

INTERNATIONALISERING

English in Italy



Af Wanda la Magna, lærer på 'Luigi Einaudi' skolen i Verona.

“Luigi Einaudi” is a commercial school for foreign correspondents in Verona, a beautiful city in the north of Italy near Lake Garda and Venice. We have about 700 students and the students’ age ranges from 14 to 19. The main subjects they study are three foreign languages (English and German and as a third language either French or Spanish, accountancy, economics, a bit of banking, Italian, mathematics and computer science. The aim is to prepare students to work in tourist agencies, companies, banks and other similar institutions. The school-leaving diploma obtained at the end of the five-year course is that of “Perito Aziendale e Corrispondente in Lingue Estere” (Business Administrator and Foreign Language Expert). This diploma enables the student to enter into the working world with a qualified

specialization or allows direct entrance to any University Faculty; however, the most logical choices usually fall on Economics, Languages or Law.

Teaching of the English language in Italy first started in the Private Language Schools, which were teeming with students. There was obviously a demand for the language that the Italian State Schools were not satisfying. The main language in the few schools that taught a foreign language was French. This was the natural trend, France is only across the Italian border and the two countries have a lot in common being Romance languages. French literature was well studied and even today Italian people are more acquainted with French authors than they are with the literature coming from any other country. Besides, most language university students at the time got a degree in French, and there were not enough graduates in English to teach the language.

The families were ahead of the schools; they realized the importance of English and went to all lengths to get their children to learn the language. In the late 70’s following parent requests for English, but above all industry demands, international culture and travelling necessities, there was an awakening to the possibility that English be introduced in state schools, and there was soon a rapid expansion to the point that most students in Middle School (ages 11 to 13) were now choosing English. To safeguard the teaching position of the teachers of French already

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working full time in the school, some students were persuaded to do French either by putting better teachers in those streams or by giving the students extra afternoon lessons in English. At high school, however, students could opt for the language they wanted.

In the 80's the English foreign language was well introduced in the state sector and the BROCCA programme was innovative in introducing also foreign "Conversation teachers" in the three languages English, French and German in high schools specialising in languages.

The 80's also saw the extension of the foreign language in the primary schools. It was first taught where there was a teacher available meeting the teaching requirement standard. Here again parent pressure made it possible for "outside" teachers, who were paid either through school funding or directly from parent contributions, to be called to fill in the gap.

The English language was in full swing in the 90's where it became the main foreign language learnt throughout the school system from nursery school right up to the end of high school. In universities it is introduced as an optional subject even in degree courses that had previously not foreseen the learning of a foreign language.

Language teachers became aware of their need to finance their own studies and to go abroad. Teacher associations such as LEND that gave refresher courses to teachers arose. The British Council also offered courses. In the late 90's large amounts of state money were financed in training systems for foreign language teachers.

Today with the Lingua 2000 project schools have funding not only to hire native speakers for extra "conversation" tuition, but also to encourage a second foreign language to be learnt.

Since last year the Ministry of Education partly funds students who sit a qualified certificate exam in the four languages currently being taught in Italian High Schools: English, French, German and Spanish. The Examination Boards accepted by the state for the English Certificates are the Cambridge, Trinity and Pitman Boards. Students passing these exams acquire a credit in their report which will contribute to the grade in their school-leaving diploma.

The European Framework provides a series of competences drawn out by the European Council with three levels which are articulated into other levels, giving schools a valuable guideline. There is a proliferation of projects that aid students: Erasmus, Comenius and Lingua to name a few. Schools make contacts with other schools and organize exchanges of students, programmes and letters. Students become even more aware of the importance of studying languages.

Parents will go to no end of expenses in financing language learning abroad either during the school holidays or when their grown up children have ended their studies. We are now living in a globalized world where work may not be found round the corner, and not only English but also another foreign language will be the gift that we educators and parents will hand to our children: the passport for their journey in life.

