"Ti posso offrire un caffè?"
Implementing an out-of-class experience in a tertiary Italian programme

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Abstract

This paper describes the “Lingua e comunità” (Language and Community) project, implemented with intermediate students of Italian at Griffith University for the first time in 2000. As part of their course of study, the students were required to meet on a regular basis with members of the local Italian community to practise their conversational skills. The paper first provides an overview of similar out-of-class experiences, together with a discussion of the benefits that contact with native speakers outside class can have on students’ motivation, self-confidence and autonomy. This is followed by a description of the way in which the community component was integrated into the course structure, the type of preparation students did in class and the way their meetings with community members were conducted. Finally, a preliminary analysis of the outcomes is presented, with a particular emphasis on practical concerns, along with some proposed enhancements to the scheme for the future, derived from students’ and teachers’ responses.

1 Introduction

This paper describes the Lingua e comunità (Language and Community) project, implemented by the Italian team at Griffith University for the first time in 2000. This was part of a larger project involving all languages taught at the University, whose main objective was to improve students’ linguistic competence and cultural knowledge through out-of-class interaction with speakers of the various languages. As part of Lingua e comunità, intermediate students of Italian were asked to meet during the semester with volunteers from the Italian community in Brisbane to discuss various topics. These meetings, which were in addition to normal scheduled classes, usually took place in the sitting rooms or kitchens of the community members, starting with a friendly “Ti posso offrire un caffè?” (Would you like a coffee?) which has given this paper its title. This simple introduction helped students feel at ease in the new linguistic and sociocultural setting, and engaged them from the start in an important Italian ritual. This ice-breaker undoubtedly contributed to establishing a relaxed and informal atmosphere for the conversation that followed.

In this paper we provide a step-by-step account of the implementation of our project, with practical suggestions and guidelines based on our experience of integrating an out-of-class component into a university language course. After outlining the rationale behind the Lingua e comunità project, we examine other examples of out-of-class language learning, focusing on the pedagogical implications of this type of initiative. We discuss the objectives of our project in relation to the themes that emerged from the reports of other experiences, and then describe its various stages. These included:
planning; recruitment of volunteers; implementation, both inside and outside the classroom; and the integration of the community component into the course. Finally, we present the preliminary outcomes of our project, based on teachers’ and students’ perceptions. We conclude by outlining a number of issues arising from this first implementation and indicating how these could be dealt with in future.

2 Rationale behind *Lingua e comunità*

Tertiary students undertake language study for a wide variety of reasons, ranging from enhancement of career prospects to a search for personal fulfilment. Whatever the reason for engaging in this rewarding but challenging endeavour, one of the more common goals is to develop the skills required to use the target language for communication with speakers of that language. As teachers, we are faced with the challenge of helping students acquire these skills in the restricted environment of the classroom and at a considerable distance from the countries in which the languages are spoken, especially in the case of European languages. Advances in technology are rapidly increasing the possibility for students to have contact with speakers of the target languages, at least in a virtual setting, via email, chat rooms, discussion forums and computer-mediated audioconferencing or videoconferencing. Moreover, exchange programmes with universities around the world are encouraging students to complete part of their studies in-country. For many of our students, however – especially those who are less independent, confident and motivated – learning a foreign language is still confined to the university context, and is generally perceived as having no (or at least limited) direct practical application during their course of study. As a result, they may graduate in a foreign language without having ever interacted with native speakers outside the classroom, particularly in a real-life, face-to-face situation.

Our aims in incorporating an out-of-class component in the curriculum were to increase students’ exposure to the language and give them the opportunity to interact in Italian in an ‘authentic’ context. These aims are common to most projects of this kind.

3 Out-of-class learning

The out-of-class learning experiences that have been reported on in various studies can be divided into two broad groups:

- those in which students have contact with native speakers in study-abroad programmes, that is, while undertaking a language course in the country where the language is spoken; this is also known as an ‘in-country’ experience;
- those in which students interact with speakers of a target language in the students’ home country.

Both sets of experiences involve participation by language learners in tasks and activities performed outside the classroom environment. Typically, these out-of-class experiences take place in parallel with more formal classroom instruction. The pedagogical framework that defines how interactions with native speakers are organised and the types of tasks students undertake varies according to the objectives of the course, the students’ linguistic level and their needs. There are, however, several themes
in common, such as:

- a link between the classroom and the out-of-class experience, whereby students prepare in class for the out-of-class interaction and later use the classroom as a forum for discussion of their experience;
- the setting of tasks;
- a focus on the role of the learner and on learner autonomy;
- the consideration given to the students’ perception of the impact of the experience on their learning.

### 3.1 In-country learning experiences

Learning a language in the country in which it is spoken has been the subject of many studies (see for example Freed 1995). However, we found only a few recent reports on in-country language programmes that include out-of-class contact with native speakers. One of these is by Montgomery and Eisenstein (1985), who describe an experimental oral communication course designed for their Spanish students of English as a second language (ESL). Their rationale for integrating an out-of-class component into a grammar-based ESL course stemmed from the students’ need to have greater opportunities to communicate orally in English in various environments, along with the authors’ desire to meet the students’ needs by engaging them in “genuine communication that is contextually rich and meaningful to both speaker and hearer” (1985:318). The course included weekly structured field trips to a number of locations, such as banks, where students were required to ask a series of questions, in English, in order to obtain certain information. Some class time was dedicated to preparing students for the field trips and providing a forum for revising new language elements used, as well as discussing information gained from each trip. Not only did the students receive greater exposure to authentic language in ‘real’ contexts, but the authors found that this approach to integrating out-of-class learning maximised both “learner involvement and learner investment”, with students reporting “extremely positive attitudes” to this type of community-based experience (1985:331).

Learner autonomy is the focus of studies undertaken by Kenny (1993) and Walter (1998) in relation to an innovative experiential learning approach designed for Asian ESL learners in Thailand. These students were encouraged to explore and use resources in the local community and region in order to carry out individual research projects as part of their language course. In this approach, the classroom became an environment in which tasks were designed by the students rather than being set by the teachers, enabling the students to pursue their own “interest and meanings” (Kenny 1993:217). This process led students to assume the active and independent role of “investigative researchers” (Kenny 1993:218) who, as a result of going out into the community, “benefit from tremendously expanded resources and are no longer confined to the pages of a textbook, or the knowledge and experience of the teacher” (Walter 1998:63). The students then brought the work done out-of-class “back into the classroom as the curriculum content”, whereby the classroom represented a “safe environment in which to present and reflect on their experimentation together with their peers” (Walter 1998:63). In addition to encouraging autonomous learning, the programme also fostered “the development of communicative language use, self-confidence, … collaboration skills and cross-cultural understanding” (Walter 1998:65); skills that are difficult to measure quantitatively but have a considerable impact on the learning process.
Archangeli also found that, for beginner students studying abroad, interaction with native speakers had a positive effect on their self-confidence and willingness to use the target language (1999:115). The students concerned – Americans in Austria – were assigned the task, early in the language programme, of interviewing native speakers in formal and informal settings. Prior to conducting the interviews, they discussed in class the questions they could pose on various topics. They were also able to talk about their fears and inhibitions and share their language-learning frustrations, and they were comforted by the fact that their peers shared the same concerns (1999:117). After the interviews, the classroom provided the students with a forum for presenting the results of their interviews, reflecting on the experience and sharing strategies for overcoming problems, especially any lack of confidence or fear of making mistakes.

3.2 Community-learning experiences ‘at home’

Learning outside the classroom is not limited to study-abroad contexts. Target-language communities ‘at home’ are a precious resource that can be used for the same purposes. Language programmes can be organised to assist students to meet and interact directly with members of the target-language community and engage in activities similar to those performed in in-country settings. Such initiatives share many of the pedagogical concerns common to those run in-country. Several studies draw attention to the intercultural dimension that students are confronted with during this type of exposure. Ingram, for example, has been advocating for many years the central role that community involvement can play in language teaching. He highlights extra-mural, face-to-face, formal and informal activities with speakers in the target-language community as a way “to develop favourable cross-cultural attitudes” as well as supplementing other course components (1979:9).

Other attempts to ‘break down classroom walls’ and give students opportunities to practise a target language and be exposed to its culture – even if at a considerable distance from country or countries where it is the national language – have been examined by Leaver (1989) and by Eisenchlas and Hortiguera (1999). In both situations, students were matched with native speakers in the community as an integral part of their course, whether to converse informally on a number of topics prepared in class (Eisenchlas & Hortiguera) or to engage in activities that were “limited only by student imagination” (Leaver 1989:69). In Leaver’s study, students in the USA met with recently arrived Russian immigrants in order to assist them with problems of daily life and, for example, visit museums together or simply discuss items of mutual interest (1989:69). In both cases, as in the in-country programmes, the classroom became the ‘stage’ for rehearsal as well as a forum for discussion and debriefing, which often went beyond linguistic issues to cultural and social aspects of target language use.

Another use of the community as a resource for language learning and teaching is discussed by Rolin-Ianziti and Boucquey (1992), who involved their students in conducting a radio programme in French for a local ethnic radio station. The task required students to collect information by interviewing French speakers and then prepare the programme to be broadcast. In this type of task-based learning, the language-learning activity also provides a service for the community.
3.3 Objectives of Lingua e comunità

The way in which we used the target-language community in Lingua e comunità is similar to that described by Eisenchlas and Hortiguera (1999) and Leaver (1989). Our main objective, like theirs, was to give students the opportunity to practise their speaking skills outside the classroom in a real-life context, increasing their exposure to spoken language and allowing interaction in a linguistically and culturally ‘authentic’ context. We required them to contact and meet with members of the Italian community in Brisbane and perform activities similar to those rehearsed in class, but with the additional challenge of using the language in an unpredictable real-life situation.

Rather than expecting a remarkable improvement in the students’ language competence, we aimed primarily at increasing their confidence in using Italian, even at lower levels of proficiency, as did Archangeli (1999). We assumed that, in a face-to-face interaction with Italian speakers, the students would be required to put into practice, and further develop, their communication strategies. And that, in learning how to converse with community members, they would also acquire sociolinguistic aspects of language use, which bring learners to a new level of language competence (Nunan 1988). In class, through the use of authentic materials and student-centred communicative activities, we seek to help the students develop competence in oral communication. However, it is the interaction with target-language speakers in real-life contexts that promotes understanding and use of linguistic features that only occur in spontaneous conversation.

As an additional benefit, we expected our learners to become more autonomous in two respects: firstly, in organising their own learning – having to prepare for the meetings, reflect on the outcomes and report to the class – and secondly, in dealing with unpredictable linguistic and cultural elements during the encounters. We also thought that meeting Italians would give them first-hand knowledge of Italian mentalità (ways of thinking) and generate cultural insights. This in turn, we hoped, would engage their curiosity and develop a positive attitude towards Italy and its people. Ultimately, we assumed that the new out-of-class experience would provide an element of novelty to the Italian programme, and therefore stimulate interest and motivation towards language learning.

4 Stages of integration of the Lingua e comunità project

4.1 Planning: course changes and recruitment of volunteers

The Lingua e comunità project was integrated into an existing course entitled Spoken Italian. We considered this course the most suitable due to its strong emphasis on the development of aural and oral skills. It is offered in the second semester of second year, when students have usually completed three of our courses (one per semester) and reached a level of competence in the language sufficient to hold a basic conversation on general topics rehearsed in class.

In order to incorporate the new component, it was necessary to make some changes to the course structure. We reduced the weekly contact hours from two 2-hour workshops to one 2-hour workshop and one 1-hour tutorial, in order to allow students time for
meeting with the community members once a week for seven weeks, for one and a half hours each time.

As far as the content was concerned, many of the topics usually covered in this course were retained, while others were introduced for the first time. The set topics, chosen for their suitability for general discussion with Italian speakers, were:

- getting to know each other, personal stories and migration to Australia
- family
- city or region of origin
- home and household
- spare time activities
- Italy and Australia

The students were free to choose a final topic for themselves.

The ‘community’ component of the subject was assessed directly only in terms of ‘participation’, in that we gave students a mark for this part of the course in proportion to the number of meetings attended. However, we also based the final oral examination on the topics covered during the interactions with community members, hoping to encourage the students to take full advantage of the meetings.

After planning the changes to the course structure, content and assessment described above, we worked on the recruitment of volunteer Italian speakers. We initially hoped to find enough community members to be able to match students to them on a one-to-one basis, but in some cases two students were eventually assigned to the same person. This did not have a negative impact on the students; in fact some actually preferred to go to the meetings together with a fellow student.

We started the recruitment process by preparing an ‘expression of interest’ document, which we then circulated in Italo-Australian and Italian organisations. We also presented the project at community meetings, placed advertisements in local newspapers and contacted personal acquaintances directly. The replies received were not as numerous as we had expected, but twenty community members were found, for thirty students. One of the reasons for the poor response rate may be that many Italians living in the Brisbane area speak dialects, which differ greatly from standard Italian in morphology, syntax and lexis. Some community members said they did not feel confident enough of their competence in standard Italian to be able to participate. Others indicated they could not commit themselves to the seven meetings required.

Each community member who accepted our invitation to become a volunteer was sent a letter setting out the necessary information regarding the meetings, the topics that the students would discuss and the purpose of the worksheets used by the students for preparation and follow-up work. The volunteers were asked to fill out an attendance sheet to record whether the weekly meetings took place or not. In the letter we explained that each meeting should be treated as just a conversation, or even a chat, and require no preparation on the volunteer’s part. It was not be regarded as a language class, or interview – with the students asking the questions and the volunteers doing all the talking – but, as far as possible, as a two-way conversation. Another issue we made clear in the letter was that the community members should not help the students with their Italian homework. We also suggested that, during the first meeting, some
agreement be reached on how to handle students’ mistakes so that they would not feel uncomfortable with their limited Italian.

Community members and students were matched according to several factors, such as common interests, age, personality, time availability and geographical distance. During the semester, we maintained contact with the community members by telephone in order to discuss any issues that arose and ensure everything was running smoothly. It was a pleasant surprise to find that most of these volunteers were interested in repeating the experience, as indicated on the feedback questionnaires they completed at the end.

4.2 Implementation of the project in class and in the community

As mentioned above, classes were in the form of a one-hour tutorial and a two-hour workshop each week. The tutorial was mainly concerned with preparation for the meetings with the community members. In order to assist students in this we introduced a worksheet on each of the topics discussed. The worksheet had two parts: one to be completed before the meeting (which was started on in class) and the other for filling in during and after the meetings.

At the tutorial, following brainstorming and pair-work or small-group activities, the students formulated specific questions to put to the community member on aspects of the current topic, which they wrote in the first part of the worksheet, along with ideas and vocabulary they thought would be useful for the meeting. In the second part, they made notes about the conversation with the community member and jotted down any new lexical items, idiomatic expressions and grammatical structures observed. The points that emerged were then discussed in later tutorials as part of the feedback and debriefing process, along with cultural and intercultural issues and communication strategies for keeping the conversation going. We sought to anticipate some particular issues that students would have to negotiate with their Italian partners – such as use of the formal Lei or the informal tu – and to provide tips on what to expect and how to behave – like shaking hands during introductions or being offered coffee, and commenting on the house as a possible ice-breaker. The worksheets, and the class brainstorming sessions, while quite guided at the beginning of semester, gradually demanded more input from the students. This is illustrated by the two examples of worksheets given in the Appendix, for the first and fifth meeting respectively.

The tutorial particularly provided a forum for rehearsing conversations with the community member through pair-work and group-work. At the beginning of the course, through role-play activities, students practised the phone call to arrange the first meeting and engaged in conversations with the teacher who played the role of community member. Other real-life tasks undertaken in the tutorials included writing a letter of introduction at the start and a thank-you letter at the end.

The inclusion of an out-of-class component in a language subject entails taking into account a number of practical issues that can influence the pace and content of the work done in class, and consequently demands a certain degree of flexibility. Part of the tutorial was taken up by providing students with suggestions on how to overcome practical problems: difficulties in contacting the community members, postponements, telephone conversations in place of actual meetings and various other changes to the original plan due to unforeseen circumstances. As part of the evaluation process, the
students were given a diary at the beginning of semester in which to record their impressions, difficulties or problems encountered during the meetings. They were asked to bring these to the tutorials for feedback and class discussion.

While the tutorials were specifically concerned with providing linguistic and practical support for the meetings with community members, the workshops addressed the general development of listening and speaking skills. Here, the input consisted mainly of authentic audio and video recordings, used as the basis for comprehension and grammar activities, but we also presented some authentic written material (such as short articles), for reading and discussion in small groups. We selected these materials in order to provide abundant linguistic input and cultural background information linked to the various set topics. Reflection on grammatical items was mainly student-driven and arose from the subjects discussed and the language functions most commonly associated with them. The role of the workshop was, therefore, to work on language skills through exposure to materials on the selected topics.

The out-of-class component, although monitored in the tutorials and through the worksheets, was essentially the students’ responsibility and beyond our direct control. We could easily keep track of ‘technical’ details such as the number of meetings that had taken place, but much of what actually happened during the meetings eluded us. Although a general mood of excitement prevailed during the semester, and students and community members gave positive informal feedback, we were unable to evaluate the impact of the experience at an individual level until the end of semester, through the administration of a questionnaire. The final oral exam also allowed an indirect insight into the effect of the meetings on the students’ development of communication strategies, and their linguistic performance generally, as they were required to conduct a conversation on a topic of their choice, with the teacher playing the part of the community member.

5 Preliminary observations

In analysing the outcomes of the project, our priority was to gain an overall insight into students’ perceptions of the usefulness of the community experience. We were interested in finding out the type of impact the out-of-class encounters had had on students’ language learning at different levels: affective, sociocultural, linguistic and strategic. We used the following instruments to obtain feedback:

- an initial questionnaire to assess all students’ expectations;
- interviews with some students (on a voluntary basis), held after the first meeting with the community member and again at the end of the semester, to evaluate their perceptions on: their use of communication strategies; changes in their comprehension and speaking skills; attitudes towards the oral exam in the previous, and this, Italian subject;
- cultural and linguistic information about the meetings derived from the worksheet and the diary that students handed in at the end of semester;
- questionnaires at the end of semester, for all students and community members, with open-ended and Leichart scale questions about various aspects of the experience.
The responses to the questionnaires, backed up by our own assessment of students’ performance at the final oral exam, indicated there had been improvements in aural comprehension, the range of vocabulary used and conversational fluency. However, an evaluation of changes in the students’ language proficiency was not our main priority in this first implementation of the project, our concern being an assessment of its overall validity, with a view to repeating the experience.

Students’ reactions to the project highlighted a number of interesting points in the areas of motivation, self-confidence, interest in another language and culture, and development of communication strategies. Their responses to the questionnaires indicated that they:

- no longer perceived Italian as just a university subject, but as a skill to be used in a real-life context;
- experienced a sense of achievement in having overcome the initial ‘block’ of conversing with Italian speakers outside the classroom, with a consequent boost in confidence in their linguistic abilities;
- experienced the desire to communicate beyond their linguistic means;
- were provided with an opportunity to consolidate what they had learnt in class through ‘real-life’ practice;
- developed the ability to keep a conversation going, using a number of strategies;
- acquired an appreciation of sociolinguistic aspects of language use;
- learned colloquial and idiomatic expressions typically encountered in conversation and therefore unlikely to be heard in class;

and that the experience:

- gave them the opportunity to discover Italian mentalità and ways of life on a direct and personal level, while gaining knowledge of cultural elements such as Italian traditions, rituals and regional differences;
- opened up the possibility of making friendships, which in some cases have continued after the end of the course;
- emphasised the importance of learning in a relaxed atmosphere.

While the usefulness of the Lingua e comunità project was unanimously agreed upon, some concerns of an organisational kind were expressed. These included:

- the difficulty of finding the time – on top of study, work and personal commitments – to meet with community members, especially if travel was involved;
- problems associated with availability of community members – who also had commitments and time constraints – and cancellations or postponements, often due to unforeseen circumstances;
- the negative effect on tutorials, at times, of some students having missed meetings and/or failed to complete the worksheet, which hampered the debriefing and sharing of experiences.

A few students did drop out of the subject because they were discouraged by the level of commitment that the project required and lacked confidence in their language abilities.

Not all students, or community members, liked having set topics for discussion; some would have preferred to choose for themselves. However, we think that giving students pre-selected topics and using the worksheet as a tool to help them prepare for the
meetings worked well. It gave them, particularly the shy and the linguistically ‘weaker’ students, a basis on which to build and helped provide some kind of structure for the meetings. It did not seem to necessarily prevent the conversations from taking their own course.

In planning the implementation of *Lingua e comunità* for the second year, we decided to maintain the basic structure, while addressing some of the issues emerging from this experience and from those of lecturers in other languages involved in the same project. In order to simplify the organisational process – matching students with community members, scheduling meetings and linking topics of conversation and classroom work – we planned to make the out-of-class component as flexible as possible, especially with regard to deadlines for the meetings and choice of topics for discussion. We also decided to try to dissipate future students’ fears of not being able to cope with the encounters by inviting past students to talk to them about their experience from a peer perspective. We revised the worksheet to include a section for feedback on various aspects of the meetings, in place of the diary, which had not proved a very effective means. The feedback section includes a series of questions in English to use (if necessary) as guidelines for their reflection.

Finally, we were concerned to address one issue in particular that arose during the semester, namely that some meetings resembled an interview rather than a conversation. We felt the need to encourage our volunteers to give the students the opportunity to talk about themselves and provide an atmosphere more conducive to chatting. We thought this might be achieved by engaging volunteers and students in a number of joint activities, such as going shopping, watching an Italian film, reading an Italian magazine or newspaper, going for a walk, cooking or eating out. At the same time, we resolved to stress in class that, while preparing some questions on a topic gives students a basis from which to start, they must expect that their conversations may take their own course, and accept this challenge.

### 6 Conclusion

The enthusiasm of the students who participated in the *Lingua e comunità* project can be summed up by the positive responses we received to the following question in the final questionnaire: “Do you feel that the *Lingua e comunità* component made the subject more interesting than it would have been otherwise?” The overwhelming “yes” response indicated that it is an important and effective experience to offer in our Italian Studies programme. We were also greatly encouraged by the positive responses received from the community members and their willingness to participate again. Both the students’ reactions and our own impressions point to the conclusion that taking Italian outside the classroom is an essential step in enhancing students’ linguistic and cultural development, as it makes their learning more ‘real’ and engaging.
Bibliography


eTandem Project web-site: [http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/email/idxita00.html](http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/email/idxita00.html) (accessed November 2001)


Appendix: Two examples of worksheets

SCHEDA n. 1 - LAL2091 Spoken Italian 2° semestre 2000

Nome: ..............................................

Data dell’incontro con il partner nella comunità: ..............................................

ARGOMENTO: Conoscenza reciproca; storia personale: ragioni dell’emigrazione in Australia.

In classe:

Possibili domande / argomenti di discussione:

- Da quanti anni abita in Australia?
- Ha sempre abitato a Brisbane?
- Prima abitava in Italia? Dove?
- È nato/a in Italia?
- Come mai è venuto/a in Australia?
- È venuto/a da solo o con la famiglia?
- Perché ha scelto l’Australia e non un altro paese?
- C’erano già dei parenti o degli amici qui in Australia?
- Ha avuto difficoltà ad ambientarsi all’inizio? Perché?
- Ha trovato subito lavoro? Perché?
- Ha avuto difficoltà con la lingua?
- Le piace abitare in Australia?
- Tornerebbe ad abitare in Italia? Perché?
- ......................................................

Vocabolario utile:

Durante l’incontro:

Punti principali / interessanti della discussione:

- ......................................................................................................................
  ...

- ......................................................................................................................
  ...

Parole o espressioni nuove, punti grammaticali notati durante la discussione:

- ......................................................................................................................
  ...

- ......................................................................................................................
  ...
SCHEDA n. 5 - LAL2091 Spoken Italian

2° semestre 2000

Nome: ........................................

Data dell’incontro con il partner nella comunità: ........................................

ARGOMENTO: Il tempo libero

In classe:

Possibili domande / argomenti di discussione:

- Quantità di tempo libero.
  - .................................................................
  - .................................................................

- Interessi / passatempi (TV, film, libri, musica, cinema, sport, volontariato, altre attività).
  - .................................................................
  - .................................................................

- Appartenenza a club / circoli / associazioni / gruppi.
  - .................................................................
  - .................................................................

- Frequenza a corsi.
  - .................................................................
  - .................................................................

- Cosa farebbe se avesse più tempo.
  - .................................................................
  - .................................................................

Vocabolario utile:

Durante l’incontro:

Punti principali / punti interessanti della discussione:

- .................................................................
  ...

- .................................................................
  ...

Parole o espressioni nuove; punti grammaticali notati durante la discussione:

- .................................................................
  ...

- .................................................................
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1 The project was planned and carried out by Sara Visocnik Murray, Francesca Laura, Tiziana Miceli and Claire Kennedy.

2 The title of the main project, undertaken by Elaine Wylie and David Ingram from the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages at Griffith University, was “Taking foreignness out of languages other than English: the community as a resource for improving proficiency outcomes”. The other languages involved were Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean and Spanish. The project was funded by the Australian Government’s Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development (CUTSD).

3 One example worth mentioning of an email exchange scheme amongst language students is the International E-mail tandem network, intended for communication between university language students but available also to adult learners outside the university environment. Information about the eTandem Project can be found at: http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/email/idxita00.html

4 We use the term “authentic” here without intending to question the “authenticity” of the classroom environment as an effective context for language learning. We believe both settings play an important role and complement each other in the learning process.