about it in order to have the whole picture by the end of this week. This work is hard but we are handling it very well... what do you think? Daniela)

Ciao tutti!

What do you think of organizing all of our information so we create a link for each group? Then we can list the links at the first page, and show perhaps the Italian and American flags? We could also divide the different parts of the WebPages so each person can create their own site?

Sarah

Hallo!!!

I tell you my ideas:

We could divide the website in three parts (as the groups)- each part could consist of a brief introduction (perhaps with some pictures too) and a series of links to the website we found.

I think the groups should decide what to include in their part of the work.

What do you think?

Bye

Alberta

ciao ragazze!

abbiamo trovato tanto informazione...adesso dobbiamo organizzare. Mi piace l'idea ad avere la prima pagina diviso con tre sotto titole (nostri gruppi), possiamo mettere anche un descrizione dei links, e alcuni foto.

Alexandra

(Hi girls! We have a lot of information ... now we need to organize it. I like the idea of having the first page with three subtitles, our groups, we can also put a descriptions of some links and some pictures. Alexandra)

Ciao a tutti!

Penso che dividere i gruppo con ogni "link" sia un buon'idea. Forse, tutti sono responsabili per la prima pagina e, come Alberta ed Alexandra hanno detto, ogni gruppo puo creare il site per ogni topic

Sarah

(Hi all! I think that splitting every group with a link is a good idea. We all might be responsible for thr first page and, as Alberta and Alexandra said, each group can create a site for every topic. Sarah)

Cara Sarah,

sono d'accordo con te sulla divisione dei gruppi per ogni argomento e sulla collaborazione per la prima pagina.

(Dear Sarah, I agree with you. We can split our groups' work and we can collaborate for the first page.)

In the first page we could include a brief introduction on immigra-

tion (citing the arguments we chose for our groups), followed by or with the links to other three pages which will include the arguments and links of the three groups...Spero di essere stata chiara, sono stanca e ho ancora molto da lavorare! (I hope to make it clear, I am tired and I still have a lot of work to do!)

ciao a tutte!

Alberta

ciao ciao!

okay...oggi sarah and I siamo andati a lavorare con Indra sul nostro sito....OH: grazie indra e sarah, la vostra aiuto e stato molto affetivo! Indra ha lavorato bene sul sito di politica, e soggiorno ecc. Sara ha cominciato fare un bel sito dei stereotipi di Italiani come un link...ed io ho cominciato una pagina

(Hi sarah and I met Indra to work together for our site ...Oh: thanks Indra and Sarah, your help was really effective! Indra has worked very well on her site on immigration. Sarah started to do a good site on Italian stereotypes with a link... and I have started to do one page ...of the influences of Italy on american and vice versa. Okay...avete any other ideas??? non siamo molti sicuri on our projects but they other coming out good the same... alberta: cosa sta facendo, non capivamo bene come abbiamo diviso il lavoro (Alberta: what are you doing? Maybe we did not understand what we were supposed to do and how to divide our work...) So sarah and I read your messages and tried our best to understand and follow them... if you have ideas and/or suggestions let us know because we are meeting again tomorrow to finish everything and send you the sites!

thanks!

alex

Care ragazze,

vi chiedo scusa se il mio contributo è stato piuttosto scarso ultimamente...

Alberta...per la home page mi sembra che le tue idee siano come sempre ottime!

Che ne dite di inserire le bandiere italiana ed americana? In merito ad un'introduzione all'immigrazione, che taglio vorreste darle?

Daniela

(Hi girls, I apologize. My work was very little ...Alberta for the Homepage your ideas are great as usual! What about inserting Italian and American flags?How would you organize the introduction to the immigration topic?

Ciaooo a tutti!

Sono d'accordo con Daniela, dobbiamo avere le bandiere italiana e americano, "it's appropriate" per il nostro topico. Anche, Alexandra grazie per le tue idee, penso che siano buoni per il nostro web site. Oh, grazie Indra e Alexandra per il vostro aiuto! Allora, come possiamo tutte le pagine insieme?

So, have we agreed to make a page according to Alberta's suggestions? Come vogliamo dividere il lavoro? Posso cercare le bandiere e delle foto per la prima pagina? Forse, ogni gruppo "provides a link" to their websites anche? Che ne pensate?

Sarah

(Hi all, I agree with Daniela, we need the Italian and American flag, "it's appropriate" to our topic. Also, thanks Alexandra for your ideas. I think they are good for our website. Oh, thanks Indra and Alexandra for your help! Well, how could we put all pages together? So, have we agreed to make a page according to Alberta's suggestions? How would we divide our work? Can I look for some images for our first page? May each group provide a link to their website, as well? What do you think? Sarah)

Learners developed an independent control of their learning process, switching topics as needed, from academic to everyday life, integrating off-task and on-task activities, and intentionally choosing what was relevant

for them to study or to learn, as the following example shows:

Grazie per i siti Rossella! Tu sei meraviglioso a me! Dopo io parla di domande io leggerò tutto.

(Thanks for the sites Rossella!! You are great! Once I have answered your questions I will read all of them.)

Eeeek! I have bad Italian don't I?

Domanda 1: In general there are three different degrees in America: an undergraduate degree (often called a bachelor's degree), a graduate degree (often called a Master's) and a PhD.

Currently in America, in order to be able to get an adequately paying job you have to have an undergraduate degree. There are many options for jobs after completing this degree, however often those jobs hinge on how well the economy is doing at the time.

After a master's degree in a particular field, there is more of a possibility of getting an upper level position in the work force. This is because you are considered a skilled-worker.

If someone decides to get a PhD. it can be assumed that they want to work in academia because PhD's allow you to teach in universities and colleges. These answers are brief and general, I know, but they should give you somewhat of a better idea of how it works.

Domanda 2: In order to get a post-doctorate you do HAVE TO have a doctorate degree. Post-doctorates are for those people who want to continue some project or research before they look for a permanent job at a college or university.

Most people apply for post-doctorates with the professors they want to work with. The professor does get to choose whether or not he or she wants to take on that post-doctorate applicant.

Come sta il tuo ragazzo? Il tuo naso? Calcio, mamma mia. Io giocava calcio a high school. Dunque, ero molto molto male. Io sono il più peggiore (come si dice

"the worst?") a correrendo.

(How is your boyfriend? His nose? Soccer, my goodness. I used to play soccer at the High School. But I was really really bad. I am "il più peggiore", how do you say "the worst", running.)

S - L - O - W. Sooooo slow.

Ciao ciao, Claire

Ciao Claire,

grazie mille per le tue risposte, mi sono state davvero utili per capire di più il sistema americano. Leggi i siti che ti ho inviato e chiedimi pure se ci sono parti che non sono chiare. Sono pronta a risponderti!

Se trovi altri siti sull'educazione post-doctoral in the U.s., me li scrivi per favore? Grazie.

Il tuo italiano si capisce bene, non ti preoccupare e non essere troppo pessimista.

Per quanto riguarda il calcio... il mio ragazzo sta meglio per fortuna.

Anche tu giocavi a calcio? Non penso che tu fossi la peggiore (the worst) come hai scritto!

A presto Rossella

(Hi Claire, thaks a lot for your answers, they were very useful to better understand the American system. Read the sites I sent you and feel free to ask me if you have any doubts. I am ready to answer! If you find other sites on post-doctoral education in US, could you please send them to me? Thanks. You Italian is comprehensible, do not worry and don't be so pessimist. For what it concerns the soccer...fortunately my boyfriend is getting better. Do you use to play soccer, as well? I do not think you were the worst as you said! Take care, Rossella)

In this exchange participants switch reciprocally from an on-task subject to an off-task dialogue related to the personal experience of a member. This communication also includes tutorial behavior focused on a grammar issue and an indirect correction of a linguistic mistake ("Non penso che

tu fossi la peggiore". *I do not think you were the worst*).

Multilingual interaction

In a collaborative community the negotiation of meaning and of social identities occurs when we use language. According to Lemke (2002: 84), during a language learning process, this use has to be included in a long-term goal, which leads learners to practice multilingual behavior in a community. Lemke maintains that a language-learning context should develop an "affective sensibility of language use that we must better articulate in order to orient language learners to what language, first or second, is fully capable of" (Lemke 2002:83). Thus, a collaborative activity is most efficient when members can use their multilingual repertory. The *Incontro* complex environment of acquisition required a whole range of social engagements and interpersonal relationships which affected the learner's linguistic behavior. Participants were allowed to choose L1, L2 or both, and different registers (formal or informal, task based or off task based, youth language, colloquial language, etc.), as they wished. This choice led students towards bilingual or plurilingual utterances employing different languages in the same message, which included peculiar elements of electronic text:

Ciao a tutti,
Il mio sito è come questo:
"I film Italiani Politici"
una regista:
i film
un'altra regista:
i film
ecct..

Posso mettere il address qui se volete. Could you look at it and help me edit my grammar mistakes? (I know there are plenty!)
Ma devo finire una cosa piccola prima.

Becca

(Hi all, my site will be like the following: "Italian movies on politics"... a director:.. movies: ... another director: ... movies...etc. I can put the address if you like. Could you look at it and help me edit my grammar mistakes? I know there are plenty! But first I need to do a small thing. Becca).

In the following message a student shows her doubts through visual and verbal codes using both L1 and L2. She uses L2 to ask for or give information to the other members and L1 to reassure them of her participation in the group work or to ask for help. Every group gradually developed its peculiar and shared community speech. Some words and electronic codes became symbolic and recurred in the language interactions of every single community. Thus through this multilingual repertory, participants could add new dimensions of their Selves (Lemke 2002: 84) and could expand their voices. In addition, they could identify themselves as a "community". Scollon (2000: 130) defines an idiolect as

"...one in which extensive exchanges with the environment are characteristic, and which is highly adaptable in terms of that environment".

Scollon adds that an idiolect should include all the performances of a person depending on "a community-wide structures of social interaction". Each participant in this multiple community found his/her personal "voice", his/her idiolect determined by multiple languages:

Vi comunico con sommo piacere che HO FINITO LE MIE TRE PAGINE WEB!!!!

Mancano solo gli ultimi ritocchi (cioè i link tra le pagine e coi siti esterni!!!)

Lo ammetto sono una frana... domani mi farò spiegare per l'ennesima volta come si fanno.

L'indice è:

(I am very glad to let you know that I HAVE DONE MY THREE WEBPAGES!!!! I need just to finalize last things, which means the links among pages and with external links!!!. I need to say that "sono una frana" I am a disaster" ... tomorrow I will try to have someone to explain me again how to make them.

The index is:)

MUSIC AND POLITICS:

1. Where has American protest song gone?

2. Voices of Protest(/Dissent?)

-Steve Earle

-Ani DiFranco

Mandi!

(Bye,)

This message is an example of personal linguistic strategies, which includes: a) the use of icons to express feelings or to replace a verbal code for greetings; b) L1 and L2 focusing on on-task activity; c) the use of metaphors in a colloquial register ("sono una frana", I am a disaster) and the Italian dialect of Friuli ("mandi", Bye).

Through their idiolect participants identify their own selves among the other selves but they also identify the community they belong to among the other communities. The result of this interaction is a "melting pot" of linguistic behaviors, which can be defined as an idiolect community. The following examples show the use of colloquial and idiomatic expressions in both L1 and L2 which became, through the interactional process, shared linguistic resources recognized by the members of a specific group/community.

Siamo stati grandi! (*We were great!*)

We rocked!!!!

Ciao Rossella

Ho appena trovato questo messaggio - Povero Michele! Voglio dire che leggo Enrico IV di Pirandello per la mia classe del teatro italiano - non e facile, ma

mi piace un sacco! L'hai letto?

Ciao Gretchen

(I have just found this message. Poor Michele! I `d like to say that I read the Pirandello's EnricIV for my class of Italian theatre. It is not easy but I like it "un sacco" a lot! Have you read it? Ciao Gretchen).

Learners simulated linguistic behavior used by native speakers (we rocked used by Italian students and un sacco used by American students) and included it in a "new" multiple code of this shared space.

Multi scale process

Learning a language has to be conceived as a long-term process. Lemke (2002:75) maintains that

"the classroom is exactly like the rest of that social world in that it contributes to the formation of identities and habits of action that are formed across the longer timescales we also spend in other places."

In this statement, Lemke points out that a continuum should occur between the classroom and the other multiple social worlds connected to the classroom through the individual experiences of its members. The multiple environments of this project promoted the interaction with different social communities and the articulation of learning itself: learning as belonging to a community, learning as doing through practice, learning as experience, which should be meaningful for learners, and learning as affirmation of social identity in a community (Wenger 1998:5).

Students felt this process was a relevant experience in their outside lives and an investment for their future. Following their own particular interests, they found multiple connections with the external world and they involved the other communities they belonged to in it.

Dear Eliza, if you can find tomorrow evening I'll meet with some boys and girls (scouts) from 18 to 21 years and I can give them your "questionnaire", ok?

Ciao

Niko

Michele, I'm not sure if you are allowed to take a class twice. I'll ask my friends and see if they know.

Mary

In the first example a student helped a peer by submitting her questionnaire to a scout group of which she is the leader. In the second example, a learner involved the community of friends and university colleagues asking them for help with her peer's work. Participants were completely involved in their tasks, which were perceived by them as meaningful for their educational and social experience and no longer merely imposed by their teacher:

Ciao, le mie colleghe!

Il sogetto dell'immigrazione e molto incendiario negli Stati Uniti! Il sogetto della lingua e importantissimo - si deve parlare soltanto inglese? Quello e la questione di cui mi interesso il piu dell'immigrazione americana.

E mi interesso dell'immigrazione italiana perche voglio abitare in Italia! Credo che sia molto difficile di farlo legalmente per tutti i cittadini dei paesi fuori della Unione Europea. Ma sogno di vivere nella Toscana, un giorno

(Hello, my colleagues! The immigration is a very fervent debate in United States. The subject of the language is very important. Do we have just to speak English? That is the aspect I am most interested in. I am interested in the Italian immigration because I want to live in Italy! I believe it is very difficult for non Union European citizens. But I wish to live in Tuscany one day).

In this message a learner shows her interest in the topic of

immigration in Italy. She considers this study as an investment for her future because she is planning to live in that foreign community. Her work is meaningful because it is a bridge between two different periods of her life.

Conclusion

Students' responses in a final questionnaire showed that this integrated environment enhanced a multi level of learning. Findings point out that learners could benefit from this intercultural experience in terms of:

- a) a multilevel of awareness,
- b) a multilevel of autonomy,
- c) a multilevel of authenticity.

Participants became aware of how to collaborate through the negotiation of their cultural identities and by means of the computer:

We have learnt how to work in a virtual and real group and also how to use technology.

One learns more about a culture knowing students of another country... you cannot learn that in the classroom or on a book

Manipulating the interactional structures of the classroom and playing the role of problem solvers learners became aware of their different learning styles which a traditional learning context would limit, as the following student points out:

The success of this project was also determined by the relaxed atmosphere and by interpersonal relationships between teacher and students that probably in a lecture teaching style would not have developed in the same way

The flexibility of the learning environment developed learners autonomy and improved the independent work they felt as "their own";

Another positive aspect was our autonomy... we did not have our

teacher telling us what to do and how to do it, we organized our work and tasks, we scheduled deadlines".

We could participate more actively and now I can feel that my work is really mine.

As van Lier maintains (1996:13) the result of these awareness and autonomy processes is an authentic behavior, an action intrinsically motivated and not provided by a teacher or a textbook. Participants found authenticity in their motivation and intention to interact on this intercultural ground made by their shared real goals:

The most positive aspect was to use language writing and reading messages for a real purpose with real people.

Students found the authenticity of the context and of the purpose of their task as well as of their interaction; they became finders (van Lier 1996:137) of all these opportunities:

It was not a scheduled meeting but a daily meeting we felt important so we looked for it.

We can conclude that an integrated and complex environment can empower student's learning system in multiple ways and promote the quality of the educational experience. This process is possible since "exposure-language is usable when the learner can make sense of it" (van Lier 1996:45) and when the shared knowledge "is mediated by this lived space, and by the materials artifacts we create" (Kramersch 2002:12).

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Editor's Note: Professor Spinelli and Professor Dolci jointly wrote the following sections of the article: Introduction and Conclusion;

Professor Spinelli wrote the sections on: The *Incontro* Project, Language Acquisition: An Open Model, Multiple

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