

# LANG matters

## Welcome back to school!

That is the main theme in this 3<sup>rd</sup> issue of **LANG Matters** - to help teachers and students get back into the swing of teaching, studying and above all learning.

This issue contains a wide selection of contributions that offer fresh ideas based on the underlying theme of facilitating students' re-entry into the classroom environment. Thus, there are articles with valid proposals for planning new projects for this new school term: the **lexical approach** for improving oral competency, how to write a **bridging module**, how to use **action research** as a means for planning and programming, **music for motivating** students.

We have a special report on the benefits and results of a study year abroad which includes some of the students' own personal reflections.

On the ever-popular theme of *external certification*, a special section has been dedicated to Pitman Qualifications with the experiences of a well-established centre in Southern Italy and some tips for the spoken exam offered by a Pitman oral examiner.

You will also find for the first time CHALK TALK, a special section for you where you can put your questions, doubts, queries to our team of authors and consultants.

Hope you enjoy reading this issue of **LANG Matters** and that you may find the ideas and suggestions useful for keeping that summer spirit alive in the class and *staff* rooms!

Buon anno scolastico!

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# Studying abroad for a year

by Kim Grellier

September, the month for great ideas and project planning! Why not offer your students the opportunity for an all-round learning experience in another country? That would really make the difference...



## Taking off to a valuable learning opportunity

**A**s an English teacher working in an Italian state high school, I have recently had firsthand experience of a new and interesting learning opportunity: three of my students have taken part in an international exchange programme.

It is now possible for Italian students aged between 16 and 18 years old to live and study abroad for either six months or a year during their fourth year without losing their right to go into the fifth year. This is regulated by the following laws: art. 14 del regolamento scolastico del Regio Decreto – 4/5/1925 n. 653 and Circ. Min. n. 181 del 17/3/1997.

## Six months in Australia

**T**he advantages of this experience seem to outweigh the difficulties our students encounter as they adapt to a completely different home and school environment. As Laura, who spent six months in Australia explains: “The first day at school was weird: I could understand the teachers and the staff, but I couldn’t understand the guys at school, who talked too fast for me and in “Aussie” slang, which is completely different from the English I had learnt at school.” However, after the initial shock she settled down and started to get on well with everyone. She found that her Australian host family and school mates were very friendly and as she says: “I was the “Queen” of

the school, I felt like a V.I.P. everyone knew me and they were so kind to me.”

When Laura returned in January, I could see that she found it difficult to fit back into the Italian school system. She was disorientated and so obviously missing the “Aussie” way of life (more laid-back and relaxed). However, she soon got involved in all the various school activities and is now looking forward to showing her Australian partner around Tuscany this summer.

## A year in the U.S.A.

**O**n the other hand, Giacomo seems to have found it easier to slip back into school life and has managed to catch up on subjects he did not study whilst living in the States for a year. He was struck by how multiracial American society really is. As he says: “On my first day of “High School” I met eight hundred new people: African Americans, Natives, Chinese, Russians, South Americans and Europeans were all the same “people” there.” Giacomo has definitely matured and his spoken English, with a

wonderful American accent, is excellent. He is now hosting an Austrian boy and by doing so, he is keeping alive the exchange experience.

### Making friends

**T**his is one aspect of the exchange that Laura and Giacomo both enjoyed; getting to know other exchange students like themselves. They met students from countries such as Turkey, Norway and Hungary to name a few and the common experience has made them close. As Giacomo remarks: “Many of these lucky guys will succeed in life like other exchange students have done so far. It’s because you have a chance to look at the world from a different point of view.”

### Exchange programme open to all students

**A**lthough the exchange programme is obviously popular among families who can afford to pay quite high fees to the exchange organization, it is well to remember, that these programmes are open to all students who have above average marks, regardless of their families’ annual income. Currently, one of my students is spending a year living and studying in Finland. When she applied last year, she was able to provide evidence of her family’s low annual income and was accepted on the programme, at a minimum cost to her family. Lucia is now so immersed in the exchange, has become so fluent that she prefers to speak in English to her sister, and only uses English in emails to her friends in Italy. One of my colleagues at school is planning to send her son to Australia on a six-month exchange and I was interested to find out what a parent thinks



about this experience. She told me that she thought it would be the chance of a lifetime for her son and because of this, she was quite willing to pay the fees required. Well, she could well be right, as Laura certainly agrees with her when she says: “I think I will always carry this experience in my heart and it will be something I won’t be able to cancel in any way.”



For further information, consult the following web sites:

[www.istruzione.it](http://www.istruzione.it)

[www.britishcouncil.it](http://www.britishcouncil.it)

[www.tesol.it](http://www.tesol.it)

[www.lend.it](http://www.lend.it)

or phone: 06 478141

or phone: 06 46742432

or contact the local Embassy Web-site for the country you are interested in.

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# BRIDGING THE GAP



by Joanna Carter  
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## Creating Real Continuity in Language Learning

Back to school for the teacher often means new classes with new students coming up from another school or in many cases different schools. Through creating bridging modules, teachers can facilitate their task of evaluation and placement and help students find their feet in this new learning environment.

It would seem that in the current educational programmes in Italy, there is already a certain degree of continuity in language learning in place. Italian compulsory education now offers children a foreign language from the age of 8. English can even start from the first class or indeed nursery school – which was the aim of Progetto Lingue 2000. Children then go up to *scuola media* for 3 more years of English and finally finish with 2, 3 or 5 more years of study at *scuola secondaria*. However continuity does not just mean providing language learning at all levels. It should also involve a continuous progression and development of that learning and smooth flowing transitions from one level to the next, from one school to the next. It is indeed this passage of students from one school, teacher or level, to the next that has always held a certain degree of difficulty. One of the reasons for this is that the methodology in the primary school is very different to that of the secondary. The young learner approach is based on total physical response, song, music and drama. There is emphasis on reception, oral production and interaction and not much on written production and grammar. In *scuola media*, the communicative approach is often limited to the

odd pair work activity or listen and repeat. The 11 year old is introduced to grammar, the use of translation and a lot of written production is required. Often the entry test at *scuola media* to assess the students' level is written. Primary school students, however, rarely develop their writing skills and have probably never done a formal written English test. The results therefore, show them to be confused and knowing next to nothing. The *media* teacher then often has no other choice than to start from scratch. Unfortunately the effects on student motivation can be devastating. Imagine an 11 year old who has just finished primary school with excellent marks in English, has produced project work, can use a bilingual dictionary and cd roms, who on his/her first day at *scuola media* discovers he/she has to start again with numbers 1-10, colours and the verb to be. This starting again attitude can have a long-lasting effect, which will create boredom and apathy towards the subject in general.

### Working Towards Continuity

One way to overcome this break in continuity and bridge the gap is to create more communication between schools. This could be done by setting up teams of primary and *media* teachers working together. The team should discuss the methodological approaches they use, what they feel the results are and whether they feel students may benefit from adopting similar approaches at higher or indeed lower levels. They should visit each other's schools and classrooms and hold lessons, talks and meetings there. All the teachers should have copies of all the materials at both levels including teacher's resources. The primary teacher should not try to anticipate materials from the *media* course book but could imitate activity types. An introduction to simple grammar activities could be very stimulating for primary pupils.

In order to create any serious continuity project teachers have to learn to work together.

Co-operation and the teacher's involvement are fundamental and cannot be underestimated.

*A bridge cannot be built from one bank alone!*

## Bridging Modules

The next step to creating continuity between schools is the development and application of bridging modules. These kind of modules can be designed in two phases. The first phase is for the

primary teacher to use at the end of the last school term. In other words it is a preparatory module for the *scuola media* including revision, remedial and consolidation activities and formative assessment that will be provided for the *media* teacher.

The second phase or second module should be planned and prepared for the *media* teacher to use at the beginning of the first school term thus a Starter module.

These two modules that are closely linked to each other create the bridge between the two levels of schools, not only for the teacher but also, above all, for the students.

There is a general outline to start planning a bridging module:

### Basic Framework for a Bridging Module<sup>1</sup>

<b>Title</b>	'Preparing for the <i>scuola media</i> '
<b>Pre-requisites</b>	it is important to set out what the student can already do. The 'can do' descriptors for level A1 of the CEF are very useful at this stage.
<b>Learning objectives</b>	teachers from both schools should work on setting these using the CEF as a reference.
<b>Contents/Steps</b>	the primary teacher then develops the contents of the module selecting materials from his/her current course book and adding materials from photocopyable resources for the <i>scuola media</i> .
<b>Learning outcomes</b>	together the teachers should decide what the outcomes for the module will be. These will become the prerequisites for the second phase in a starter module at <i>scuola media</i> .
<b>Assessment</b>	assessment has a key role as it gives the <i>media</i> teacher precious information as to the <i>individual</i> difficulties of the students, insight into what they <i>can</i> really do and examples of <i>how</i> they are used to being tested. Assessment should include self-assessment, portfolio checks and end of module tests.

Learning a language is a long process and no one teacher can expect to teach pupils all there is to know. The primary teacher sows the *seeds* of learning, the media teacher takes over the *seedlings* that are already alive and growing and plants them into firm soil. The students go up to scuola superiore where hopefully they *blossom* and will see the *fruits* of their learning in adult life. This whole *growing* process will only work however with communication and co-operation between schools and with everyone doing his own share.

*Adapted from a seminar by Sarah M. Howell at the CRT in Forlì and Cesena*

<sup>1</sup> If you would like any help in planning and preparing a bridging module for your school, your local LANG Educational Consultant will be pleased to lend a hand.

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