

**Conference on the Promotion of the Italian Language in U.S. Schools K-16  
Sponsored by the Embassy of Italy, NIAF and the American Association of  
Teachers of Italian**

Attended by Giovanna Miceli Jeffries, representing WisItalia

Washington, D.C., Saturday, June 13, 2009

The second national conference on the status and promotion of Italian in the USA was successfully organized by NIAF and the Italian Embassy of Washington D.C. to bring together representatives from various Italian-American organizations, Italian language non-profit organizations (Enti Gestori, such as WisItalia), representatives of Italian departments, Italian teachers and professional associations, consular educational officers, etc. The focus of the meeting was to assess, evaluate, discuss, share and plan issues and initiatives pertaining to the teaching of Italian in this country's public and private schools.

The goal of the conference was to visualize and encourage the creation of a sustainable network for the promotion of the Italian language in U.S. schools by understanding the challenges, and developing strategies and action plans. Participants represented all the consular areas: Boston, Philadelphia, New York, New Jersey, Washington, Miami, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

The conference was hosted in the new Italian Embassy—a striking ultramodern architecture—and started with a welcome speech by the Italian Ambassador, Giovanni Castellaneeta, and was followed by those of two Italian parliamentary members, the Hon. Valentina Aprea, from the Italian house of representatives, president of the Parliament Committee on Culture, Science and Education of the House of the Italian Parliament, and Senator Vincenzo Maria Vita, Vice-president of the Permanent Committee of Public Instruction and Culture. They talked about the commitment of the Italian government to support Italian language programs in the USA and its long history (1961).

One of the Italian government officers who represented the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs (the branch of government that deals with the Italian government relations to Italians abroad) administration of budgeting related to the funding and assessments of requests, made a strong point about the 40% cut that the current economic crisis has been forced to impose into the funding for 2010. He insisted on the accuracy and fiscal accountability of the US Italian-American organizations (Enti Gestori) in writing their budgets, especially the balanced budgets to make sure that when there is a surplus of funding (funds not used) to return those funds.

## Summary of Sessions

There were 4 sessions held throughout the day:

- a) Advocacy/Promotion/Initiatives
- b) Teacher Certification/Professional Development/Recruiting
- c) AP Italian
- d) Funding of Italian Programs

### A. Advocacy/Promotion/Initiatives

The status of promoting Italian in the USA was shown by reports of various groups, one of which representing all the organizations (i.e., WisItalia) and their work and progress; WisItalia's data and growth were highlighted.

Promoting and developing Italian as an international language in a multicultural curriculum for a multicultural society, instead of as a simple foreign language; this can be accomplished through dual language programs (similar to the Victory Immersion program) with good results at the elementary level (e.g., in New Jersey); some Italian universities already teach certain subjects in a foreign language; one example of a working model was illustrated by an Institute in the Lombardy region:

[http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Linguistic/Default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Linguistic/Default_en.asp)

Eleonora Cammareri, who chaired this panel, was quick to add at the end of the session that in Wisconsin there is already in place such a dual language program at Victory Elementary in Milwaukee.

Martha Abbott, Director of Education of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) reported that on a National Survey conducted by ACTFL, 40% of the polled students responded that they would choose Italian. She emphasized the importance to identify K-12 innovative programs that could serve as models; the key words should be INNOVATION AND REPLICATION.

### B. Certification of Qualified Italian Instructors in the US Italian Programs

A number of US universities presented their current collaborative programs with an Italian university for dual or joined language and teaching degrees granted by Italian universities; there are already in place "double diplomas" recognized by both Italy and France; the University of Perugia for Foreigners grants certificates of language competence that are recognized all over the world. What is essential is to establish "memoranda of understanding" between Italian schools and universities and US similar institutions; this will allow the exchange of teachers and of students and the reciprocal recognitions of credits and certificates earned abroad.

### **C. Future of AP Italian**

A number of initiatives and projects were presented. In general, the panelists were polarized among 1) those who stressed it is imperative to keep and secure the continuation of AP Italian programs as they are, sponsored by the College Board because of the prestige of the program and its direct translation into college credits and economic incentives (less tuitions to pay for college courses); and 2) those who are interested in alternatives to counteract what they call the “tyranny” and whims of the College Board. Some examples of these alternatives were advanced Italian courses that high school students in New Jersey take at Seaton Hall University and which are recognized at the college level, called Project Acceleration. In the Los Angeles area in California, some local Community colleges recognize Italian classes taken in high school and give credits for them. The problems with these alternative programs are that they are linked to single or limited colleges and therefore do not have the nationwide recognition and choices that AP exams allow.

### **D. Funding of Italian Programs**

The panelist who represents the Italian-American organization of the East Coast (IACE) stressed the importance for Enti Gestori (i.e., WisItalia, Italdeia) to become self sufficient and self supporting in their activities of promotion and supporting of Italian programs so as to lessen their dependence on the Italian contribution (MAE funds). This can be accomplished through more aggressive marketing and larger involvement of the Italian-American communities to raise funds.

### **Some Facts Presented by the Members of the Italian Parliament:**

There is a sustained growth of interest in Italian language and culture in the world, in general, and a substantive presence in Italy of tourists, scholars and students:

- ❖ 80 US universities have a branch in Firenze;
- ❖ There are approximately 167 million people (including 58 million Italians nationals living in Italy) who consider themselves Italian speakers;
- ❖ In Japan, Italian is the third most studied foreign language;
- ❖ Within the languages used in blogging, Italian is in the 4<sup>th</sup> place;
- ❖ Around 30,000 US students go to Italy every year to study.