# TESTING FEASIBILITY OF CROSS BORDER CONTACTS WITHIN PRIMARY NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES CLASSROOM

*Moira Irina CAVAION*

University of Primorska, Faculty of Education, Cankarjeva 5, 6000 Koper Capodistria, Slovenia

e-mail: irinacavaion@hotmail.com

## ABSTRACT

*The paper reports a six-weeks-lasting research run into two mainstream primary classrooms settled in the border municipalities of Trieste and Koper, representing the initial stage of a wider study which aim is the development of a methodological framework in order to introduce systematic virtual and face-to-face cross-border contacts into the teaching and learning of Neighbouring Languages (NL) in mainstream border area primary schools. At this phase, beyond an embryonic investigation about pupils' language behaviour in multilingual learning context, there have been tested the "face-to-face encounter" feasibility between involved classrooms and virtual network efficacy. Results have shown evidence of feasibility as well as the cross border primary schools contacts positive influences on attitudes and pupils' learning NL language behaviour .*

**Key words:** teaching and learning neighbouring languages, mainstream primary schools, cross-border contacts, Koper-Triest

## REALIZZABILITA' DEI CONTATTI TRANSFRONTALIERI NELL'INSEGNAMENTO DELLE LINGUE DI CONFINE NELLE SCUOLE D'ISTRUZIONE PRIMARIA

### SINTESI

*L'articolo descrive una ricerca svoltasi nell'arco di sei settimane in due classi di istituti scolastici di istruzione primaria della comunità di maggioranza situate nelle città di Trieste e Capodistria dove si apprende la lingua di confine. Essa rappresenta la fase iniziale di uno studio più ampio che si pone come obiettivo quello di sviluppare una metodologia atta ad introdurre in modo sistematico contatti sia virtuali che reali nell'insegnamento delle lingue di confine nelle scuole di lingua di maggioranza. In questa ricerca - oltre ad un'iniziale studio sui comportamenti linguistici degli alunni in un contesto d'istruzione multilingue - sono state verificate la realizzabilità degli incontri reali tra le classi coinvolte e le problematiche riguardanti i contatti virtuali. I risultati dimostrano l'effettiva realizzabilità delle iniziative svolte nonché un'influenza positiva sia sugli atteggiamenti che sull' apprendimento della lingua di confine degli alunni coinvolti.*

**Parole chiave:** insegnamento ed apprendimento delle lingue di confine, scuole con lingua d'istruzione maggioritaria, contatti transfrontalieri, Capodistria-Trieste

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 24 · 2014 · 2

Moira Irina CAVAION: TESTING FEASIBILITY OF CROSS BORDER CONTACTS WITHIN PRIMARY NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES CLASSROOM, 277–292

## INTRODUCTION

The study that is hereby proposed, reports a first cycle of an Action Research (AR) which aim is the development of a methodological framework in order to introduce systematic virtual and face-to-face cross-border contacts into the teaching and learning of Neighbouring Languages (NL) in mainstream border area primary schools[1]. Exploiting cross-border contacts in the NL primary classroom has been identified, by the author of the study as well as a possible powerful strategy to implement the use of the language and enhance pupils' language skills, intercultural competence, and motivation for the NL learning in Slovenian-Italian border area where, as the research shows, NL suffers of a lack of prestige in the eyes of teenagers coming from both sides of the boundary (Furlan 2002), results of the compulsory teaching of Italian language have lately reached very low proficiency level (Čok 2009) while the teaching of Slovenian language - at its very beginning on Italian side of the border – lacks of instruments and strategies, and cross border contacts among teenagers and schools have had so far very little place (Cavaion 2012)[2]. Nevertheless the methodological and systematic exploitation of cross-border contacts has been seldom applied in NL classrooms in Slovenian Istria (see previous footnote) whereas many cross-border projects have been run in the last decades mainly in the field of intercultural communication, aimed at the developing of tools for a better mutual understanding among border schools (see projects CROMO, EDUKA[3]), teachers training in multilingual areas (Project "Promotion of Minority Languages in Multilingual Areas with regard to Teacher Training" and "Info Project", in the past the project "Teaching Foreign/ Second Language in Pre-primary Primary Sector"[4]) or curricular implementations of NL (see project ESCO[5]). More, throughout an attentive reading of the Mercator Regional Dossiers[6] about the Italian Language education in Slovenia and Slovene Language Education in Italy we are acquainted with the fact that neither in Slovenia nor in Italy have been developed specific research about a contact based NL learning and teaching.

In other European border regions where the teaching of NL is well-established, lots of projects have been run mostly introducing bilingual language education programs. Whereas school exchanges based projects are organised there is little clarifications about the methodological approach, giving us no models to refer to[7]. More, from organisational viewpoint it is clear that cross-border projects reflect local or regional language policies which ensure different level of NL teaching integration into mainstream primary education with the higher level of structured cross-border cooperation – like for example EGTC programs[8] - the more integrated NL planning. For, the need to identify the proper solution for the specific language policy situation which characterises at

---

1   Mainstream schools are those schools attended by majority language speakers - in this case primary schools settled in Koper, using Slovenian language as language of instruction, and lower secondary school settled in Trieste, using Italian as language of instruction.

2   Between February and May 2012 we run a survey research in the majority of mainstream primary schools of Slovenian Istria providing compulsory teaching of Italian as L2 which showed that:
   • 72% of  questioned pupils (class year 9) do not have any contacts with Italian teenagers
   • 59% say they are willing to meet them, but the remaining 40% declare they are not interested in it  (27%) or definitely against that possibility (13%)
   • 2/3 of the questioned teachers of Italian L2 do not exploit cross/border contacts
   • schools happened to run cross-border projects but they never included NL teaching specifically
   • the major part of the cross-border school projects are characterised by a no continuity in contacts, that is, once the project has finished there are no further contacts.
   From "Presence, Role And Value Of Cross Border Contacts And Meaningful Relationships Development In Neighbouring Language Classroom. The case of mainstream primary schools of the Littoral zone of Slovenian-Italian border", Cavaion Moira Irina, paper presented at 13th ICLASP Conference, Leeuwarden, 20-23 June 2012

3   Project CROMO (Crossborder Module), cross-border regional project ITA-SLO-AT 2007 dealing with ELP implementation for students aged 15+;  Project EDUKA: Educating for Diversity, a project which develops tools for intercultural reflection in border schools, realised within the Crossborder Cooperation Programme Italy-Slovenia 2007-2013, http://www.eduka-itaslo.eu/

4   COMENIUS-2.1 project: "Promotion of Minority Languages in Multilingual Areas with regard to Teacher Training (2003-2006)" dealing with aspects of teaching strategies and strategies of learning, teaching a minority language without prejudices, politics in teaching minority languages;  COMENIUS-2.1 project: "Identifying training models in multilingual areas (INFO), 2004-2007; Tempus-3767 project: "Teaching foreign/Second Language in pre-primary Primary Sector"(1992-1995).

5   Project ESCO: Educare senza Confine, Interreg IV ITA-AT, a project of contacts among schools  with teachers exchanges for teaching the NLhttp://www.dreihaende-triroke-tremani.eu/it/progetto.html

6   MERCATOR Regional dossiers are documents stating briefly the most essential features of the education system of regions with an autochthonous lesser used language . They are published by Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning www.mercator/education.org

7   After long investigations, it was identified only one important project based on the principle of contacts assumed in this paper. It is the case of the project named Euregioschool, run by a network of schools settled in Belgium, Germany and Holland in the Meuse–Rhine Euregion http://www.euregioschool.eu/?locale=de_DE

8   EGTC: 'European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation' which allows public entities of different Member States to get together under a new entity with full legal personality. Established in year 2006 to facilitate and promote territorial cooperation (cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation), in view of strengthening the economic and social cohesion of the European territory (see https://portal.cor. europa.eu/egtc/en-US/discovertheegtc/Pages/welcome.aspx)

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 24 · 2014 · 2

Moira Irina CAVAION: TESTING FEASIBILITY OF CROSS BORDER CONTACTS WITHIN PRIMARY NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES CLASSROOM, 277–292

this moment Slovenian-Italian littoral border area.

We think that teaching NL inspired by the social integration ideal and matched with friendship development among peers who learn each other's language could bring positive intergroup relationships development with important consequences in terms of improved attitude towards the other speech community and motivation to learn the NL.

## FEW SOCIOLINGUISTIC EXPLANATIONS

The complex sociolinguist background of the research we are about to present and which has to be considered as an investigation within the studies of language and learning teaching – thought not directly under investigation, obliges us to give some explanations which certainly will not be exhaustive of the problem but they may give the level of the complexity we were working in.

NLs are dual identity languages. They are languages spoken along boundaries, characterised by a communion of language and culture with the mainstream community on the other side of the boundary (Serena 2003, De Mauro 1998: 11, Brezigar 2003: 47) - and regional or minority languages that is, according to the definition given by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, "languages traditionally used within a given territory of a state by nationals of that state who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the state's population" (CETF 148: 1). In the case of Italy and Slovenia, the NL teaching and learning has been so far included within special laws for minority group protection in force since 1954 in Slovenia and since 1948 in Italy, even if only the latest European laws promulgated to protect minority languages (with its climax in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, promulgated in 1992) ensured them the context for their effective preservation. Actually, Slovenia has been providing compulsory teaching of Italian in all the primary schools of its Littoral area since the end of the II World War, whereas Italy has carried out an experimental teaching of Slovenian language in its primary and low secondary schools only in the last few years. The sociolinguistic context of the two minority/neighbouring languages is very different, one with a basic two-way bilingualism which characterises the Slovene Istria border area against a completely opposite tendency of a one-way bilingualism which characterises the Trieste area (Mikolič 2005). So far, we have found that teaching of these languages has been aimed at, with a great importance, healing the wounded relationships between border areas (Brezigar 2003:49). Nevertheless, we are convinced that, considering the slow process of renewing as well as the playing down of the complex borders context - especially such as "ancient borders" (Bufon1998) - the NL teaching cannot be any longer a matter of sole protection and healing. On the contrary, valuing their NLs status, minority-regional

languages could have a leading role within a social integration development process, personal growth, local border communities cultural enrichment, following the ideal of "cultural contamination" (Balboni 2002),"real-life intercultural language learning laboratory" (Halink, Raasch, Schmitz-Schwamborn 2003), "laboratories of Europeism" (Čok 2008).

Within this context, efficient teaching strategies are needed as to inspire teachers and consequently the local language policy in order to sustain efficacious NL teaching interventions in mainstream primary schools, which might be the context where regional-NLs could find their way for a revival.

The lack of reference models, as well as the innovative nature of activities proposed urged us to start with a feasibility test of practical aspects related to these specificities, mainly linked to virtual networking and the face-to-face encounters between classrooms involved, more over the investigation about efficacy of the research instruments used for analysing pupils' language behaviour during formal interethnic encounters.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Extensive, highly interdisciplinary literature underpins our proposal, contextualised in social psychology (Allport 1954, Pettigrew 1998), language and social psychology (Gardner and Lambert 1972, Gardner 1985, Dörnyei 2001, 2003) psychology of peer relationships (Berndt 1996, Berndt and Ladd 1989, Bukowski and Hoza 1989, Bukowsky, Newcomb and Hartup 1996, Ladd 1999, Levy and Killen 2008), intercultural studies (Bennett 1993, Byram 1997, Byram and Morgan 1994, Čok 2003, 2006, 2009, Furlan 2002, Mikolič 2004), applied linguistics (Kramsch 2010), second language teaching and learning (Canale, Swain 1980, Candlin 1981, Littlewood 1981, Prabhu 1990, Richards, Rodgers 2001, Swan 1985), network-based foreign language teaching (Warshauer and Kern 2000, Thorne 2005, Thorne and Black 2007), sociolinguistics (Weinrich 1953, Thomason 1997, Fishman 1991, Kaučič Baša 1997, 2004). Here we provide some references which could specifically help to interpret actions and results of this initial phase of the research.

Contacts are at the heart of Gordon Allport's Intergroup Contact Hypothesis (Allport 1954, for a review see Pettigrew 1998, Wright, Brody, Aron 2005, Brown and Hewstone 2005). This theory claims that interaction/contact between individual members of different groups, under a proscribed set of conditions, can lead to a reduction in prejudice. The author identified four key conditions that lead to contacts' positive effects. They are: equal group status within the situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; support of authorities. Pettigrew's implementation of Allport's contact theory (Pettigrew 1998) adds *friendship potential*, advising that contacts situation must provide the participants with

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 24 · 2014 · 2

Moira Irina CAVAION: TESTING FEASIBILITY OF CROSS BORDER CONTACTS WITHIN PRIMARY NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES CLASSROOM, 277–292

the opportunity to become friends and that constructive contact relates more closely to long-term close relationships than to the initial acquaintanceship (Pettigrew 1998: 76). According to more recent findings the quality of contact (i.e. friendship potential) appears to be pivotal whereas mere quantity of contacts with no specific quality conditions has sometimes detrimental effects as well as learning about the out group brings behaviour modifications at the initial stage of contacts, whereas the generation of affective ties gains over time importance (Eller and Abrams 2004:34).

A critical viewpoint is presented by Amichai-Hamburger and McKenna (Amichai-Hamburger and McKenna 2006) who propose a reconsideration of the contact hypothesis based on the use of internet interaction as a substitute of face-to-face encounters, sustaining successful results already gained in numerous researches regarding anxiety reduction, greater self-disclosure, practicality with on-line translator software.

Gardner and Lambert (Gardner, Lambert 1972, Gardner 1985) - and more recently Dörnyei (Dörnyei 2001, 2003) - present evidences regarding relations between the successful second language learner and his/her psychological preparation to adopt various aspects and behaviour which characterise members of another linguistic-cultural group.

In this research, friendship has been assumed as a powerful instrument for entering teenagers' world, since it is the group this research is addressed to. It is an emotional instrument which is mostly left aside in classrooms setting since cognitive matters are valued over the affective ones. Friendship in children and adolescents has been deeply investigated by Berndt (1996), Berndt and Ladd (1989), Bukowski and Hoza (1989), Bukowsky, Newcomb and Hartup (1996), Ladd (1999). Main findings of the research are the following:

- peers play an essential role in the socialisation of interpersonal competence
- children associate friendships with peers with companionship, dyadic exchanges, intimacy, emotional support, openness, honesty, and affection
- gender differentiation in some preferred friendship's aspects with girls more likely to appreciate intimacy as well as boys solidarity
- friendship in adolescence serves as a means for achieving individual identity and self-understanding
- cross-cultural peer relationships could lead towards misunderstandings as variations in cultural values may cause differences in the way children interact and maintain friendships

On the front of intergroup and cross-race friendship research:

- cross-race friendships are one of the most influential intergroup contact's types in terms of positive impact on social attitude (Tropp and Prenovost 2008, cited in McGlothlin and Killen 2010:626)
- purely cognitive information about the out-group might bring changes in beliefs but not in behaviours; only close relationship with an out-group member leads to more positive attitudes (Liebkind and McAlister 1999)
- where close-ethnic friendships arise, lower level of intergroup anxiety is associated with more positive out-group attitudes in general, hence the call of the same researchers addressing psychologists, practitioners and policy-makers for strategies development encouraging intergroup friendships (Turner & Feddes 2011:922)
- infrequent cross-race friendships in childhood may lead to the inference that these friendships are not feasible (McGlothlin and Killen 2010:631)

Network-based language teaching[9] (NBLT) is our research key element of since it compensates the difficulty to realise frequent face-to-face encounters in NL classrooms. The theoretical framework we assumed refers to Network-Based language teaching, grounded in the studies of Mark Warschauer (Warschauer and Kern 2000), Tele collaboration research in foreign language learning and teaching run by Julie Belz (Belz 2003), Internet-Mediated-Intercultural-Foreign-Language-Education (ICFLE) invented by Steven Thorne (Thorne 2006), Robert O'Dowd's research on intercultural learning in on-line environments (O'Dowd 2003) and Mark Prensky's thoughts about digital natives (Prensky 2001, 2010). Specifically it is acknowledged that networking tools are:

- learner-centred environments (O'Dowd 2003)
- authentic environments, that is augmented communicative authenticity
- good tool for expansion of vocabulary (Wilson and Espejo 2009)
- highly motivating
- highly expressive, inspiring multimodal compositions (podcasting, web conferencing; Thorne & Black 2007)

They can:
- enhance oral, aural and cultural proficiency (Webconferencing, Skype, Cooke-Plagwitz 2009)
- enhance writing skills and motivation to write (blogs, wikis, Thorne 2005)
- enhance fluency (SCMC, Thorne 2005)
- instil culturally responsive sense of sociolinguistic variations (SCMC, McCourt 2009, in Oxford & Oxford)
- trigger reflective learning (email, wikis, blogs, SCMC, Thorne 2005, O'Dowd 2003[10])

---

9   "Network-Based Language Teaching (NBLT) is language teaching that involves the use of computers connected to one another in either local or global networks.(...)It represents a new and different side of Computer Assisted Language Learning, where human-to-human communication is the focus" (Warschauer & Kern 2000: 1)

**ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 24 · 2014 · 2**

Moira Irina CAVAION: TESTING FEASIBILITY OF CROSS BORDER CONTACTS WITHIN PRIMARY NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES CLASSROOM, 277–292

- inspire collaborative learning (on-line gaming, Thorne & Black 2007)
- provide enjoyment for language learning, students not focused on grades (Wilson and Espejo 2009)

The methodological framework of the research is that of communicative approach to language teaching (CLT) (Canale, Swain 1980, Candlin 1981, Littlewood 1981, Prabhu 1990, Richards, Rodgers 2001, Swan 1985) with a particular attention to affective second language learning theories (Arnold 1999, Schumann 1997, Stevick 1990) linked to natural second language acquisition theories (SLA theories) like Krashen's affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, Terrel 1983, Krashen 1985), and consequent to the underlying belief that learning languages is not only a matter of cognition, socialisation, communication but it is also, or even more importantly, a matter of human relations (Kramsch 2010: 2).

Although the focus of the research is more language speakers oriented and not language oriented, the theoretical framework offered by the linguistics contacts field's study (Weinreich 1953, Thomason 1997) gives us a tremendous amount of information about linguistic behaviour that might occur within interaction in multilingual settings we are going to observe. Within the research it is also developed a paragraph dealing with models of language interaction – like the choice of the code: half code, alternation code, one code (Thorne 2005) - preferred by adolescents engaged in cross cultural communication.

The underlying learning theories of the research are those derived from social constructivism (Kelly 1963, Vygotsky 1978) which put experience and social interaction at the centre of the learning process, cooperative learning theories (Slavin 1995, Johnson, Johnson, Holubec 1994) and multiple intelligence (Gardner 1983, 1993, 2008).

### RESEARCH CONTEXT AND PROBLEM

NL teaching and learning in mainstream primary schools of the border municipalities of Trieste- Italy and Koper- Slovenia are not efficacious as they could and should be. As it was said in the introduction, the study of Italian language is not "implemented well" in Slovenian schools where it represents a compulsory subject and where it lately reached a quite low proficiency level (Čok 2009). Slovenian language teaching is, with a great delay, at the very beginning of its introduction into the compulsory mainstream education system in Italy, not "well-equipped" at all from an organisational and methodological viewpoint.

Rare contacts and, above all, low quality contacts exist between the two named mainstream speech communities, neither at compulsory schooling level where teachers of Italian in Slovenian Istria since ever engaged

in NL teaching had so far hardly considered to exploit contacts with the neighbouring country for their language classrooms, nor at informal socialisation of involved teenagers (Cavaion 2012).

We are convinced that, in order to set up a methodology based on the development of systematic contacts and meaningful cross-border relationships among teenagers learning each one the language of the other, could work as refined means of linguistic, cultural, social and interethnic relationships growth in the border area, giving impulse to a renewed idea of NL teaching and learning.

### RESEARCH AIMS, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND DESIGN

This six-weeks-lasting study represents a first cycle of an Action Research (2011 - 2012) which will continue in the following school year 2012 – 2013 in the same classrooms, aiming at the development and implementation of tools and strategies in order to sustain in practice the idea of contact based NL learning and teaching. This stage answers specifically to the need to identify feasibility and practicability of the innovative planned actions – which are network based communication exchanges, videoconference, SCMC[11] (chats), emails and real encounters where pupils are expected to work together, developing and testing their communicative skills in a multilingual environment. The following research questions have led this phase of the study:

- How can cross-border face-to-face and virtual meetings be logistically and technically sustained?
- How much are they sustainable from an organisational, didactical and financial point of view?
- How much realistic and sustainable is the planned work with teachers?
- How should cross-border face-to-face and virtual meetings be shaped in order to get students to
  - a positive feeling with the experience of encounter
  - increase the use of the language they learn
  - strive together cooperatively for goal attaining?
- How much do students spontaneously use their NL in cross-border contacts?
- How do students reflect through forums on their own cross-border contacts experiences and NL learning?
- How should cross-border face-to-face meetings be shaped to become an efficacious context for assessing real students' communicative competence and intercultural awareness?

This first cycle of AR was carried out between April and June 2012 and went throughout three stages which were planned, acted, observed, reflected and finally re-

---

10  Very interesting the research reported by O'Dowd in this article investigating intercultural learning in a Spanish-English e-mail exchange
11  SCMS, synchronous computer-mediated communication, or Instant messaging (IM) commonly referred to as *chat.*

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 24 · 2014 · 2

Moira Irina CAVAION: TESTING FEASIBILITY OF CROSS BORDER CONTACTS WITHIN PRIMARY NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES CLASSROOM, 277–292

*Table 1. Research design for Action Research (AR) "Teaching and learning neighbouring languages through cross--border contacts" following Kemmins and McTaggert's AR model- Cavaion 2012*
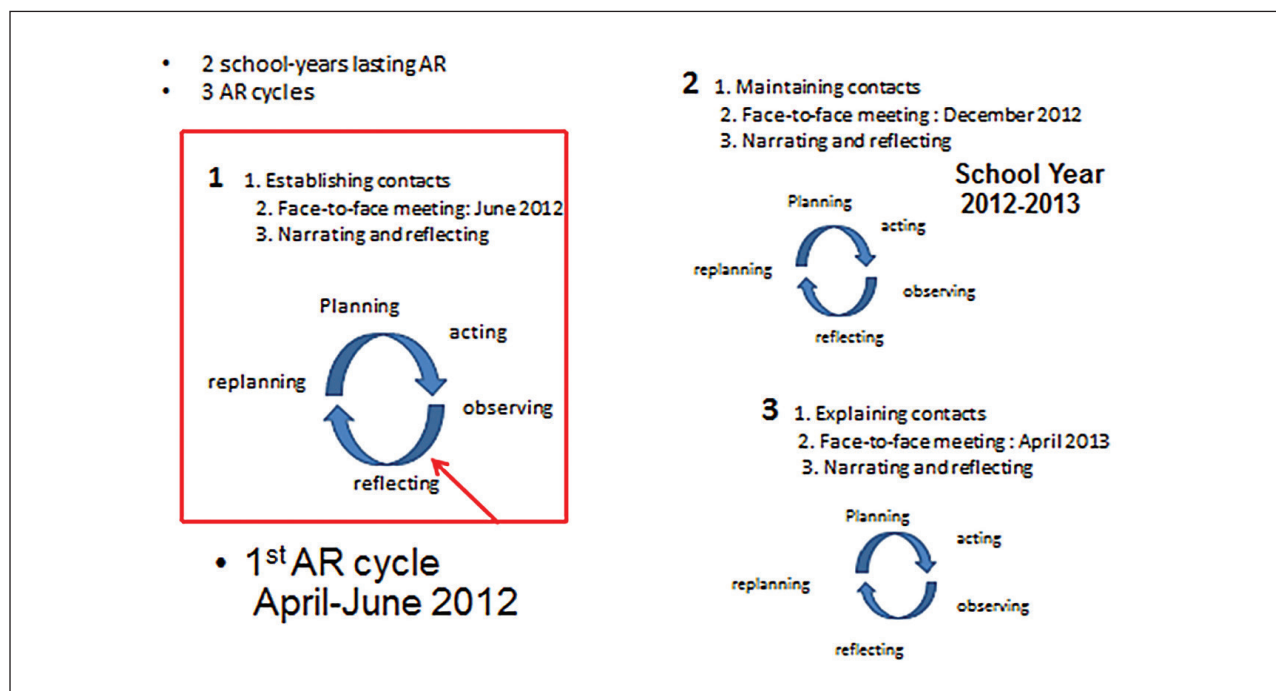


planned by the researcher and the other participating teachers (Kemmins and McTaggert 1990).

The actions in classrooms lasted five weeks for the Italian school and six weeks for the Slovenian pupils for the reason that the Italian school year ends before the Slovenian one. It must be said that the beginning of the study underwent an important delay due to ju-ridical problems which came up in the Italian school linked to a very strict legislation which limits the use of internet networking in school setting among under age children.

We started establishing contacts over the period of April - May 2012 through a first videoconference which tried 20 minutes and where pupils met and, in pairs, introduced themselves either in their language or in the NL. Immediately after, maintaining the same pairs, they were engaged in a chat session, trying to get as many information as possible about the pupils from the other school. After this virtual encounter free exchange of emails/Facebook messages [12] to maintain and foster con-tacts were asked to pupils. We also set up an e-Forum (e-Forum 1: *Contacts*[13]) on the project web site about to provoke reflections on realised contact (homework activity).

In the second stage (June 2012) we prepared pupils to the real encounter with the NL school which had the characteristic of being a thematic encounter on the wide topic of "Communication", either linguistic or non-verbal one. We chose this very general theme to get pupils reflecting about channels of communication and not naming directly diversity of languages which we thought could lead them easily to speak only about difficulties. We focused their attention on their own ex-pectations and feelings about the encounter and intro-ducing them a little on the activities they would be in-volved in. The encounter took place in the Italian low secondary school in Trieste. The classes encountered over a school morning and they were divided into mixed groups of 4-5 students each, engaged in diverse, interdisciplinary, multi-media, task-based coopera-tive activities. A particular attention has been given to grouping. We teachers and researcher decided to mix pupils of different level of linguistic and communica-tive skills. Pupils set up podcasts (recording Italian and Slovenian tongue twisters) and video clips, produced collaborative and creative writing and posters. A final full group session concluded the meeting with presen-tation of the materials produced by students.

In the last stage of the project we asked pupils to join another e-Forum (e-Forum 2: *Impressions*, homework activity for the Slovenian class) to narrate and reflect about the whole experience.

---

12  Facebook was not foreseen thought it resulted to be used by the majority of students
13  A web site of the experimental project was set up, called "Teaching (through) contacts". It was guested within the virtual web site of the Slovenian primary school. The web site is accessible only to participants, that is, teachers, students and ICT technician.

**ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 24 · 2014 · 2**

Moira Irina CAVAION: TESTING FEASIBILITY OF CROSS BORDER CONTACTS WITHIN PRIMARY NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES CLASSROOM, 277–292

## RESEARCH METHODS

The research is a qualitative study, specifically it is a cycle of a qualitative AR. Never the less some quantative data coming mostly from a questionnaire were analysed with descriptive statistics. The cycle we are going to present refers to the AR model developed by Kemmins and McTaggert (Kemmins and McTaggert 1990, see below, Table 1).

## PARTICIPANTS

The research involved a primary school class of the Municipality of Koper, Slovenia, having Italian language as a compulsory subject   and a first lower secondary school[14] class of the city of Trieste, in Italy, where teaching Slovene language is included in its school curriculum. Participants were:

- 24 pupils, aged14-years-old, from class year 8 of the Koper's school, and 22 pupils, aged 13-years-old, from class Year 2 of the lower secondary Trieste's school.
- the two specialised NL teachers of the involved classes
- other subjects' teachers: one arts' teacher, one geography's, history's, Italian's, one Italian school's support teacher for pupils with special needs ; one Slovenian school English teacher. These teachers were present during the face-to-face meeting in order to support the activities and tutoring pupils

A specification has to be made about the NL different knowledge level of the two classrooms. Slovenian students have been taught Italian language since the beginning of primary schools, with this school year representing the eighth year of their NL learning. Italian pupils took up Slovenian language just in Year class 1 of their lower secondary school, which means the year before the research started. This different level of language knowledge as we will report in the following paragraphs has determined some difficulties but did not hinder the planned activities.

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Considering the very diverse nature of activities we needed to try out – linguistic, metalinguistic, visual, audial, virtual and face-to-face activities – there was requested a wide range of techniques, both for collecting and for analysing data. The most of these techniques had and will have to be readapted for the purpose of the research since their context of origin is the tradi-

tional FL classroom[15]. We used the following techniques and procedures (which we report with the code label in brackets):

- 3  Observational grids: one for the video conference  (OB.videoconference1a,  1b),  one  for  the chat session (OB.chats1a,1b), one for students' individual observation during the face-to-face meeting (OB.face-to-face1a,1 b,1 c)
- 2 semi-structured interviews, one with the Slovenian  NL teacher (Int.Ma.1), one with the Italian NL teacher (Int.Chr.1)
- Document analysis of:
  - Chats (Chat1)
  - Writing texts produced within creative writing activities and poster activities
  - Forums (For.1.contacts, For.2.impressions)
  - Podcasts (Pod.1, Pod.2)
  - Video clips (Vid.1.kavarnica, Vid.2.igrišče)
- 1 questionnaire to students (Q.pupils1)
- Researcher's diary (Diary)
- minutes of the "AR reflection meetings" (ARmeeting1 and 2)
- mails (e-mails + initials of names)

Data were analysed through qualitative data analysis, mainly using the qualitative content analysis (Vogrinc 2008) and - with regards to dialogic texts like chats, or interviews – by means of Conversational Analysis (Peräkylä 2005) thematic analysis (Boyatris 1998) and chat analysis (Pasfield-Neofitou 2007) - paying attention to the possible differences linked to the multiple symbolic systems represented by the different languages and cultures included in the research. Never the less the research revealed the need to identify more specific analysis's techniques referring to multimedia materials which constituted the bulk of analysed documents (virtual video networking, video clips, podcasts, drawings). Descriptive statistics analysis was applied to some answers of the questionnaire delivered to pupils.

Triangulation of observers as well as multiplicity of data collection techniques and data sources sustained the research's "internal validity" of followed by *member check* (Merriam 2002). In fact, once each activity had been observed, field notes were sent to the teachers in order to be verified. These notes were sent back by the teachers via e-mails reporting their own reflections on the issues.

In summary the process was 'inductive' involving the moving backwards and forwards between data and analysis, and between data and every theory and concept developed, and between the data and other literary sources (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:297).

---

14  Thought the different label of schools, students are of the same age.
15  As a matter of fact, it happened that we devised an observational grid (OB.face-to-face1) inspired by two famous observational models, TALOS and COLT (in Nunan 1992 ) in foreign language methodology of research, which did not work.

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 24 · 2014 · 2

Moira Irina CAVAION: TESTING FEASIBILITY OF CROSS BORDER CONTACTS WITHIN PRIMARY NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES CLASSROOM, 277–292

## RESULTS

### Cross-border face-to-face and virtual meetings: logistical and technical sustainability.

This question is the key point which will enable us to sustain our idea's practical feasibility, since we are convinced that, any innovative proposals in school are really good even without experiences confirming they are possible in practice.

### Virtual Networking

In cross-border contacts based on NL teaching, a big bulk of teaching actions works throughout networking tools like: web conference, SCMC (chats), fora, emails. These tools are quite easy to use both for students and teachers, and they are absolutely accessible since they are all free of charge internet services. At the beginning, we were worried about the quality of virtual connection, in particular during videoconference, since we used a simple Skype video-call software, which was not well supported by literature reference reporting only about researches exploiting high quality level of technological video-conference tools (Kappas and Kraemer 2011, Oxford and Oxford 2009). Since the observational grids we used to record the event as well as interviews with teachers and the researcher's diary showed each technological problem occurred during video-call and chat session (Diary, 15 May; OB.videoconference.1.Ch/Ma),very good atmosphere that was created within a rather good software's resolution used in classroom context (Diary, Tues.15 May, e-mail Ir.- Ch., Ir.- Ma, 15 May). There were some negative events linked to the fact that not all PC in the Italian ICT room were operative. (OB.videoconference.1.Ch; Int.Chr.1, p.1,2; Diary, week 0, week1), orthographic problems regarding Italian pupils who were not acknowledged with orthographic switching method (OB.chats.1), Italian school was not "equipped" with software and microphones (Diary, week 0, week 1), pupils not accustomed to talk closely to microphones (OB.videoconference.1.Ma; OB.videoconference.1.Ch ), pupils not able/very slow to subscribe the school website and to set up an e-mail address (Diary, week o, week 1; e-mails Ir-Ma, Ir-Dz; Int.Chr.1,p.2)

Hence we can say that the real problems that occurred, linked to virtual networking, were Italian school technological equipment (PC working properly, microphones) but, more remarkable was the, pupils' unpreparedness (mostly Italian) to enrol virtual space, very much confirming warnings coming from literature to not overestimate the actual skills of digital natives (Oxford and Oxford 2009, O'Dowd 2003). No technological roadblocks occurred during virtual connections.

### Face-to-face meeting

The face-to-face meeting, long planned in details through intensive emails exchange with teachers, visit to the guest school, meetings with the guest school co-ordinator and preliminary talks to the head teachers at the very beginning of the project (Diary-meetings with head teachers) presented no logistical and technological problems. The rooms were identified in advanced within the Italian low secondary school big auditory in which 6 groups worked simultaneously without interference problems. There were three more available class-rooms with one teacher in each as supervisor. From the event's observational grid , the researcher's diary, from interviews with teachers and from the AR meeting report it appears that no practical problems were noticed by teachers (Int.Chr.1, p.1; Int.Ma.1, p.1; Diary 7 June), activities had no needs of any special place, classrooms were a good setting (Diary, 7 June; e-mail Ir.-Ch., Ir.-Ma. 7-10 June; AR.meeting1;), pupils, well equipped with technological tools (I-pods, video cameras, cameras), complied with the fact the Italian school is not enough technologically equipped (Diary, 7 June;). We can say that no logistical problems have characterised this very first time event and the potential problem regarding technological tools for recording video clips and pod-casts were solved by students' proactive self- organisation confirming what Prensky says about proactive behaviours of *digital natives* (Prensky 2010:10).

### Cross-border face-to-face and virtual meetings: organisational, financial, methodological feasibility

The classes participating to the research had no previous experiences of class exchanges or virtual networking (Diary: The schools, Meetings with head teachers, preliminary meetings with teachers). Virtual and face-to-face meeting were tested for the first time with these results:

*Organisation*
- need of parents' permission to record pupils in the virtual classroom: both schools (Diary18 April, e-mail Ir./Dz)
- special permission to use internet networks in the Italian schools (Diary 18 April, e-mail Ir./Dz)
- need to improve strategies as to form successful and effective groups (Int.Chr.1, p.8, Int.Ma.1, p.4, AR.meeting2)
- shortage of available time for running both videoconference and chat session (Int.Chr.1,Int.Ma.1, AR.meeting2)
- teachers previously planned work within the curriculum which did not allowed researcher's interventions in the classroom, that is, need to integrated contacts based teaching into the curriculum (Int.Ch.1p.1,3,4,5, Int.Ma.1,p.15, AR.meeting2, Diary week 6)

*Finance*
- need of financial support outside school budget for the Slovenian school in order to cover travel's

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 24 · 2014 · 2

Moira Irina CAVAION: TESTING FEASIBILITY OF CROSS BORDER CONTACTS WITHIN PRIMARY NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES CLASSROOM, 277–292

costs to Trieste (Diary: Meeting with head - teachers)[16]

*Methodological issues*

At this phase of the research we have only data related to the question whether the activities proposed for the research obliged teachers to change their teaching approach (asked in teachers' interviews) and few observations from thematic analysis of the same interviews (Int.an.Ma1/Int.anCh1) where we identified the topic "Teacher/students relationship/ teacher's teaching style, approach". Observations are also reported in the Diary where we describe some discussions we had with teachers about the proposal to do not oblige pupils to use one code rather than another (Diary 14 February, 5 March). As interviews confirm, teachers claimed that they did not have to change their teaching style, that is, the activities proposed met very well their usual way of teaching (Int.an.Ma1, Int.an.Ch1). The NL teacher from Slovenian school stressed very much the fact that the pupils, within the period they participated to the research, were positively different, she perceived that if a different teaching style "happens" it will be due to pupils' higher engagement (Int.Ma.1, p.6). Actually, in our interviews' thematic analysis we noticed different ways of relating to pupils on the behalf of the two teachers, one more exhortative – Slovenian school NL teacher - and one more direct and executive – the Italian school NL teacher - which actually does not meet the constructivist foundations of this research. But the so far findings tell us that a process of change is in progress, both in pupils - more motivated (Int.Ma.1; Diary, 15 May, 7 June; Q.pupils1, ARmeeting2) – and teachers who noticed some positive changes in attitude towards the project (question "How do you feel within the research?". Int.an.Ma1/Ch1) and who started to reflect on how to integrate face-to-face activities within the "traditional" classroom activities (see paragraph about networking and face-to-face activities). It is interesting that teachers rather speak about lacks in NL curriculum which do not allow them to develop meaningful activities (Int.Ma.1, p.7). Relationship between contacts and NL curriculum will be investigated in the next stages of the AR.

### Teachers' extra-work sustainability

Another aspect of this approach is the proposed methodology's real sustainability in terms of teachers' increased amount of work. In this initial phase of the research we had to do with highly motivated teachers who were willing to cooperate as they saw the potential benefits of the approach (Int.Ma.1, p.2,4,6,9,11,14,15/ Ch.1, p.8). Never the less, if we had to involve more schools to adopt our proposal in the future, it would be advisable to provide the amount of job teachers are

asked to do. For this reason we asked teachers to keep a detailed record of the time spent on the preparation of activities, meetings *et al*. We also recorded some observations about relationships development within the research among cooperating teachers (Diary 5 July). At the end of this first stage teachers declared about 30 hours of extra work spent between February and June (Ma. grid1, Chr.grid1) but as discussed in the final AR meeting (ARmeeting2) a great amount of time was spent at the very beginning in order to prepare communication for the families and the presentation for the school. In this phase intense e-mail communication (about 100 e-mails) run mainly between the researcher and the Slovenian teacher (e-mails Ir-Ma December 2011-July 2012). No meaningful contacts occurred between NL teachers due to lack of a real encounter at the beginning of the project.

### Making Networking and face-to-face meeting activities effective

In order to be effective from a didactic viewpoint, and following social psychology literature about effective contacts (Allport 1954, Pettigrew 1998, see theoretical framework) our activities in this phase of the research had to meet the following conditions:

- to make pupils associate a positive feeling with the experience of encounter
- increase the use of the language they learn
- make them to strive together cooperatively for goal attaining.
- Through multiple data collection - questionnaire to pupils, Diary, interviews to teachers, the AR meeting - we came to the following midterm considerations.

The most effective activities – taking into account pupils' engagement and amusement, their linguistic behaviour and the level of spontaneous cooperation - appeared to be the recording of "*tongue twisters*" activity (podcast1 and 2) and the role-plays' video recording (Vi.1.kavarnica; Vi.2.igrišče) which allowed pupils "to become more friends" (Q.pupils1) and to reflect about sounds of languages which they had no opportunities to play with, even in their own language ("I have never learned an Italian tongue twister at school, it is really funny!", is an answer given by an Italian pupil in pupils' questionnaire). Amusement and engagement as well as positive feeling were confirmed by pupils' comments on networking activities (Diary 15 May) with 39 out of 44 pupils who were very satisfied and who felt nice, at ease, absolutely relaxed during videoconference and chats. From the questionnaire (Q.pupils1) we know that face-to-face meeting was judged positively/very positively by 89,8% of participating students and pupils left

---

<?> The Italian school can so far rely on financial support within the budget foreseen by the national law about minority languages protection. (Legge n. 142, 15/12/ 1999, "Norme in materia di tutela delle minoranze linguistiche storiche").

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 24 · 2014 · 2

Moira Irina CAVAION: TESTING FEASIBILITY OF CROSS BORDER CONTACTS WITHIN PRIMARY NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES CLASSROOM, 277–292

school with a good/very good feeling about it (85,3% of pupils). Encountering "others" was described as positive/very positive experience for the majority of pupils (87, 8%), where 17 pupils who expressed very positive comments found the encounter "super, wonderful, very nice, highly educative, very amusing, perfect". The use of language had been a surprise for teachers who were quite suspicious about the possibility their pupils could spontaneously choose to speak their respective NL. On the contrary, in all the proposed activities the NL was very frequently used that is, almost every student made some use of his/her respective NL (see next paragraph). In podcasts and role-plays pupils collaborated spontaneously and found out the way to communicate and attained the goal of making the things going (In.Ma.1, p.9,In.Chr.1,p.4, Diary 15 May, 7 June) despite the very different NL mastering level.

Less effective activities were posters, drawings and creative writings. The first two linked to the fact that in these kinds of activities talking can be avoided, pupils can work individually on the chart without communicating intentions, just "*spying on*" the neighbour's work (In.Chr.1, p4). Eventually pupils did not cooperate, nor enjoyed the work (In.Chr.1, p.4; In.Ma.1, p.4). Creative writing activity was misunderstood, as defined by teachers who also admitted it was an activity they did not usually use for their language teaching (In.Ma.1, p.5, ARmeeting2). This brought to a new research question an answer that is "how to integrate innovative practice within teachers' own teaching practice?" (Diary 5 July) which made us reflect about the fact that activities proposed during the face-to-face meetings must be already experienced in classroom. Among virtual networking activities both videoconference and chat sessions were very effective with the only problem concerning the lack of time. It was demonstrated that Chat sessions provided pupils with authentic communicative environment giving them some opportunities to expand their vocabulary (Wilson and Espejo 2009), triggering reflective learning (Thorne 2005, O'Dowd 2003), through peer-to-peer learning, as well as of intimate expression of emotions (see next paragraph) confirming what literature says abut intimacy in intergroup and intercultural computer mediated communication (Amichai-Hamburger and McKenna 2006, Thorne 2005) and inspiring the researcher with new research questions, that is "how much internet contacts improve sense of friendship within this research activities?", "how much contacts develop into friendship and how is this perceived as a possible positive factor for bettering NL learning?" , "how much contacts developed within this research continue out-of-school pupils lives?" (ARmeeting2). Fora were the only completely unsuccessful activity proposed with practically no pupils enrolling them. Special reflections were dedicated to this problem in the AR final meeting and it also represented a new research question for the next stage of the research, which is: "How to engage pupils in fora

without giving this task as compulsory?" (Diary, 5 July, ARmeeting2).

In the last AR meeting another key aspect was identified in order to ensure the activities' success that is, the attentive grouping made according to pupils' personal aptitudes and interests toward the proposed activities instead of grouping them like simply mingling skilled pupils with those less skilled, as we did for this face-to-face meeting (ARmeeting2).

## Students' language choice and interaction in cross-border contacts

"How will pupils interact?" was the big question and challenge the we, teachers and researcher, were not able to answer, nor even to imagine it at the beginning of the research, as no previous similar experiences were reported in literature and teachers themselves had no experience involving contacts with teenagers learning each one the language of the other. The choice of the language to be used during contacts was somehow free, as agreed at the beginning of the research (Diary/ Book/ Journal: preliminary meetings with teachers) in the form that we encouraged pupils to feel confident using their NL but if they did not use it, nothing would happen. We also agreed not to take into account English as a possible alternative communication channel. When very few pupils - one from the Italian school, surprisingly very good at Slovenian language, and few from the Slovenian school – asked to be allowed to use English, we just tried once again to encourage the use of NL, but we practically did not deny the use of any code. It was following the researcher's conviction, and which at the beginning sounded like an imposition but as time passed, it became a shared opinion among teachers and researcher (Diary) - that in multilingual learning setting rhetorical restrictions on code choice cannot replace communication's authenticity.

We had the opportunity to observe and collect data about pupils' interethnic communication mainly in two occasions – during the videoconference and during the chat session. During the face-to-face meeting a lot of informal observations were reported (Diary 7 June) but data collection wasn't carried out because teachers were unable to fill in the available observational grid, being them already engaged in supporting pupils in their activities. Never the less we asked pupils in the questionnaire to report about their use of language delivered during the face-to-face meeting session (Q.pupils1, Q.4) which may be indicative of their language behaviour. During the face-to-face activities pupils reported their quite equal use of the languages: NL (26,8%), L1 (26,8%) and a mixture of L1 and NL (29,3%). We found some correspondences between what they answered in the questionnaire and what was observed informally (In. Ma.1, p.13; Diary 7 June).

Language authenticity code choice characterises, as matter of fact the video clips pupils set up in which, for

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 24 · 2014 · 2

Moira Irina CAVAION: TESTING FEASIBILITY OF CROSS BORDER CONTACTS WITHIN PRIMARY NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES CLASSROOM, 277–292

*Table 2: Examples of peer-to-peer learning during chat communication*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Excerpt from chat room 11; four girls chatting, two from the Italian school (G. and A.), two from the Slovenian school (T. and F.) | | |
| Slovenian girl (SLO)10:11 T: come stai? | [how are you?] | |
| Italian girl (ITA)10:12 G: Dobro in ti? | [fine, and you?] | |
| (SLO)10:12 T: DOBRO | [FINE] | |
| (ITA) 10:13 G.: in F.? | [and F.? ((referring to the other Slovenian girl))] | |
| (SLO)10:13 T.: je tukaj z mano | [she's here with me] | |
| (SLO)10:13 T.: in tudi ona je dobro | [she's also fine] | |
| (ITA) 10:14 G.: ?? o.o | [??o.o , ((request for explanation))] | |
| (SLO)10:14 T: anche lei sta bene | [she's also fine ((translation into Italian))] | |
| (ITA) 10:14 G.: je tukaj z mano? | [she's here with me?] | |
| (ITA) 10:14 G.: cosa significa? | [what does it mean?] | |
| (SLO)10:14 T.: lei sta qui con me | [she's here with me ((translation into Italian))] | |
| (ITA)10:15 **Giorgia: aaaaa.... A. je tukaj z mano! ^_^ [aaaa…A. ((the other girl)) she's here with me!** ((use of the new language))] | | |
| (SLO)10:15 T.: ok | [ok] | |

example, they devised situations where they maintained their linguistic identities playing the role of speakers in multilingual setting (a conversation in a bar, an arrangement for going to cinema, Vid.1.kavarnica, Vid.2.igrišče). As said before, teachers were very surprised by the fact that pupils decided on their own to use their respective NL both in videoconference and chats. All the pupils presented themselves in NL in videoconference thought the instruction were: "Find your way, either in Italian or Slovene language, to introduce yourself to a boy/girl you have never met before but who you are going to meet soon. One-minute presentation". During the chat session NL were used as main means of communication in six out of the nine valid chats we analysed (chat room n.1, 2, 4, 9, 10, 11). 92 out of 142 utterances were in NL, use of English was limited to frequent "OK", uttered above all by Italian students, and mixed code communication exchanges were also very rare (chat 8). Analysing "e-Turns" and feature of "Communicative Activity" we were able to analyse the turns distribution (Pasfield-Neofitou 2007) that is, we could notice whether in the interethnic encounter representatives of one group were predominant on the others, due also to the condition that a group (Slovenian pupils) was more proficient in NL than the other one (Italian pupils). Surprisingly 7 out of 9 valid chat rooms were characterised by an even distribution of labour, only two chats were led by Slovenian pupils. During the chats we also observed possible meaningful peer learning situations (we report below an excerpt, Table 2) as extraordinary examples of peer to peer learning through ICT tools. These confirming literature findings reported in the paragraph *Network-based language teaching in* NL classroom of this paper claiming for quality of learning through ICT tools.

## Making pupils' reflect

Sadly, no results came out from pupils' reflections about the experience regarding this first stage of the research as pupils did not enrol the proposed e-fora. Fora were the only way we had to get pupils' comments, due to delayed beginning of project, we had no opportunities to enter in the classes after the face-to-face meeting of the 7 June for group interviews or focus groups. We expect e-forum to be an appealing tool itself for making pupils participate to discussions. New ways have to be developed for this important aspect.

## Cross-border face-to-face meetings as context of a language learning assessment

Actually, Cross-border face-to-face meetings as context of a language learning assessment is a big question, not exhaustively answered within this cycle which in any case represents the very first step of this innovative investigation. In fact, educational settings, providing pupils with real contacts with target language native speakers, never before have been subject of studies. Here we are wondering if face-to-face meetings - beyond representing opportunities of positive interethnic encounters and authentic language usage - could also be a context for assessing pupils communicative and intercultural competences which hardly are assessable in a classroom context (Balboni 2002), in order to answer the research question "How should cross-border face-to-face meetings be shaped to become an efficacious context for assessing real students' communicative competence and intercultural awareness?".

The most significant answers we got are those expressed by teachers in interviews (Int.an.Ch1/Ma1) who

**ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 24 · 2014 · 2**

Moira Irina CAVAION: TESTING FEASIBILITY OF CROSS BORDER CONTACTS WITHIN PRIMARY NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES CLASSROOM, 277–292

identified motivation, fluency during performances, spontaneous use of the language, participation, desire to communicate as subjects of new investigation, bringing more specific research questions, that are "How can we observe and assess fluency during role plays and podcasting activities?", "How can we assess a wish to communicate during face-to-face activities?, "How can we observe and report pupils' spontaneous use of the language during the face-to-face activities?". The Observational grid devised for the face-to- face meeting, addressed to pupils' was not at all effective due to the high engagement of teachers in organisational matters.

CONCLUSION

With this research we wanted to investigate practical feasibility as well as methodological implications of introducing cross border contacts into the primary NL classroom of mainstream schools situated along Slovenian-Italian littoral border area. It has been also described an embryonic investigation regarding pupils' language behaviour in instructional multilingual learning context. This study is actually the beginning of a research which will continue during next school year, answering questions more oriented towards the role of cross border friendship development in the NLs learning, contacts' influence on pupils' integrative motivation, implications of contacts based on language learning and teaching for the NL curricula.

Results of this short study bring evidence of practical feasibility of introducing contacts into the traditional NL teaching. No insuperable problems hampered the planned actions, neither the organisational ones – sustained actually by very motivated teachers who have been also engaged in organisational aspects of the research - nor the technological ones. In fact, although the schools do not meet the level of technological equipment they should have, pupils compensated it by putting at the disposal their own technological devices. This extraordinary behaviour what Prensky would call proactive self- organisation of *digital natives* (Prensky 2010:10) is not actually confirmed when some basic ICT skills are requested in order to take part in activities of the web-site project (difficulties to enrol the website project, total "mutiny" of the e-forum).

Methodological issues are still at the beginning of investigation with some data contrasting teachers' own perception that the proposed approach doesn't require any changes in their own teaching style (see examples reported of students' different behaviour, activities which are not carried out in everyday NL lessons like creative writing activities, tongue twisters, teachers' attitudes and expectations towards pupils' own use of target language ). We retain that a process of change has been triggered both in teachers and pupils, and we dare to think that actually the proposed contact based approach will oblige teachers, in the future actions, to review first of all their capability to meet pupils' diverse, multimodal learning style and their prejudicial thoughts about pupils' language behaviours.

Afterwards we identified characteristics of what we defined "effective activities" for cross border virtual and live encounters in terms of pupils participation and amusement, increased use of NL and level of cooperation, being these characteristics inspired by social psychology theories like Intergroup Contact Hypothesis – Allport 1954, Pettigrew 1998 - and studies on intergroup/cross-race friendships - Liebkind and McAlister 1999, McGlothlin and Killen 2010, Turner & Feddes 2011. During face-to-face meeting multimedia activities (video clips and podcasts) beat both traditional and non-traditional activities - like posters, drawings and creative writing. Internet networking activities confirmed their powerful role within writing intercultural communication exchanges, as early described by field literature.

Spontaneous use of NL by the pupils taking part in project's virtual and face-to-face activities has been analysed, demonstrating in majority of pupils a spontaneous interest to use their respective NL. The study also confirmed the exploited language analysis tools appropriateness providing us with important insights which might inspire future activities conceiving pupils' language choice. Effective observation of pupils' live extemporary speech has not been possible due to teachers and researcher over engaged in organisational matters.

Finally, some initial reflections about how cross-border contacts could be exploited for new ways of assessing pupils' language learning were gathered, which inspired new specific research questions.

A quite important data is missing in this phase, that is the pupils' reflections which were supposed to be collected from pupils' participation to e-fora but it did not happen. Somehow, this fact undermines the proper data collection triangulation, although we did have some data regarding pupils which were collected by means of questionnaires and observations. At this proposal we found out that the foreseen data collection and data analysis techniques were almost appropriated (with one observational grid completely useless). There is definitely a need of further investigations and above all within the field of visual ethnography (Harper 2005).

**ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 24 · 2014 · 2**

Moira Irina CAVAION: TESTING FEASIBILITY OF CROSS BORDER CONTACTS WITHIN PRIMARY NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES CLASSROOM, 277–292

# IZVEDLJIVOST ČEZMEJNEGA POVEZOVANJA PRI POUČEVANJU SOSEDSKEGA JEZIKA V OSNOVNIH ŠOLAH

*Moira Irina CAVAION*
Univerza na Primorskem, Pedagoška fakulteta Cankarjeva 5, 6000 Koper, Slovenija
e-mail: irinacavaion@hotmail.com

*POVZETEK*

*Sosedski jeziki so jeziki, ki se uporabljajo v obmejnem prostoru in vključujejo skupine ljudi, ki predstavljajo manjšinski narodnostni delež glede na večinski narod državnega teritorija. Kljub temu so pomemben člen jezikovne in kulturne različnosti specifične družbe; različnosti, ki jo evropska jezikovna politika zelo upošteva, saj je v zadnjih dvajsetih letih oblikovala veliko pomembnih zakonov, ki predstavljajo osnove za njeno zaščito. Vendar se politika ohranjanja jezika ne srečuje vedno s potrebami mladih govorcev, ki ne kažejo dovolj zanimanja, da bi se jezikov soseda naučili in niti, da bi jih posledično uporabljali. Raziskave na področju učenja / poučevanja sosedskega jezika potrjujejo, da med učenci slovenskih osnovnih šol v Slovenski Istri upada raven znanja italijanskega jezika in da je premajhno zanimanje šoloobveznih otrok za slovenski jezik v Italiji, kjer se pouk tega jezika šele uvaja v obliki poskusnih šolskih programov.*

*Pričujoča raziskava dokazuje, da je bistvena prednost poučevanja obmejnih ali sosedskih jezikov (J2) motivacija za učenje, ki postane učinkovitejše v neposrednem stiku med obema jezikovnima skupinama. Ta možnost je bila v modelih obmejnega šolstva do zdaj premalo izkoriščena.*

*Pri raziskavi sta sodelovala dva razreda dveh osnovnih šol v Trstu in v Kopru, v katerih je sosedski jezik (slovenščina in italijanščina) v kurikulu. V času poteka raziskave so se učenci najprej povezali na internetu (virtualna srečanja, klepetalnice ter video-konference) nato pa še v živih srečanjih.*

*Med raziskavo sta bili preizkušeni tako izvedljivost predlaganega učenja in poučevanja sosedskega jezika, kot tudi učinkovitost izdelanih didaktičnih pripomočkov ter inštrumentov spremljanja.*

*Raziskava je dokazala izvedljivost uvajanja čezmejnih povezovanj v tradicionalno poučevanje sosedskega jezika. Pokazala je, kateri izdelani in uporabljeni pripomočki delujejo bolje od drugih, so torej v procesu učenja učinkovotej-ši. Živi in virtualni stiki so povzročili tudi zelo pozitivne odzive, tako pri učencih, kot tudi pri učiteljih. Predvsem pa so pokazali precejšnje zanimanje mladih (učencev obeh razredov) za medsebojno komuniciranje v sosedskem jeziku.*

**Ključne besede:** učenje in poučevanje sosedskega jezika, osnovne šole večinskega naroda, čezmejno povezovanje, Koper-Trst

**ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 24 · 2014 · 2**

Moira Irina CAVAION: TESTING FEASIBILITY OF CROSS BORDER CONTACTS WITHIN PRIMARY NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES CLASSROOM, 277–292

## REFERENCES

**Allport, G.(1954):** The Nature of Prejudice. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.

**Amichai-Hamburger, Y., McKenna, K. Y. A. (2006):** The contact hypothesis reconsidered: interacting via the internet. Journal of Computer-mediated communication 11/3. http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol11/issue3/amichai-hamburger.html

**Arnold, J.(Ed.)(1999):** Affect in Language Learning. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Balboni, P. (2002):** Le lingue di Babele. Torino: UTET.

**Belz, J. (2003):** From the special issue. Language Learning & Technology. 7/2. 2-5

**Bennett, M. J. (1993):** Towards Ethnorelativism: a Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity.In: Paige M. (Ed.) Education for the intercultural experience. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press. 21-71.

**Berndt, T. J. (1996):** Exploring the effects of friendship quality on social development. In: Bukowski, W. M., Newcomb, A. F., Hartup, W. W. (Eds.): The company they keep: Friendship in childhood and adolescence. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 346–365.

**Berndt, T., Ladd, G. W. (1989):** Peer relationships in child development. New York: Wiley & Sons.

**Boyatriz, R. E. (1998):** Transforming qualitative information: thematic analysis and code development. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

**Byram, M.(1997):** Teaching and assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

**Byram, M., Morgan, C. (Eds.) (1994):** Teaching-and-learning-language-and-culture. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

**Brezigar, B. (2003):** Le lingue meno diffuse nella scuola in Europa.In: Schiavi Fachin, S. (Ed ) : L'educazione plurilingue: dalla ricerca di base alla pratica didattica. Udine: Editrice Universitaria Udinese. 47-58.

**Brown, R., Hewstone, M. (2005):** An integrative theory of intergroup contact. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology. 37/5. 255-343.

**Bufon, M. (1998):** Le regioni transfrontaliere nel processo di unificazione europea. In Bonavero, P.,Dansero, E. (Eds): L'europa delle regioni e delle reti: I modelli di organizzazione territoriale nello spazio unificato europeo. Torino: UTET. 126-153

**Bukowski, W. M.,Hoza, B. (1989):** Popularity and friendship: Issues in theory, measurement, and outcome. In: Berndt, T., Ladd, G. W. (Eds.): Peer relationships in child development. New York: Wiley. 15–45.

**Bukowsky, W. M., Newcomb, A. F., Hartup, W. W.(1996):** The company they keep: firendship in childhood and adolescence. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

**Canale, M., Swain, M. (1980):** Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing. Applied Linguistics I/1.1-47.

**Candlin, C. N. (Ed.) (1981):** The Communicative Teaching of English. Principles and an Exercise Typology. London: Longman.

**Cavaion, M. I. (2011):** Virtual contacts in the net-generation neighbouring language classroom: principles, tools, and possible applications, non-published paper written within the course Sodobna spoznanja in izzivi edukacijskih ved, 2011-2012, Prof. A. Isteni**č Starčič**, Pedagoška fakulteta, Koper

**Cavaion, M. I. (2012):** Presence, role and value of cross border contacts and meaningful relationships development in neighbouring language classroom. The case of mainstream primary schools of the Littoral zone of Slovenian-Italian border. Paper presented at 13th ICLASP Conference, Leeuwarden, 20-23 June 2012

**Cooke-Plagwitz, J. (2009):** New directions in CALL: an objective introduction to Second Life. CALICO Journal. 25/3. 547-557

**Čok, L. (Ed) (2006):** Bližina drugosti. The close otherness. Koper: Založba Annales.

**Čok, L.(2003):** Cultures and languages of the Environment. The role of the Minority language in Slovene Education Policy. In: Schiavi Fachin, S.(Ed): L'educazione plurilingue: dalla ricerca di base alla pratica didattica. Udine: Editrice Universitaria Udinese. 59-69.

**Čok, L. (Ed) (2009):** Izobraževanje za dvojezičnost v kontekstu evropskih integracijskih procesov. Koper: Založba Annales.

**Čok, L. (2008):** The human coexistence underpinned by languages and cultures. ***Šolsko*** Polje 19/5-6. 91-106.

**De Mauro, T. (1998):** Storia linguistica dell'Italia unita. Roma, Bari: Editori Laterza.

**Dörnyei, Z. (Ed.) (2003):** Attitudes, orientations, and motivations in language learning : advances in theory, research, and applications. Oxford: Blackwell.

**Dörnyei, Z. (2001):** Teaching and researching motivation. Edinburg Gate, Harlow: Longman.

**Eller, A., Abrams, D. (2004):** Come together: longitudinal comparisons of Pettigrew's reformulated intergroup contact model and the common ingroup identity model in Anglo-French and Mexican-American contexts. European Journal of Social Psychology. 34/3. **229–256**

**European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages**, CETF No: 148. Strasbourg. 5/11/1992 Council of Europe.

**Fishman, J.a A. ( 1991):** Reversing Language Shift. Clevedon ,England: Multilingual Matters

**Furlan, M.(2002):** Bilingualism through the eyes of monolinguals and bilinguals. Attitudes of adolescents from Slovenia and Italy. Koper: Annales Ser. hist. Sociol. 12/2. 437- 444.

**Gardner, H. (1983):** Frames of Mind. New York: Basic Books.

**Gardner, H. (1993):** Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice. New York: Basic Books.

**Gardner, H. (2008):** Five minds for the future. Boston: Harvard Business Press.

**ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 24 · 2014 · 2**

Moira Irina CAVAION: TESTING FEASIBILITY OF CROSS BORDER CONTACTS WITHIN PRIMARY NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES CLASSROOM, 277–292

**Gardner, R. C., Lambert, W. E. (1972):** Attitudes and motivation in second language learning. Rowley: Newbury House Publishers, Inc.

**Gardner, R. C. (1985):** Social psychology and second language learning. London: Edward Arnold.

**Halink, R., Raasch, A., Schmitz-Schwamborn, G. (2003):** Neighbouring languages in border regions. Graz. European Center for Modern Languages.

**Harper, D. (2005):** What's new visually?In: Denzin, N. K., Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.) The Sage handbook of qualitative research, third edition. Thousands Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

**Hitchcock, G., Hughes, D. (1995):** Research and the Teacher. London: Routledge.

**Italian. The Italian language in education in Slovenia (2012)**. Regional Dossiers series. Mercator, European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning.

**Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., Holubec, E. J. (1994):** Cooperative learning in the classroom. Alexandria Va: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

**Kappas, A., Kraemer, N. C. (2011):** Face-to-face communication over internet. Emotions in a Web of culture, language and technology. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

**Kaučič-Baša, M. (1997): Where do Slovenes speak Slovene and to whom?** Minority language choice in a transactional setting. International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 124, 51-73

**Kaučič-Baša,M.(2004):** Ohranjanje slovenščine pri Slovencih na Tržaškem in Goriškem: Nekaj elementov za tezo o vzrokih opuščanja manjšinskih jezikov. Sloven**ščina** v šoli. 9/3. 12-29

**Kelly, G. A. (1963):** A theory of personality: the psychology of personal constructs. New York: Norton.

**Kemmis, S., Mc Taggart, R.(Eds.)(1990):** The action research planner. Geelong: Deakin University Press.

**Kramsch, C. (2010):** The multilingual subject. Oxford: Oxford University Press

**Krashen, S. D. (1985):** The input hypothesis: Issues and implications. New York, Longman.

**Krashen, S. D., Terrell, T. D. (1983):** The natural approach: Language acquisition in the classroom. London: Prentice Hall Europe.

**Ladd, G. W. (1999):** Peer relationships and social competence during early and middle childhood. Annual review of Psychology 50. 333-359.

**Levy, S.R., Killen, M. (Eds)(2008):** Intergroup attitudes and relations in childhood through adulthood. New York: Oxford University Press.

**Liebkind, K.,McAlister, A. L. (1999):** Extended contact through peer modeling to promote tolerance in Finland. European Journal of Social Psychology. 29: 765–780

**Littlewood, W. (1981):** Communicative Language Teaching: an introduction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**McCourt , C. A. (2009):**Pragmatic variation among learners of French in real-time chat communication. In: Oxford, R., Oxford, J.(Eds): Second language teaching and learning in the net generation. University of Hawai'i at Manoa: National Foreign Language resource Center.

**Merriam, S. (2002):** Qualitative research in practice. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

**McGlothlin, H.,Killen, M. (2010):** How social experience is related to children's intergroup attitudes. European Journal of Social Psychology. 40: 625–634

**Mikolič, V. (2004):** Jezik v zrcalu kultur. Jezikovna sporazumevalna zmožnost in (med) etična ozaveščnost v slovenski istri. Koper: Založba Annales.

**Mikolič, V. (2005):** Language diversity and Preservation in the Slovene-Italian Cross-Border Area. Paper presented at Second Linguapax Asia International Symposium: Language in Society and the Classroom. Preserving Heritage and Supporting Diversity, Tokjo 11/06/2005

**Norme in materia di tutela delle minoranze linguistiche storiche**, Legge 15 Dicembre 1999, n.482, gazzetta Ufficiale n.297 del 20 dicembre 1999.

**Nunan, D. (1992):** Research methods in language learning. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**O'Dowd, R. (2003):** Understanding the other side : the intercultural learning in a Spanish-English e-mail exchange. Language Learning & Technology 7/2. 118-144.

**Oxford, R., Oxford, J.(Eds.) (2009):** Second Language Teaching and Learning in the Net Generation. University of Hawai'i at Manoa: National Foreign Language resource Center.

**Pasfield-Neofitou, S. (2007):** Intercultural internet chat and language learning: a socio-cultural theory perspective. Learning and socio-cultural theory: exploring modern Vygotskian perspectives international workshop 1/1. Article 10.

**Peräkylä, A.(2005)**: Analyzing talk and text. Denzin, Norman K., Lincoln, Yvonna S. (eds.) The Sage handbook of qualitative research, third edition. Thousands Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

**Pettigrew, T. (1998):** Intergroup contact theory. Annual Review of Psychology 49. 65-85.

**Prabhu, N. (1990):** There is no best-method, why?. TESOL Quarterly 24/2. 161-176.

**Prensky, M. (2001):** Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants, part II: Do they really think differently? On the Horizon 9/6. 1-6

**Prensky, M.(2010):** Teaching digital natives: partnering for real learning. Corwin: SAGE Company.

**Rheinhardt, J., Thorne, S. (2007):** SCMC, Blogs, & Wikis: a manual for professional teacher development. Pennsylvania State University: CALPER, Centre for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research.

**Richards, J.C., Rodgers T.S. (2001):** Approaches and methods in language teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Schumann, J. H. (1997):** The neurobiology of affect in language. Malden, Oxford: Bleckwell.

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 24 · 2014 · 2

Moira Irina CAVAION: TESTING FEASIBILITY OF CROSS BORDER CONTACTS WITHIN PRIMARY NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES CLASSROOM, 277–292

**Serena, O. (2003):** La tutela e la valorizzazione della lingua ladino-friulana. I riferimenti normativi. In: Schiavi Fachin, S. (Ed): L'educazione plurilingue: dalla ricerca di base alla pratica didattica. Udine: Editrice Universitaria Udinese. 83-96.

**Slavin, R. (1995):** Cooperative learning: theory, research, and practice. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

**Slovene. The Slovene language in education in Italy (2nd Ed.)(2004)**. Regional dossiers series. Mercator, European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning.

**Stevick, E. W. (1990):** Humanism in language teaching: A critical perspective. **Oxford: Oxford University Press.**

**Swan, M. (1985):** A critical look at the communicative approach. ELTJournal 39/1. 2–12.

**Thomason, S. G. (1997):** Contact languages : a wider perspective. Amsterdam. Benjamins.

**Thorne, S. L. (2005):** Internet-Mediated Intercultural Foreign Language Education: approaches, Pedagogy, and Research. Pennsylvania State University: CALPER.

**Thorne, S. L., Black R. W. (2007):** New Media Literacies, online Gaming, and Language education. CALPER Working paper series No. 8

**Tropp, L. R., Prenovost, M. A. (2008):** The role of intergroup contact in predicting children's inter-ethnic attitudes: Evidence from meta-analytic and field studies. In: Levy, S. R., Killen, M.(Eds)(2008): Intergroup attitudes and relations in childhood through adulthood. New York: Oxford University Press. 236–248

**Turner, R. N. and Feddes, A. R. (2011):** How intergroup friendship works: A longitudinal study of friendship effects on outgroup attitudes. European Journal of Social Psychology. 41: 914–923.

**Vygotsky, L. S. (1978):** Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

**Vogrinc, J. (2008):** Kvalitativno raziskovanje na pedagoškem področju. Ljubljana: Pedagoška Fakulteta.

**Warshauer, M., Kern, R. (2000):** Network-based language Teaching: concepts and practice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Weinrich, U. (1953):** Languages in contact: findings and problems. New York. Publications of the Linguistic Circle of New York.

**Wilson, V., Espejo, C. I. (2009):** The coalescence of Spanish language and culture through blogs and films. In: Oxford, R., Oxford, J.(Eds.): Second Language Teaching and Learning in the Net Generation. University of Hawai'i at Manoa: National Foreign Language resource Center. 127-139

**Wright, S.C., Brody, S. M., Aron, A. (2005):** Intergroup contact: Still our best hope for improving intergroup relations. Crandall Christian S., Schaller, Mark (Eds.): Social psychology of prejudice: Historical and contemporary issues. Lawrence, Kansas: Lewinian Press.119-146.