



LA SCUOLA D'ITALIA
GUGLIELMO MARCONI

Preliminary Language Policy

May 29, 2017

"A different language is a different vision of life." - Federico Fellini



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1. LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY

La Scuola d'Italia Guglielmo Marconi is an international, bilingual English/Italian educational institution whose central mission is to foster the growth of intellectually curious, critically-minded, global citizens at all stages of primary and secondary education. As a school whose languages of instruction reflect the dynamic, hybrid nature of bicultural identity, our philosophy of language goes beyond the recognition of the important role language plays in cognitive development and communication. Rather, as educators, our aim is to encourage students to become and remain lifelong learners, thinkers, communicators, and risk-takers. Our students develop the knowledge and confidence needed to think and learn independently while respecting the cultures and beliefs of others. Through a true bilingual education, students are better able to comprehend the interdependence we share with others throughout the world, and how they can make a positive difference.

La Scuola d'Italia was born in 1977 as a bilingual and bicultural institution in New York City, in an area where the interest toward Italian culture has always been strong. The bond between Italian and American culture constitutes the foundation of our school, an educational institution that, during the course of its history, has developed a program inspired by its dual-cultural identity. Two of the main goals of La Scuola d'Italia's program are, indeed, plurilingualism and intercultural awareness. The two cultures and languages of the school coexist at every level, from management and administration to class teaching and daily life interaction, providing a fertile environment for the growth of international mindedness amongst the students.

Plurilingualism and interculturality are the essence of our programs and our educational goals. If through language an individual builds his/her identity, in our bilingual environment (starting from primary school), the student shapes a more complex and flexible way of thinking, developing critical thinking, understanding and appreciation of cultural differences from the beginning. Following the *Common European Framework of References for Language (CEFR)*, at La Scuola we "emphasize the fact that as an individual person's experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, [...] he or she does not keep language and culture in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact" [p.4].

Our primary objectives in constructing a language policy are to ensure consistency in methods of instruction among teachers while ensuring continual support for linguistic achievement and expansion among our students. As a working document, the language policy of La Scuola d'Italia has been formulated in cooperation with a cross-section of members of our school community with the recognition that a working document is also a living document, necessitating continual interaction, periodic review, and adaptation according to the needs of our learning community.



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2. SCHOOL LANGUAGE PROFILE

A. The languages of instruction

Our main educational goal concerning plurilingualism is enabling students to acquire proficiency in both instructional languages (Italian and English) comparable to that of native speakers.

Italian and English are the two official languages of the school. Both languages are used in every context by students, teachers and administration. Teachers are mother-tongue speakers of either Italian, English, (or French and Spanish) and some are bilingual. In order to reach the goal of a 100% multilingual staff, teachers not already fluent in Italian are currently enrolled in a course, offered by La Scuola through ICON. Teachers are required to fulfill the responsibilities of their own online tutorial course.

La Scuola's bilingual instructional program is made up of the following components:

- At the Liceo, the subjects taught primarily in Italian are: Italian Language and Literature and History. The subjects taught in English are: English Language and Literature, American History, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Art History and Design. Latin and Philosophy are taught both in Italian and English. French is taught both in French and English.
- At the Middle School, the subjects taught primarily in Italian are: Italian Language and Literature, Theater, History and Geography. The subjects taught in English are: English Language and Literature, Science, Mathematics and Arts. Music is taught both in Italian and English.
- At the Elementary School, the subjects taught in English are: English Language Arts, Social Studies, Basic Math (money, time, geometry), and Science. Subjects taught in Italian are: Italian Language Arts, History, Geography, Math, Music and Theatre.

Students are required to study and produce their written work in the subject's language of instruction. However, depending on the student's' grade, code switching may occur if teachers consider it appropriate and favorable for the class or part thereof. The class may have differentiated levels of linguistic competence, therefore the teaching method requires a strong adaptability to a mixed-ability classroom. Students have the ability to interact in class in their mother tongue while continuing to perfect their ability in the target language of instruction. Teachers, accordingly, borrow methodology from the Italian approach to CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). Furthermore, within the school context, immersive learning is improved by the presence at all grade levels of relevant numbers of native speakers of the target language (a context comparable to bilingual schools in bilingual territories and border regions).

At La Scuola, students are encouraged to become fluent and expressive, and to communicate effectively, in both the English and Italian languages. In a bilingual and bicultural setting, students are exposed to a variety of language experiences. The Italian and English teachers



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work closely together to reach common goals. The teachers integrate academic units of study to enrich their program. A skillful, competent staff, cares for children in small classes, affording them individualized attention and guidance.

B. IB Practices

As an Italian/English International School and official IB Candidate School, La Scuola d'Italia focuses on but is not limited to the following IB practices:

- The school develops and promotes international-mindedness and all attributes of the IB learner profile across the school community. (IB Standard A; Practice 4),
- The school places importance on language learning, including mother tongue, host country language and other languages. (IB Standard A, Practice 7).
- Collaborative planning and reflection recognizes that all teachers are responsible for language development of students. (IB Standard C, Practice 8)
- Teaching and learning engages students as inquirers and thinkers. (IB Standard C3, Practice 2)
- Teaching and learning addresses the diversity of student language needs, including those for students learning in a language(s) other than mother tongue. (IB Standard C3, Practice 7)
- Teaching and learning demonstrates that all teachers are responsible for language development of students. (IB Standard C3, Practice 8)
- Teaching and learning uses a range and variety of strategies.(IB Standard C3, Practice 9)
- Teaching and learning differentiates instruction to meet students' learning needs and styles. (IB Standard C3, Practice 10)
- Teaching and learning fosters a stimulating learning environment based on understanding and respect. (IB Standard C3, Practice 14)

C. English as a New Language (ENL) and Italian as a New Language (INL)

Because of La Scuola's bilingual curriculum, a significant factor in determining a student's academic success centers on ensuring they receive the support they need in English, Italian, or both. Classes of Italian as a New Language (INL) and English as a New Language (ENL) aim at improving students' linguistic competence and making our high educational goals reachable. We believe that intercultural education is the most valuable and desirable form of education in our contemporary globalized society and with INL and ENL programs we want to make it accessible to every student. By making intercultural education accessible, we increase its intrinsic value and its impact on our society.

Students in need of support work with highly trained and experienced language teachers. These teachers specialize in second language acquisition and have experience teaching students of all ages; from pre-K to adulthood. After achieving mastery in basic interpersonal communicative



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skills (BICS), the goal is for our students to develop cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) as effectively as possible. After-school support classes for both English and Italian as a New Language students are also offered throughout the school year in grades K-12. Currently, students receive INL and ENL support two-three times per week at all grade levels, from elementary (Elementari) to high school (Liceo).

Parents also play a crucial role in students' language acquisition. Our faculty encourages parents to take part in school activities, volunteer for events, and become steadfast advocates in supporting and inspiring their children in their language development. As a matter of fact, a group of parents attends language classes in the afternoon (both in Italian and English).

C.1: English as a New Language (ENL) Program

New and transfer students, who are not native English speakers (ELLs), are given the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (NYSITELL) to assess their level of proficiency with the English language. If ENL classes are deemed necessary, students are taken out of class for at least one period a day, two to three times a week to work with the ENL teacher. ENL classes are conducted in a small group environment with lessons tailored to meet the individual needs of students with varying language abilities and backgrounds. The lessons mirror the themes being taught in the homeroom class so students do not fall behind academically. The sessions are conducted using a communicative approach to facilitate the student's mastery of the language. Students' progress is measured at the end of each school year using the NY State ESL Achievement Test (NYSESLAT). Levels of English language proficiency are as follows: Entering (Beginner), Emerging (Low Intermediate), Transitioning (High Intermediate), Expanding (Advanced), and Commanding (Proficient).

Classes are conducted based upon ENL teaching methodologies with approaches for teaching grade-level content to English learners in ways that make the subject matter understandable by providing comprehensible input. The themes of instruction are similar to those being taught in the child's homeroom class, in order to complement the main English program of La Scuola. As students improve in their English language skills, they begin to spend more time in their homeroom classes, while taking on additional classroom work responsibilities.

The study of English as a New Language is intended to support, assist, and develop the language skills of non-native English speakers. The main objective for ENL students is to develop and consolidate strong communicative competence, acquire fluency and understanding, utilize academic and social language, elevate and develop student reading and writing skills, and to develop their confidence in the use of the English language.

In accordance with La Scuola's Mission, our emphasis is on individualizing instruction, working in small groups, and on supporting students in developing their competence as learners and socially responsible citizens. With this, our ENL students are strongly encouraged and expected to develop the four basic language skills according to the NYS ENL Learning Standards: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.





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Each of the four basic language skills is reinforced through various activities, such as role-play, songs, games, TPR, and technology, which further encourages students to practice their newly acquired language. La Scuola has also adopted a six-level online ENL course specifically designed for children. This course enables learners to practice their English in a fun and interactive environment. Students are also encouraged to utilize the program at home, allowing for parental involvement.

C.2: Italian as a New Language (INL) Program

Italian in the Lower School (Elementari)

In the Elementary School, instruction of Italian as a New Language is crucial in order to boost language competence early on. For absolute beginners, the program - implemented in an individual or small group setting - introduces students to the basic vocabulary to be used in the initial development of communication and understanding. The INL class follows the progression of the students' language competence in each grade, above all in regard to their ability to read and write.

One of the teachers' main tasks is to create a warm classroom atmosphere and an emotionally secure environment in which everyone – either native speaker or new language learner - feels supported and accepted. Students are encouraged to come together and feel a sense of community, irrespective of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds and abilities. When students feel accepted, fears and anxiety are removed. As a result, the general process of learning and the specifics related to language acquisition become more enjoyable and successful. For this very reason, the teaching strategies adopted within the context of INL classes are extremely adaptable and customizable.

Moreover, by keeping up-to-date with the latest resources the Italian market has offers with respect to Italian acquisition as a New Language, the INL program at La Scuola gives students access to the most updated textbooks, reading books, and linguistic games. Given the variety of language levels coexisting in the classroom, additional class activities, homework assignments and evaluation tests are also tailor-made by Italian and INL teachers in order to meet students' individual needs.

In Elementary, grades are assigned mostly through direct observation of the communication and listening skills of the student in the target language within the classroom context. New INL students are first assessed at the beginning of the school year, their progress being constantly monitored by both Italian and INL teachers afterwards.

Finally, we strive to provide our students with a higher level of language competency in which two (or more) languages don't simply sit side by side, but are proficiently integrated in order to work in synergy. This effectively facilitates bilingualism/multilingualism and, therefore, multiculturalism and international mindedness from the early years.





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Italian in the Middle and Upper School (Media e Liceo)

In the Middle and Upper School, the INL program is structured in two phases. The primary goal is to provide a fast development of linguistic awareness and elementary communicative competence. Once students reach a basic level of language acquisition, the main goal becomes to lead every learner to full participation in bilingual class activities. Proficiency is reached *within* the study of each subject; INL simply provides the underlying tools needed to make subject-specific learning in the target language possible.

In order to develop linguistic and basic communicative competence, we utilize a fundamentally communicative approach, based on the theoretical research of D.A. Wilkins, the "Modern Language Project" promoted by the Council of Europe, in conjunction with the most recent guidelines from the CEFR - Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. This particular framework currently underpins language teaching instruction methodologies at the Università per Stranieri in Perugia, as well as at all major academic institutions in Europe.

A strong focus on grammatical competence is also built into the program. The development of the grammar syllabus takes into account the specific needs of every learner. The small class size allows for continuous assessment through weekly formative assignments. These frequent evaluations inform our teaching practices and represent an invaluable tool in shaping the program and adapting it to individual needs.

Formal assessments are scheduled three times per semester. Literary extracts as well as texts from other disciplines taught in Italian are used as linguistic components for these activities so that intermediate students may further develop their linguistic abilities. In fact, as students make progress in their language acquisition journey, they also approach the specific language of a variety of disciplines through explanation and simplification of technical vocabulary, as well as through paraphrasing. In this phase, students work more on written texts, with the goal of improving grammar and developing vocabulary. They are trained to develop fundamental skills - such as classifying, comparing, inferring, evaluating, and synthesizing - in order to improve knowledge of their target language.



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D. Instruction in Additional Languages and Support for Mother Tongue Instruction

In addition to studying the school's two languages of instruction – English and Italian – La Scuola's students are also exposed to the study of two additional languages: one modern language, French (from 6th to 12th grade); and one classical language, Latin (from 9th to 12th grade).

The exceptional variety of language instruction provided by La Scuola reflects the inherent international-minded nature of our educational institution. Respect for other tongues and ways to communicate and appreciation of other cultures is of fundamental importance within the program and is fostered throughout the curriculum.

In relation to this and in accordance with IB principles, in grades 11th and 12th, the school supports the study of Mother Tongues other than the languages studied at La Scuola through the "Self-taught Language Option" of the IB Diploma Program. For details about this option, please, contact La Scuola's IB Diploma Program Coordinator.

4. Admissions

La Scuola d'Italia is an English/Italian bilingual school with an international student population. Presently nearly 50% of students are American. Knowledge of Italian is not a prerequisite for admission to Pre-K through 5th grade. Admission decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, but in general, it's preferable for students entering La Scuola in 6th grade to have comprehension skills in English and Italian. Students entering in 7th or 8th grade need to be proficient in both English and Italian. Students applying to La Scuola in the 9th grade or beyond must be proficient in both English and Italian.

5. Language Policy Review

In order to maintain our role as the plurilingual and intercultural institution that we pride ourselves on being, La Scuola's Language Policy shall be reviewed and revisited on a yearly basis.

Our 2017 Language Policy Development Team consisted of the following professionals:

1. Christine Morga, ENL teacher; Elementary (Elementari) and Middle School (Media)
2. Daniel Bellissimo, INL teacher, Elementary (Elementari) and Upper School (Liceo)
3. Flora Ghezzeo, Italian Literature teacher, Upper School (Liceo)
4. Anthony Martire, English Literature/History teacher, Upper School (Liceo)



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6. References

1. Council of Europe, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001.
2. *Languages and Learning in IB Programmes*. International Baccalaureate Organization, Sept. 2001.
3. *Learning in a Language other than Mother Tongue in IB Programmes*. International Baccalaureate Organization, April 2008.