TESOL italy

NewsLetter

What an Experience:
the meeting of Words & Worlds!

by Beth Ann Boyle

There is a unique quality to all TESOL-Italy events and activities: a kind of fire. This fire was burning brightly during the TESOL-Italy National Convention held on November 18th and 19th in Rome this year because this event was not only organised by teachers who are passionately committed to language teaching, it was also attended by the very same kind of teachers. They are people with dreams, people with the desire to know more and to take even more back to their students and classrooms. They are people who do not allow the challenges in language education today to stop them from following their dreams. Because of this fire, another TESOL-Italy Convention has proven to be a great success!

This year's convention theme, *Words & Worlds*, was dedicated to establishing connections among people through one of the most basic tools at hand – words. Words are powerful: they can transfer knowledge from one person to another or from one generation to another; they can communicate emotion and build relationships; they can trigger conflicts and thankfully resolve them. The four convention subthemes investigated areas which are key to these times and to the Italian educational context: *Content through Language, Identity and Diversity, Primary Language Education,* and *Motivation in Language Learning*.

As those of you who attended the Convention already know, there were many different types of sessions spread over the two days. We were very fortunate to have had the following plenary speakers: Do Coyle (sponsored by the British Council), Jon Hird (sponsored by OUP), Geraldine Mark (sponsored by CUP), Janet Orr

Food for thought
From TESOL publications
by Franca Ricci Stephenson

Learners' Lives as Curriculum

The June 2011 special issue of TESOL Journal[1], which started republishing online in 2010, is entirely dedicated to "**Learners' Lives as Curriculum**" and celebrates the work of Gail Weinstein, who edited the issue, but unfortunately passed away about a year ago. Ms. Weinstein is known throughout the TESOL community for having dedicated her passionate energies to constructivist, holistic models to teach nonnative speakers English and literacy skills. The teaching model she developed, together with other teachers, the "Learners' Lives as Curriculum" model, is a learner-centered approach to EFL/ESL teaching which uses learner texts to discuss themes of interest to learners. It uses thematic units which offer learners personal stories of others like themselves, along with an opportunity to respond to those stories, generate their own narratives, and prepare for a collective project while learning specific language skills and structures[2].

The table of contents in this special issue shows by itself that all the articles would be worth reading, as the titles seem to open new horizons for reflection and action research. They deal with learner-centered teaching as the core of effective practices for adolescent English language learners; they offer examples of a project centered on adult English Language learners constructing and sharing their stories and experiences; they discuss the importance of language lessons on immigrant identity, food culture and the search for home.

The introduction, by Janet D. Johnson[3], explains that the articles in this issue were chosen by Ms. Weinstein and

demonstrate how her life's work can be applied to multiple teaching contexts with students of various ages and English skills. The model she so strongly believed in: "**Learners' Lives as Curriculum**" (LLC) places learners' lives and experiences at the center of curriculum, as she believed that *"To understand the possibilities for language and literacy instruction, it is necessary to know something about learners, their resources, their needs, and their goals for learning"*. Ms. Weinstein defined six discrete principles of her model:

Principle 1: Require Ongoing Inquiry (Listening to and Learning about Learners)
Identify learners' interests and needs.
Identify learners' learning styles and preferences.
Learn about learners' contexts: issues and challenges.
Learn about learners' contexts: resources and possibilities.
Principle 2: Build on What Learners Know
Identify learners' current knowledge

TESOL-Italy's mission is to develop the expertise of those involved in teaching English to speakers of other languages, and to foster professional growth and active participation in language teaching. Its mission includes promoting community understanding of the role of language in a progressively changing environment while respecting individuals' language rights.
To achieve this TESOL-Italy
• encourages access to and standards for English language instruction, professional preparation, continuing education and student programs;
• links groups to enhance communication among language specialists;
• produces high quality programs, services and products
• promotes advocacy to further the profession.

TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) Italy
TESOL-Italy, an affiliate of TESOL International, founded by Mary Finocchiaro, is a non-profit organization of teachers of English in Italy. Its purposes are to stimulate professional development, to disseminate information about research, books and other materials related to English, and strengthen instruction and research.
TESOL-Italy organizes a national convention every year .
Members receive *TESOL-Italy Newsletter* and *Perspectives,* the academic journal of the association.
Officers: Stefano Mochi *President*; Beth Ann Boyle *Vice President*; Lina Vellucci *Second Vice President*; Raffaele Sanzo (MIUR) *Honorary President*; Patrizia Petruccetti *Office Assistant.*
Ex officio members: *David Mees*, Cultural Attaché, Public Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy, Rome; *Maria Paola Pierini*, Cultural Affairs Assistant, Public Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy, Rome.
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From the Editor

The turning of the calendar page to a new year is traditionally a time for rethinking the past and looking forward to the future.

The Annual Convention took place in November: Beth Ann Boyle and Letizia Corbucci's words, in different ways, help the readers treasure the input from the many talks and workshops, while the welcome impressions offered by Khalyapina from Russia give a breath of International air to our mission.

In the meantime, the leading themes in this issue are the *Learners' lives as curriculum* (just to quote Franca Stephenson); Lopriore's interesting analysis of the linguistic landscape and Morbiducci's "food for translation" (at a time when everyone would like to be on a diet!)

There is one more thing worth careful consideration: TESOL Italy's position statement on Primary stimulating discussions.

There is a new section, proposed and edited by Lina Vellucci, on the last pages. It is a special Dossier on the SpellEvent, the Global competion for learning and experiencing words. Enjoy your reading.

Daniela Cuccurullo

Buzz-words

Lucilla Lopriore

Buzz-word: *'a word or phrase that people in a particular group start to use a lot*

because they think it is important'

Buzz-word of the day:

Linguistic Landscapes

The concept of *Linguistic Landscapes* is an emerging interdisciplinary field which encompasses areas of research such as sociolinguistics, language policy, multilingualism and applied linguistics. The term is generally used to refer to the material manifestations of language - street signs, advertising billboards, commercial shop signs, place names etc. –that, all combined, form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. The linguistic landscape of a territory plays an important role in determining the ethnolinguistic vitality of the languages spoken in that environment

Linguistic Landscapes is officially defined as "the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region" (Landry & Bourhis 1997: 23).

These visual messages may have a variety of modalities, which may involve either language or image, or a combination of both (Kress & Hodge, 1998; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, 2006; Van Leeuwen, 2005). They constitute the landscape of the languages in a region or in a country, that can be in the language of that area as well as in a variety of other languages since most countries in the world have become more and more linguistically heterogeneous. In many of these countries the amount of exposure to other languages, mostly English, is expanding in an unprecedented way, thanks to the increased mobility between countries, the new media, social networks, new forms of advertising and the increasing number and types of language signs. In Europe today more than 75 per cent of people aged 16-55 use the Internet every week, with a majority of young people doing so even on a daily basis. Further evidence of the impact of globalisation can be found in the worlds of entertainment and trade, where advertisements are rarely translated, adding to the need and motivation for knowledge in foreign languages.

The first studies of linguistic landscapes were about cities since only in cities or urbanized environments did writing evolve and unfold "its full potential" and develop complex interaction patterns. In this light, a more accurate term would be "linguistic cityscape" (Backhaus, 2007:14).

In the age of visual literacies, *Linguistic Landscapes* and its on-line homologue, the virtual linguistic landscape (VLL) or "linguistic cyberscape" (Ivkovic, 2009) studies enable us to understand how languages are visually processed and experienced by people in linguistically diverse contexts. The implications of research on *Linguistic Landscapes* are manifold and are carried out in different research areas besides sociolinguistics: research on multilingualism, new formats and approaches in the study of the interaction of English with local languages; new perspectives in the analysis of developing features of English as a Lingua Franca; and aspects of research in second language acquisition or in foreign language teaching.

A broad understanding of what foreign language learning encompasses is particularly pertinent in a time where global mobility is a reality for many people, in education, at work and in private life. The impact of globalisation may be found in 'real life' as well as in the virtual world, where people meet each other through various forms of social communication. Thus foreign languages, particularly English, are more and more present in the everyday lives of most European citizens. This presence is bound to affect learners of foreign languages, and research is now beginning to show how. Studies from Iceland, for example, show how primary school children without previous training in English learnt words and phrases by watching movies in English, with subtitles in Icelandic. In Belgium, Dutch speaking 11-year-old children progressed faster in English when they watched subtitled movies or played computer games. In Sweden, exposure to English through the Internet and TV/films had a strong impact on secondary school children's FL oral proficiency and vocabulary (Muñoz & Lindgren, 2011).

The study of the linguistic landscape is, thus, a valuable new development in the analysis of how learners are affected by exposure to other languages outside the school context; it may constitute a valuable resource to be carefully looked at by educational authorities, teachers and families as well.

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Webwatch-CLIL:
Create the New Citizens of the World!
by Letizia Corbucci

Dear Tesolers,

Back from the 36th Annual National Convention held in Rome on the 18th and 19th November, we are here to keep on reflecting on "content through language". This issues has been recently addressed by most of the speakers from both teachers' and students' perspective. Our international expert in CLIL, professor Do Coyle, highlighted how CLIL can be demanding and challenging to realize in our classrooms. She provided the example of a recent study conducted with over 650 learners in Secondary schools in the UK as a lens on the CLIL classroom. Other speakers (Prodromou) highlighted how "CLIL and Communicative Language Teaching are Related" and others (Maggi, Cherubin) showed us how "web 2.0. Tools Can Foster Peer to Peer CLIL Teaching and Assessment". The book and software exhibition was full of new ideas on how to teach CLIL in our classrooms. Here I will point out a list of official websites which can be useful if you want to prepare a lesson based on the European Union and the United Nations to develop the new citizens of the world:

European Union: http://europa.eu.int
Euro: www.euro.ecb.int/en.html; www.europa.eu.int/euro
UNESCO: http://wch.unesco.org/en/list
United Nations: www.un.org
United Nations (website for students): www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/index.shtml
Human Rights: www.ohchr.org/english
Amnesty International: www.amnesty.org
Geography (selection of websites):
www.sheppardsoftware.com/European_Geography.htm (Develop a mental map of Europe, its countries, capitals, and geography through these amazing games!)
www.geographia.com/indx03.htm (Europe Travel Resource. Includes travel tips, country planning guides, maps, travel discounts, tours, events and more for your trip)
www.nationalgeographic.com (provides free maps, photos, videos and daily news stories, as well as articles and features about animals, the environment, cultures, history and so on)
Art: www.artcyclopedia.com (**The Artcyclopedia** is an index of online museums and image archives: find where the works of over 8000 different fine artists can be viewed online)
Museums in Europe (selection of websites): www.louvre.fr, www.tate.org.uk, www.uffizi.it, www.pinakothek.de, www.khm.at/homeE/homeE.html, www.vangoghmuseum.nl
Games: www.peacegames.org (The program uses cooperative games and community service activities to empower elementary school students to be peacemakers)
Good luck!

IMPRESSIONS OF A RUSSIAN PROFESSOR ABOUT TESOL-ITALY'S 36th NATIONAL CONVENTION
by Liudmila Khalyapina

I work at the department of foreign languages at Kemerovo State University (Russia), which is located far away from the central part of our country, in Siberia. I have been educating and training teachers for about 20 years. I enjoy working with students who would become teachers of English in future, helping them become professional and observing their development.

I understand that it's my responsibility to bring new tendencies of teaching English to my students. For this purpose I try to participate in different international conferences and learn new ideas of teaching English for speakers of other languages.

In November 2011 I happened to participate in one of such conferences in Rome. The name of the conference "Words and Worlds" was suggested by its organizers - TESOL-Italy group.

It was my first acquaintance with this organization, first meeting with my colleagues – teachers of English – working in Italy, and even the first visit to one of the most ancient cities in the world – to Rome.

All my impressions can be described by several adjectives of very positive connotation: well-organized, interesting, high scientific level, demonstrating new ideas in methodology of teaching English (first of all I mean CLIL), having opportunity to listen to well-known specialists from the UK and the USA (Do Coyle, Hugh Dellar, Deborah Short and others), as well as for the Italian specialists in this sphere (Maggie Fabricio, Silvana Ranzoli and others).

One of the most important results of my participation in the conference was a discovery of CLIL as a new approach to the process of teaching English. It was so unusual and unexpected for me to make this discovery (it was not my first participation in an international conference). In spite of my big enough experience in the sphere of methodology of language teaching, I came to the conclusion that it's absolutely a new approach which is not developed in Russia. It was so strange for me to recognize that all the European countries are actively developing this type of teaching foreign languages (which I find really effective and corresponding to the demands of modern schools), but our scientists and school practitioners haven't heard anything about it. Now it's quite clear for me that the conference helped me to formulate a new objective – to develop the ideas of CLIL in our universities and secondary schools, to share them both with our university professors, and school teachers.

I would like to thank the members of the executive committee of TESOL-Italy for their work and for the invitation which I received to participate in this very interesting conference.

Translation in Love
FOOD FOR TRANSLATION
by Marina Morbiducci

If you are or would like to be on a diet, strenuously struggling for a few ounces less, here's a kind of food you can abundantly indulge on: food for translation! We do not mean the language of recipes useful for preparing gastronomic delicacies, but simply the language of translation connected to nutritionally cultural facts: so that we can really say "La traduzione è servita!", rendering the Italian verbal form in its double intrinsic possibility (due to the auxiliary ambivalence of our verb "to be"): 1. "è servita" = "it is / it is being served" (passive voice in the present tense); 2. "è servita" = it has been of use" (active voice in the present perfect tense)!

The semantic field of "food" is extremely rich and nourishing even from the point of view of idioms which, typically, are extremely culturally-loaded: for instance, have you ever wondered whether "It's not my cup of tea" could somehow be considered equivalent to "Non è pane per i miei denti"?, where tea (in Britain) and bread (in Italy) serve a parallel cultural function in terms of nutrition? Similarly, have you ever noticed how many idiomatic expressions in both English and Italian contain terms belonging to the realm of food or ingredients of the kind? From "you're mixing oranges with apples", to "salvare capra e cavoli", from "bread & butter" to "Se non è zuppa è pan bagnato"(note the insistence on "bread" in Italian formulations…) and so on: certainly food impinges on our life and vice versa. Why is food so important? "What a question", you could reply. Without food we cannot live; and what about translation, could we survive without it?

There's a plump list of texts to read and translate concerned with food: from *Mindless Eating* by Brian Wansink, published by Editrice Pisani, 2007, and translated into Italian by Marina Marino, where, ultimately, our nutritional culture gets enriched by self-awareness and our diet becomes healthier, to *The Oxford Companion to Italian Food*, by Gillian Riley, OUP, 2009, defined: "A magisterial (recipe-less) book anyone even mildly interested in the subject must own… encourages you to read entry after entry for the pleasure of learning marvelous oddments about the obscure and the familiar" (*The Atlantic*); "Riley, a British food historian, displays the same combination of exhaustive scholarship and English drollery that made Alan Davidson's Oxford Companion to Food (1999) both indispensable and a blast to read. The factoids are endless: ambergris, the perfumy effluvium from sick sperm whales, was once used as an ingredient in appertivi [sic]; medieval Italian followers of Hippocrates believed that cumin impart a scholarly pallor to students who'd been playing hooky." (*Chicago Reader*).

As you see, even gastronomic reviews dispense a special taste for translation… Let's have a bite of the Foreword by New York chef Mario Batali in the same edition and appreciate the cultural layers and metaphoric strata: "I'm still hungry for Italy. By this of course I mean not only the food and drink,

along with all of their associated tastes and smells, but also the weather, the landscape, places, people, and their way of life, too. […] Whenever I'm there, I'm always a little surprised to learn that the countless varieties of the peninsula's dishes are able to evoke memories that I hardly knew I had. For so many reasons, Abruzzo […] can only be described as heavenly, and I honestly don't think I'll ever be convinced that a better Italian saffron exists outside of L'Aquila."

The texts goes on quoting other parts of Italy where you find unique ingredients; but the most praising words are in the Introduction by Gillian Riley: "Those of us who have encountered and come to love the food of Italy become obsessed with trying to find out more about it. We experience both the thrill of the chase, and despair and frustration at the immensity of the task. We press our noses against the misted-up windowpane trying to glimpse what lies beyond, hardly daring to venture in search of the pleasures within. Italians do not have this problem; they know it all, they seem to be born with an innate sense of their national gastronomic heritage, and deep knowledge of their local traditions."

Well, according to Riley, the author of *The Oxford Companion to Italian Food*, just above quoted, apparently there's at least one problem that we, as Italians, do not have, being endowed with the innate taste for food, and, more importantly, the culture of food. Looking under the item "Literature and Food" (p. 293) of the said edition, we read: "In addition, some helpful translation of Italian culinary classics have become invaluable: Artusi, *The Silver Spoon*, Ada Boni's Talismano, and at last the immensely helpful Reader's Digest Illustrated Encyclopedia. […] *The Futurist Cookbook* is now available in English. Meanwhile, bilingual Italians with reputation as restaurateurs or cookery teachers are writing in English for British and American readers." Quite a significant portion, we'd dare say!

Finally, in the *Idioms Organiser* by John Wright, Thomson-Heinle, 2002, we find chapter 24 titled "Eating idioms" (pp. 58-59) and chapter 30 "Food idioms" (pp. 70-71), where we are substantially nurtured: should you fail in your translation, never mind: if you "swallow your pride", you're allowed " a second bite at the cherry" (fail better, and eat well!); the important thing is that we don't end up with "egg on our face", but rather with it in our digesting (and translating) apparatus…

NEWS from the Groups

TESOL Italy
CASERTA group
by Viviana Padovano

TESOL Italy Caserta group is happy to inform you that by the end of February (date still to be confirmed) an international conference on "Bilingualism: teaching a second language at a very early stage" will be held in Caserta with the aim of discussing the aspects and benefits of bilingualism at an age when young learners are more and more exposed to high tech tools and language learning becomes crucial in their education. The event will cover topics ranging from scientific/academic truths to best practices and new methodologies. For those interested in making a presentation or talk about a best practice: papers should be emailed to vivix71@gmail.com NLT Jan 25th, 2012. Once the conference program is in its final version, Caserta group will inform TESOL- Italy so to allow proper distribution. For further information, please contact Viviana Padovano, TESOL Italy Caserta's coordinator at info@crossboundaries.it.

What an Experience:
the meeting of Words & Worlds!

by Beth Ann Boyle
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(sponsored by TESOL- International Association), and Deborah Short (sponsored by the Public Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy in Rome). Plenary speakers make an important contribution to the Convention because they are highly qualified experts in their specific ELT areas. The concurrent sessions (seven at one time), which are either talks, workshops, demonstrations or poster sessions, are equally significant because they are led by a diverse group of individuals (writers, practicing teachers, researchers, teacher trainers, and so on). It is especially during the concurrent sessions that the TESOL spirit shines because it is a moment when teachers are sharing with other teachers.

This year's Convention has seen speakers from all over the world. We have been especially fortunate this year to have speakers from the following countries: Canada, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, the UK, and the USA. This coming together of different nationalities and different teaching contexts is another unique aspect of a TESOL Convention.

The Book, Software and Tour Operator Exhibition was a wonderful opportunity for teachers to talk to representatives of different publishing houses and educational travel agencies to find out about the most recent offers and developments.

Even though all of the exhibitors can be found on the Internet, nothing can replace being able to speak to representatives in person. This year, 20 different organisations were present in the exhibition hall.

Music! Food! Drinks! Dancing! These moments were spread over the two days and they were well appreciated. The intense distribution of talks and workshops was pleasantly "interrupted" by our social events: nineteenth century English dance, American Delta Blues and Zydeco music, and harp and voice duets for the lovers of the classical arts, and of course, abundant wine and *hors d'oeuvres*.

There are many people to thank for the success of the Convention. First of all the office staff without whose precious contribution the convention could not take place. Another group of people deserving our appreciation are the many volunteers who have donated their time, energy and dedication: the students from the *I.T.T. Colombo* high school in Rome, the university intern from *RomaTre* University, and the program book editors to name a few.

Most importantly I would like to extend a warm thank you to all those who believe in TESOL-Italy and what it offers and especially the Convention participants, who are energised by the two-day event and who then take this energy back to their classrooms.

Food for thought
by Franca Ricci Stephenson
(continued from p.1)

and skills.
Honor and celebrate language and culture.
Provide opportunities to integrate the past with the present.
For family literacy, nurture intergenerational transmission of culture and values
Principle 3: Balance Skills and Structures With Meaning Making and Knowledge Creation Provide information about how the language works.
Develop skills for addressing learners' purposes.
Provide opportunities to address those purposes.
Provide learners with opportunities to create and transmit knowledge.
Principle 4: Strive for Authenticity
Provide so access to authentic texts and authentic tasks.
Move beyond ''rehearsal'' to authentic interactions in pursuit of real purposes.
Employ project-based learning.
Aim for measurable linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes.
Principle 5: Encourage Shared Responsibility for Learning Among Students and Teachers
Build in learner choice over what to learn and how.
Create mentoring opportunities in which more proficient learners help less proficient learners.
Foster learner initiative in setting goals and monitoring progress.
Provide opportunities to apply new knowledge outside the classroom and to report results.
Practice 6: Build Communities of Learners and Practitioners
Provide support for analysis of situations.
Create opportunities to collectively develop strategies for action.
Provide opportunities for reflection and planning for further action.
Engage teachers as learners in ongoing discovery.
Though LLC, based as it is on a learner-centered approach, is not new to us, I feel learners have hardly ever been placed really at the center of teaching. This special issue of TESOL Journal contains lots of food for thought and invites us to pause and reflect on what could be achieved if it was adopted with dedication and intelligence.

[1] Volume 2. Issue 2: June 2011

[2] http://www.ableresources.org/p/instructors.html

[3] Rhode Island College

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TESOL ITALY on PRIMARY

by Letizia Corbucci, Rosanna Fiorentino, Ritana Leo, Lucilla Lopriore

The teaching of a foreign language to young learners has been supported by TESOL Italy since the 1970s when the association contributed to innovative projects such as ILLSE which introduced early language teaching in Italy. Since then, TESOL Italy has organized - on this specific subject - national and international conventions, seminars and special sessions as well as language improvement courses requested by primary teachers. TESOL Italy has also officially collaborated with the Italian Ministry of Education, TESOL Intl., and RAI, the Italian Public Television, providing our expertise and professional advice in the organisation of seminars, training programs and publications on early language learning. TESOL Italy has very recently been involved – together with ANILS & LEND – in a scientific committee at INDIRE with the aim of improving the training programs currently offered to primary teachers. TESOL Italy has recently carried out an investigation on the teaching of English at primary level (TESOLITALY_on_PRIMARY), and a survey on the current practices of pre- and in-service training of primary teachers, to be continued in the next few months. As a result of TESOL Italy commitment for the improvement of early language learning, the position statement below was written and presented at last TESOL Italy national conference.

TESOL Italy POSITION STATEMENT ON EARLY FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

The trend to introduce early foreign language learning in primary schools has been followed internationally including in Europe. As a consequence of that, lively debates have focused on which foreign language to teach as well as the teacher's profile and the training required. Globalization and the widespread use of the Internet has predominantly led to the acceptance of English as the language for international communication. Indeed, the choice of English as the only foreign language (L2) to be taught in primary school was strongly requested by Italian families which coincided with the choices made by most other European countries. However, that decision actually went against an earlier recommendation by the Council of Europe in favor of a multilingual formation of students as well as to the reform of the primary school which dates back to 1985.

Even though psycholinguists recommend "The earlier, the better", that alone is not sufficient for successful learning to take place. Other conditions are also required in order to sustain and promote language learning over time. To learn a language, which cannot be compared to other subjects which are content specific, depends on a continuous exposure to it and to its use in meaningful contexts under the guidance of a skilled teacher. This becomes even more important when, as is the case in Italy, learners of an L2 go from the very first year of primary school on through to the last year of high school— a thirteen-year period which includes diverse stages of cognitive and emotional development. Clearly, such an extended learning experience must be sustained by well-trained teachers. If these conditions are not met, the continuity of learning could be compromised with the risk of demotivating students.

One of the critical conditions, therefore, for successful foreign language learning beginning at primary school is that the teacher be well-prepared in terms of language, methodology, culture, and intercultural communication. Research at an international level and recommendations by the Council of Europe point out that the role of the teacher is one of the variables that can lead to positive results. So, these teachers should be highly trained and motivated throughout their career, even more so since they are responsible for introducing classes of very young children to a foreign language. Too often, however, the complexity of the learning/teaching process of both early learners and their teachers is underestimated.

TESOL Italy, therefore, is concerned about the university programs for future teachers, which on the one hand, do state the requirement of achieving a B2 level in English, whereas on the other hand, the number of hours in class and the credits earned per course have been cut. No clear indication of either how to assess the level of language competence actually acquired or how to integrate that ability with teaching methodology has been defined. With regard to in-service training, TESOL Italy is also concerned about the gradual reduction in the number of hours, the quality, and the resources available with respect to the original project of long-ago 1991.

It must be acknowledged that the current compulsory teacher training program has proven to be unsatisfactory, that is, unable to guarantee successful results. Therefore, more adequate ways must be found to encourage teachers to engage in the lengthy process of professional development—of which language certification is only the first essential step. In particular, the current in-service training has far too few numbers of hours in direct contact with the trainer compared to hours on-line, and needs to improve on the quality of the materials and the types of courses offered. The development of the abilities to speak and listen have been reduced to such an extent that current teachers in training programs are very insecure about their ability to use the language correctly and fluently. Obviously those abilities - which are the most critical ones for young learners - may well be neglected. In addition, these teachers may very well have incorrect notions about the language, with the consequence of unwittingly providing both an incorrect model of the language itself and how best to learn it.

Thus, **TESOL Italy** believes that it is important to establish:

1) a policy based on the principles of early language learning that includes:·

Dossier on the Global Spell Event:
1st part

edited by Lina Vellucci

'What's in a Word?'

Learning and Experiencing Words

by Lina Vellucci

(TESOL Italy Second Vice-President)

Tesol-Italy has participated in the 'Global SpellEvent Championship' for three years now. This global competition is for non-native English-speaking students who are learning English as an additional language.

It is organized by Franklin Electronic Publishers in partnership with TESOL International Association.

The first year of the Global SpellEvent in Italy I was one of the participating teachers together with other five from different schools in Rome. The 2009 coordinator was Mary Beth Flynn who worked hard to introduce this type of competition to an Italian audience that was not familiar with its format.

At most of our schools the preparation was devised as an extra-curricular activity within the so-called 'Piano dell' Offerta Formativa' (POF). All the teachers worked enthusiastically not only using spelling activities but also songs, games, proverbs, anything that could help with pronunciation, memorization etc.

The participating students had, therefore, the opportunity to improve their language skills but also to socialize and have fun. This format was then adopted in the following two years when students from Rome, L'Aquila, Latina, and Orvieto joined in the project.

In its three editions the SpellEvent has involved TESOL Executive members who have acted as pronouncers, score-keepers, master of ceremony and other.

Everyone gave a helping hand to make the events successful ones.

Theoretical studies have been made throughout the years on the importance of spelling. I would just like to quote the one by Susan Jones, M. Ed, 'The Importance of Spelling', 2/2009 in which she illustrates how spelling can help literacy and how she debunked some common myths about spelling.

In the U.S.A, spelling is taken into significant consideration in the No-Child-Left-Behind (NCLB) test, in SAT's handwritten essays, in English composition requirements indexes, etc. Cognitive neuroscience studies have also been made to understand how verbal automaticity is acquired.

In this dossier you will find some contributions, both in English and Italian, from some of the teachers who have had different roles in the event, some pros and some cons the type of competition, but the positive ones outdo the negative ones.

I'd like to share this short poem with you to conclude this introduction. I hope it can help us understand, as teachers in our every day tutoring, that words are what form literacy and vocabulary confidence is very important for our students' academic progress. Therefore, any activity that can lead them towards reaching this goal is welcome.

You can't always trust a spell-checker to write correct English

Eye halve a spelling chequer.
It came with my pea sea.
It plainly marques four my revue
Miss steaks eye kin knot sea.
Eye strike a key and type a word
And weight four it two say
Weather eye am wrong oar write,
It shows me strait a weigh.
As soon as a mist ache is maid,
It nose bee fore two long
And eye can put the error rite.
Its rare lea ever wrong.
Eye have run this poem threw it and
I am shore your pleased two no
Its letter perfect awl the weigh.
My chequer tolled me sew.

Sauce unknown; original source is not known

A proposito dello *Spell Event*
(Alcune considerazioni sullo "spelling"
nella didattica dell'inglese L2)
di Paolo Coppari

Premessa – ovvero, ciò da cui non prescindiamo…

La questione dello *spelling* può rientrare a buon diritto in quella più generale dell'approccio ai percorsi di insegnamento linguistico, nei quali tradizionalmente scarso spazio viene riservato agli aspetti più rigorosamente "formali" della lingua (ortografia, pronuncia, intonazione, accenti...).

Gli sviluppi recenti della glottodidattica hanno evidenziato come questi aspetti della comunicazione non rivestano importanza in quanto tali, ma solo se riferiti all'efficacia comunicativa dei testi/messaggi nel loro insieme.

Così come la grammatica e la sintassi, infatti, questi aspetti formali possono essere generalizzati solo se posti come oggetto di riflessione *a posteriori* sulle regolarità/ricorrenze della lingua realizzata (le "regole", non prescrivono gli usi linguistici, ma vengono da questi descritte attraverso processi induttivi di generalizzazione e sistemazione teorico-concettuale).

Il dibattito intorno a queste acquisizioni della moderna glottodidattica si è soffermato molto sul ruolo della grammatica nella metodologia comunicativa.

Va detto a questo proposito che nessuno tra gli studiosi più accreditati, da D.A. Wilkins a H.G. Widdowson, fino agli esperti del Consiglio d'Europa estensori del "Quadro Comune Europeo", ecc., abbia mai affermato che insegnare una lingua in modo comunicativo significhi ignorarne, o sottovalutarne, gli aspetti formali.

Qual è dunque il ruolo di questi aspetti nell'economia generale della comunicazione, e quale dovrebbe essere il posto a loro riservato nella didattica di una lingua?

E' un fatto che l'insegnamento scolastico – per motivi che gli addetti ai lavori conoscono bene - non consente "immersioni totali" nella lingua straniera.

Ed è anche un fatto che, poiché la lingua straniera non è che una materia curricolare (una delle tante), il suo insegnamento/apprendimento è bene che proceda insieme a quello delle altre, in un'ottica formativa pluri- ed inter-disciplinare che rientra nel quadro strategico più generale e complessivo della *Educazione linguistica*.

E' questo che induce docenti, scrittori di libri di testo, *curriculum developers* - insomma tutti coloro che in vario modo si occupano di didattica delle lingue - a selezionare i contenuti linguistici secondo criteri distributivi che ne consentano un apprendimento graduale e progressivo da parte degli allievi.

A questo processo ci si riferisce quando si parla di definizione di "*sillabi*" per l'insegnamento/apprendimento delle lingue.

Un "*communicative syllabus*" è generalmente declinato secondo funzioni comunicative, abilità linguistiche, nozioni generali e specifiche, lessico, esponenti grammaticali/strutturali.

Tutte queste componenti concorrono a descrivere (a fini didattici) un quadro necessariamente "scomposto" e frammentato di un fenomeno invece articolato e complesso come quello definito "*competenza linguistico-comunicativa*".

Gli aspetti formali della lingua – o *rules of usage* - entrano quindi a buon diritto nella programmazione di un percorso di insegnamento/apprendimento linguistico, per il semplice motivo che essi concorrono, al pari delle *rules of use*, al conseguimento della competenza comunicativa.

What's next?

Nella didattica delle abilità di produzione sia orale che scritta, un approccio che tenga conto in pari misura delle esigenze di correttezza formale (*accuracy*) e di scorrevolezza ricettivo-espressiva (*fluency*) non può non prevedere, ad es., uno spazio adeguato allo sviluppo delle competenze ortografiche e lessicali.

La lingua, si potrebbe dire, è fatta prima di ogni altra cosa di parole – oltre che di combinazioni tra queste – e se non si conoscono le parole con cui chiamare le cose, se non si è in grado di comprenderle, di scriverle e di pronunciarle correttamente, vengono a mancare gli elementi essenziali della capacità di comunicare.

Questo vale in particolare per la lingua inglese, caratterizzata da un sistema di relazioni suoni-significati che talvolta anche gli stessi madrelingua stentano a padroneggiare.

Tuttavia non vi è dubbio che l'insistere sulla presentazione esplicita e sistematica di questi aspetti formali – specie se fine a se stessa e/o avulsa da contesti di lingua realizzata – rischia di rendere l'apprendimento linguistico arido, ripetitivo, nozionistico, e potrebbe far perdere di vista al discente la rilevanza di questi stessi aspetti in quanto elementi costitutivi della comunicazione verbale .

Vediamo allora che cosa si potrebbe "consigliare" (ad es. nell'ambito di un percorso di formazione) al docente che, senza dover rinunciare ai principi di una metodologia comunicativa, vorrebbe al tempo stesso rinforzare queste abilità "parziali" (*part-skills*) nello sviluppo della competenza comunicativa dei suoi allievi.

Cosa accade nella comunicazione verbale, nell'uso quotidiano della lingua realizzata?

Diciamo che ci sono delle occasioni in cui si ha bisogno, ad esempio, di compitare numeri e/o lettere. Non lo si fa mai come un'attività fine a se stessa, ma sempre con uno scopo ed in contesti precisi.

Nel caso dei numeri, ad esempio, lo facciamo quando parliamo dell'età, di date, orari, indirizzi, telefono, calcoli, ecc.

Nel caso di lettere dell'alfabeto, lo facciamo quando abbiamo bisogno di scandire una parola per qualcuno che non riesce a comprenderla

(o, viceversa, quando chiediamo a qualcuno di farlo per noi), come spesso accade con i nomi propri di persone, o di luoghi, o di cose che non conosciamo o che non sappiamo come si chiamano, come si scrivono, ecc. (si pensi ad es. a quando ci si trova a dover chiedere informazioni stradali).

Accade in particolare anche quando dobbiamo trascrivere queste parole (per es. prendendo appunti, o compilando un modulo, una scheda, ecc.), oppure se le dobbiamo confrontare con qualcosa di scritto che abbiamo di fronte a noi, e così via.[1]

Il problema è dunque sempre quello di inserire la fase esercitativa in un contesto di comunicazione che (pur necessariamente simulata), sia per quanto possibile "realistica", cioè corrispondente a quanto può verosimilmente accadere nella lingua realizzata.

Ecco che allora, in casi come questi, l'"accuratezza" che si richiede nel veicolare suoni e simboli verbali diviene non più mero esercizio ripetitivo e/o mnemonico, ma bensì qualcosa di "comunicativo", in quanto funzionale alla comprensibilità del messaggio nel suo complesso.

Si tratta in altri termini di trasformare un esercizio meccanico, come può essere ad es. quello sullo "*spelling*" delle parole, in una **_esercitazione in contesto_** , in cui la presenza di *information gap*, di *information transfer*, e di *correction for content* (laddove necessario) garantiscono il rispetto dei requisiti della metodologia comunicativa.

Lo *spelling* come "abilità di studio"

Al di là di questo, un lavoro didattico che riservi uno spazio adeguato all'acquisizione di competenze lessicali, può presentare altre interessanti opportunità, come ad es. lo sviluppo delle *"dictionary skills"*.

L'utilizzo del dizionario, sia mono- che bilingue, viene sempre incoraggiato nella didattica di una lingua straniera, ma raramente accade che si dedichino in classe spazio e tempo adeguati per questa importante abilità di studio.

Un lavoro accorto sullo sviluppo di questa abilità, oltre a guidare all'uso corretto di una risorsa linguistica essenziale quale la padronanza dell'alfabeto - e quindi dello "*spelling*" - può, tra le altre cose, prevedere la riflessione su:

- il ruolo di prefissi e suffissi nelle variazioni ortografiche e/o di significato delle parole
- la formazione delle parole, la "genesi" di queste, la loro storia, origine e/o derivazione, ecc.
- i contributi (importantissimi nel caso dell'inglese) apportati da altre lingue/civiltà, eventi storici, ecc.
- le contaminazioni e le trasformazioni - sia fonetiche che ortografiche - che le parole subiscono nel tempo e su cui può risultare estremamente utile e stimolante indagare, magari sfruttando le risorse rese disponibili dalle tecnologie didattiche (e grazie alle quali sarebbe anche possibile individuare opportunità di apprendimento cooperativo…).

Questi possono essere degli esempi.

Naturalmente si tratta di trovare in classe gli spazi necessari alla trattazione di questi argomenti.

Come d'obbligo sempre in questi casi, il problema va affrontato nell'ambito della progettazione dei percorsi di apprendimento linguistico, sede in cui vengono stabiliti quantità e qualità dei materiali didattici da utilizzare, tempi e modalità di presentazione, esercitazione, controllo, ecc.

Ciò che si vuole sottolineare qui, è soltanto l'importanza da un punto di vista metodologico di queste "competenze parziali", che mentre possono da un lato concorrere allo sviluppo della competenza comunicativa, possono dall'altro fornire al docente anche interessanti spunti di lavoro didattico.

Lo "*spelling bee*"

Non v'è dubbio che manifestazioni come lo "*SpellEvent*" abbiano apparentemente ben poco a che vedere con quanto sopra descritto.

Lo *spelling bee* è un "gioco" (ma è anche una "gara" a premi, ad eliminazione) in cui gli allievi devono scandire correttamente lettera per lettera singole parole, che vengono lette e pronunciate ad alta voce, e che loro possono non aver mai incontrato prima.

Tuttavia, le opportunità che vengono date agli allievi/concorrenti prima che siano tenuti a fornire la scansione della parola sono diverse, ed è qui che essi hanno la possibilità di "capitalizzare" sul lavoro didattico eventualmente svolto a monte dell'evento (cioè in classe). Essi possono infatti chiedere di ascoltare :

a. il significato della parola, ovvero la descrizione che di questa viene data dal dizionario monolingua, nonché la categoria grammaticale di appartenenza (nome, verbo, aggettivo, avverbio, ecc.);

b. la parola nel contesto di una frase di senso compiuto;

c. eventuali modi diversi di pronunciare la parola (es., *American English* vs. *British English*, ecc.).

Questo di per se certo non può bastare per sostenere che, soltanto in virtù di questi accorgimenti, l'attività diventi automaticamente "comunicativa".

Ma è evidente che nel momento in cui si chiedono informazioni circa contesti e significati, si attivano abilità cognitive utili a collegare la parola "ascoltata" con la parola "scritta" attraverso l'identificazione di una sua valenza d'uso.

Se sono questi i processi che si sviluppano nelle classi nel lavoro propedeutico ad uno *spell event*, forse non è il caso di definirli come attività di tipo meccanicistico e/o di semplice "memorizzazione". 2

E in ogni caso, è bene tenere presente che la consapevolezza di ciò che definiamo *language as communication,* non può maturare se non si sviluppa a monte (tramite lo sviluppo di processi logico-cognitivi) quella più generale di *language awareness*.

Per capire come usare la lingua per comunicare, occorre cioè "prendere coscienza di che cosa è", di come è fatta, di come "funziona", ragionare sulle sue regolarità, sulle sue "eccezioni", ecc. – in una parola, sul suo "sistema".

Nell'ambito di un percorso didattico che punti al miglioramento delle competenze lessicali, uno spazio dedicato alle peculiarità ortografiche della lingua inglese può consentire agli allievi di soffermarsi a riflettere, a formulare ipotesi e vagliare possibili opzioni che aiutino a ragionare induttivamente sulla "struttura" delle parole, sulla loro funzione e/o collocazione in contesto.

Ecco allora che, in un quadro complessivo metodologicamente "avvertito", un'attività come lo *spelling bee* può fornire al docente occasioni per suscitare tra gli allievi motivazioni di tipo "ludico-agonistico", senza contraddire gli assunti dell'approccio comunicativo, ed evitando il rischio di dover insistere su pratiche esercitative meccaniche, ripetitive e banalmente nozionistiche.

Per concludere…

Allo stato, non abbiamo informazioni sufficienti per valutare cosa in realtà avviene in quelle classi in cui i docenti preparano gli allievi per farli partecipare ad uno *"Spell Event"*.

Per quanto ne sappiamo, i docenti coinvolti riferiscono che l'iniziativa è, dal loro punto di vista, "utile", "motivante", "interessante", "gratificante".

Danno cioè in generale un giudizio positivo dell'esperienza, sia per quanto riguarda la fase preparatoria del lavoro in classe, che per quella dello svolgimento della competizione.

Come già detto in altra occasione, a meno che non ce lo dicano loro esplicitamente, non si può sapere cosa esattamente facciano questi colleghi in classe per preparare i ragazzi a questo compito, e come lo facciano.

Le possibilità di "approccio" sono, in teoria, molteplici.

Ci possono essere coloro che si limitano ad insistere su mere (meccaniche?) esercitazioni per sviluppare repertori lessicali e migliorare competenze ortografiche, e ci possono essere invece coloro che ne approfittano per sviluppare competenze più ampie e diversificate, del tipo di quelle a cui si è accennato.

Ma al di là di questo, non c'è dubbio che un'associazione professionale come TESOL-Italy, qualificata a svolgere attività di formazione per il personale docente della scuola, e da sempre impegnata sul terreno della realizzazione e della diffusione di "buone pratiche" nella didattica delle lingue, nel momento in cui decide di accettare il coinvolgimento in un'iniziativa di questo genere deve saperne valutare la portata e tutte le possibili implicazioni.

Nel farlo, deve essere in grado di "dialogare" e di interagire con i docenti coinvolti, raccogliendo informazioni, ponendo domande, discutendo, consigliando, condividendo, orientando sulla base di riferimenti metodologico-didattici fondati.

E questo va fatto non solo in vista di uno *"spell event"*, ma prima, durante e dopo lo svolgimento di questo, possibilmente nel corso di tutto un anno scolastico, attraverso un "filo diretto" con i docenti stessi, con i quali sarebbe in tal modo possibile svolgere una vera e propria attività di sviluppo professionale.

Ecco, forse varrebbe la pena di cominciare pensare a come cogliere l'occasione dello *Spell Event* per aprire dentro TESOL-Italy una riflessione sui possibili modi per perseguire questo obiettivo.

<u>*Other contributions will follow in the next issue*</u>

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1 Un caso a se stante può essere considerato quello del "dettato", che è una tipologia esercitativa (o di verifica) sicuramente non "comunicativa" di per se ma molto diffusa nella pratica didattica ad ogni livello, e la cui indiscussa utilità deriva dal fatto che consente di integrare lo sviluppo di abilità come l'ascolto, la lettura e la scrittura.

2 Così come sarebbe azzardato affermare che si tratti *sic et simpliciter* di un "gioco" didattico senza pretese, di quelli che si fanno svolgere di tanto in tanto in classe per non far annoiare i ragazzi e per interrompere un po' la routine dello svolgimento del programma, ecc..

TESOL ITALY on PRIMARY
by Letizia Corbucci, Rosanna Fiorentino, Ritana Leo, Lucilla Lopriore

(continued fon p.7)

* pre-service and in-service training programs that combine language and methodology preparation, that value language awareness, that develop inter-cultural sensitivity; and that enable teachers to take advantage of the wide range of pertinent online resources available;
* investments in courses which are cost-effective and foresee subsequent quality control;
* support for exchanges of schools, classes and teachers in Europe as well as regular grants for teachers to study abroad;
* awareness-building of the school authorities regarding the distinctive nature of language teaching, so that they appreciate and encourage teachers to attend training courses;
* the availability for teacher use of age-appropriate resources and materials, including audio-visual materials in the L2 with Italian subtitles.

2) awareness-building–both within and out of school in the community at large—of the value of learning other languages with the aim of fostering an appreciation of other cultures and encouraging language use beyond the limits of the classroom;

3) greater exposure to other languages by means of authentic materials, including cartoons and films in the original version, regularly scheduled and broadcast on public television.

In light of the above points, TESOL Italy suggests a reconsideration of the policies regarding early language learning in primary school which, despite a substantial investment in time and financial resources, have neither been rewarded by adequate levels in teacher preparation nor produced significantly improved results by the very young learners.

The above document reflects the position of TESOL Italy on early language learning and teacher training.

November 2011

Tesol Italy Groups

REQUISITI PER IL RICONOSCIMENTO

Si raccomanda a tutti i colleghi impegnati o che intendono impegnarsi nella costituzione di un gruppo provinciale TESOL-Italy di inviare all'Executive Committee la seguente documentazione:

1. *Elenco nominativo degli iscritti (**minimo cinque**), con allegata fotocopia della ricevuta del relativo versamento sul c/c postale n. 15774003 intestato ad Associazione TESOL-Italy, Via Boncompagni 2, 00187 ROMA.*
2. *Verbale dell'assemblea costitutiva del gruppo da cui risultino l'elezione e il nome di un Coordinatore.*
3. *Programma delle attività che il gruppo intende svolgere nel corso dell'anno scolastico.*
4. *L'Executive Committee, preso atto della documentazione prodotta dal gruppo, si riunisce per deliberarne il riconoscimento ed invia successivamente il testo della delibera al Coordinatore.*

Il Coordinatore del gruppo TESOL-Italy rappresenta a tutti gli effetti l'Associazione nell'ambito della provincia in cui il gruppo svolge la sua attività ed è tenuto a presentare una relazione annuale in sede di National Committee.

I membri del Consiglio di Presidenza e la Segreteria di TESOL-Italy sono a disposizione per qualsiasi eventuale richiesta di ulteriori informazioni.

Le colleghe incaricate dall'Executive Committee del coordinamento nazionale dei gruppi sono Simonetta Romano (*e-mail:* simonetta.romano@infinito.it – *tel. 06/6390532) e Paola Mirti (*e-mail* paola.mirti@tin.it)

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