

## For Our Children. KEYWORD: Dual-Program

G.P. and L.A. (April 06, 2014)



The Advantages of Bilingualism / How to create an Italian DLP in your local PS in NYC. Meeting at the Consulate to promote dual language classes in public schools.

### **ARTICOLO IN ITALIANO >>> [2]**

She looks around and she admits it. Lucia Pasqualini, the vice consul in New York, is amazed at the vast participation. Two rooms have been prepared, a screen has been connected to a camera, to allow all of the attending audience participate. There were more than two hundred guests at the meeting consisting of three separate speaker panels. That's a big turn out for the Park Ave location, the home to the Italian Consulate General.

"It all started with an article in the New York Times that addressed a bilingual curriculum in French? English in the New York City public schools. I asked myself, if the French have as many as eight such programs why do we have only one? " states Lucia Pasqualini, Vice-Consul of Italy in New York to the i-Italy TV crew.

"We had to find a solution, the Italian and Italian American communities represent a significant part of the Big Apple, and they also need these kids of opportunities. I kept thinking for days of the



French project, until a couple of weeks later, three Italian parents scheduled an appointment with me to speak about a bilingual program. It was a sign of fate," continues the vice-consul.

The combined efforts of the Italian Consulate, IACE (The Italian American Committee on Education) together with its executive director Ilaria Costa and parents of the three parental representatives of this initiative have led to a meeting held on April 3 at the Italian Consulate General. And they all agreed: no one expected such a great and enthusiastic turn out.

"It's evident, that the need to maintain the culture and language is a fundamental for the community." said Lucia Pasqualini. Of course, the turnout at the event is proof of how necessary it is to preserve its origins using a method of bilingual education, how this is intrinsically linked one's identity.

Present at the event is Fabrice Jaumon, the Chairman of education at the French Embassy, an institution which has already started on this important path. His speech is enlightening and in a sense visionary. "It 's been a revolution for France here in New York, and began six years ago. There were only 24 children in Carroll Garden's in Brooklyn and they had no idea how this was going to end. It involved the work of the whole community. From there we went to other schools, and today we have about 300 students. And today even non-French can learn the language. This is also a great medium to spread our culture and our country here in New York."

We can say, without a doubt, that many Americans, or citizens of other countries, would love to learn Italian as a second language. The proof is in the wonderful work carried forward by IACE, offering American schools Italian courses, attended by many children who are not of Italian origin.

We interviewed the three parent representatives, whom have first turned to Ilaria Costa to bring to IACE's attention the need for creation of Italian programs.

"Despite having left Puglia, my native land, only 18 years ago to study in the North of Italy, I always feel a strong connection to my roots within me, and I want my son to grow up as an individual deeply rooted in our culture despite the fact that we live in America now. Language is the medium through which we can pass this on to our children. This is the reason why I am here, " said a mum, Piera Bonerba to i-Italy TV.

"One thing that I find very interesting is that while in Europe studying more than one language is currently considered necessary, in the United States this is not always the case. The fact that a child is able to speak more than one language can only be an added value in this country," said Marcello Lucchetta, one of the student's fathers.

"Very soon my son will speak better English than I do, but I do not know if his Italian will ever be as good as mine. The study of language is not just about talking, learning a language is a way to enter into contact with the culture of that language and that is a very important aspect," said Martina Ferrari, another Italian parent.

The three parent representatives, along with many other parents, have an active blog which gathers the information required to locate schools interested in this initiatives. The publication of the first results is scheduled for April 20.

The dire need to be able to maintain a strong connection with the motherland through their children, despite being separated by an ocean, is not unfamiliar to Claudia Aguirre, CEO of the Office of the English Language within the Department of Education.

"We think it is very important for foreign students to bring their cultural baggage from home and share it with others. More than 40% of students in New York speak a language other than English in their homes, and this is a great opportunity that we want to exploit. In the city we have about 400 bilingual programs already active. Especially in Spanish and Chinese," she said.

"The culture of the Italian language is a very important part of a heritage to be preserved in all possible ways, particularly among young people. This bilingual program is an excellent vehicle for the realization of this goal," added Jack Spatola, principal of PS 172 in Brooklyn and chairman of FIAO, Federation of Italian-American Organizations. From the start he was very helpful and keen to



coordinate this initiative.

It is also a unique opportunity in terms of multiculturalism. A bilingual child will soon be an adult, who will in fact, be much more openminded in terms of respect and understanding of other cultures and all those processes of multiculturalism which we experience, especially in a city such as New York, a puzzle consisting of blocks of many different ethnicities.

A bilingual program is an excellent opportunity not only for the children of Italian families but also for the children of American families, as a means to acquire two cultures in approaching the increasingly global world.

Consul General, Natalia Quintavalle, is aware of the upcoming difficulties. There is a bureaucratic and organizational complex to be activated to create bilingual classes, starting from kindergarden level of the American public schools.

"The success of this initiative begins with the involvement and interest of the Italian and Italian-American communities, without which it would be very difficult to undertake this new and important step. If we finish this project, the families of Italian origin will continue to maintain their cultural and linguistic roots in the framework of the American educational system, providing a better chance for their children," she stated in the invitation sent out by the Consulate for this event.

The great response and enthusiasm we have seen is the first feedback, and it is extremely encouraging.

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