

EQUIPE PROJECT

Case study

Teaching European languages as foreign languages at home
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In Italy, as well as in many European countries, people and institutions were not accustomed to receiving thousands and thousands of immigrants from all over the world. Particularly the Lazio "regione" (county) is the most affected by this unforeseen social and historical event. In fact, in many schools of Rome and of its county classes are full of young immigrants who do not know or know just a few words of Italian language. For the most part, the teachers who are not expert in language teaching, for example those teaching mathematics, history, biology teachers and so on, have a hard time teaching their subjects to students whose first language is not Italian. Consequently, the school system is in search of a new approach to this linguistic problem. In the Frosinone "provincia" (Lazio) the new approach was studied and realized both by the government of the county and by the university and the high school system, in search of a quality label.

The most important objective of the quality project was the training of the primary and high school teachers through a course organized by university professors and experts in teaching Italian as a foreign language. The second objective was the creation of new links between the school system and the university in the fields of linguistics and pedagogy, to improve the quality of the academic research and to promote the continuing education. The directors of the schools involved in the project were requested to monitor and evaluate the results of the course and in the end they were very enthusiastic about it. Certainly the objectives were achieved and the course is now a model for new projects in the continuing education field.

A new model was chosen to test new ways in this particular continuing education based approach to the linguistic education in Italy. The model is a combination of different existing models for courses of languages addressed to immigrants and for university courses addressed to teachers. The strength of this model was the opportunity of a steady monitoring of the progress and the results of the project. The weakness of the model was in the difficulty of placing high school students and immigrants, especially adult immigrants, together in the same class. The project was part of routine practice in some high schools in Lazio. In these schools the course was offered as part of the program of Italian, History, Mathematics and so on, and it was accepted both by teachers and students at the beginning of the school year.

The quality project was organised in two parallel courses, the one for immigrants and the other one for teachers. The course for immigrants was directed by an experienced group of university professors and lecturers of Italian language and linguistics, from the universities of Pescara and Rome (Rome I and Rome III). They taught Italian language for some months in four level courses, from beginners to advanced students. The students were all immigrants from all over the world, mostly from Albany, Africa, Poland, Cuba and Central America. They were from seventeen to forty years old. They attended classes not at school, but in special conference halls offered by AIPES association, which is linked with the Lazio government. The course for school teachers was directed by the same group of university professors of Pescara and Rome universities. This second course was organized as a list of lectures about the main subjects of the teaching Italian as a second language. The teachers of selected schools in Lazio attended the lectures with their students, who, after that, wrote some papers, studying the matter in depth and with the support of a rich literature. Some of these papers were published in daily newspapers with a high circulation. The school teachers involved in the project were also invited to give lessons of Italian language and culture in the courses for immigrants, to test their acquired competence. The project cost 86.000 euro.

After a while, the teachers involved in the project were requested to write a handbook of Italian language for foreigners, published on the website www.italianistica.it and in the press for Regione Lazio. The handbook is addressed to immigrants who need to know the most common words and idioms for the typical dialogs of the everyday life. Moreover the handbook has very helpful glossaries in many European languages like Albanian, English, French, Polish, Russian. The process of conducting the project was very important, because new ways and approaches were found, during the lessons for the students and the teachers training, after meetings and thorough analysis of the local problems.

The results of the quality project for the short term were very positive. There was a new awareness of the difficulties of learning Italian as a second language in the schools and in the universities of Rome and Pescara. Many school teachers and university professors established permanent links for mutual cooperation. In the longer term the project gave the first idea for the realization of a new university Master's degree for teaching Italian as a second language in the universities of Rome and Pescara (see www.italianistica.it). In fact, all the university professors involved in the quality project were promoters of the Master's in "Italianistica per la didattica dell'italiano come lingua straniera", the first created in Italy in this particular field of linguistics. The cost of the project increased, because of the printing expenses for the handbook, which needed a new financing of the foreseen budget.