

# ACLE Language Camps

## Italy

### Language Training



## Good Practice Executive Summary

The Dossier is about the language activities provided by the ACLE (*Associazione Culturale Linguistica Educational* - Educational Language and Cultural Association) in its camps. ACLE is a non-profit organisation endorsed by the Italian Ministry of Education which promotes a student-based teaching method and is the first association in Italy to teach English to children through T.I.E. (Theatre in Education<sup>1</sup>) and to organise drama courses for teachers. ACLE has been operating successfully for over 25 years. The company was founded by Arrigo Speziali and is managed by a team of collaborators located in Sanremo, Milan, Naples, Rome, Roccafranca and the Veneto area.

Furthermore ACLE arranges training courses for teachers and cooperates with some Italian publishers in preparing teaching materials for English language learning.

The dossier will be focused on the language camps arranged by ACLE. The system is organized in order to provide young Italian students with fun, enriching, hands-on opportunities to learn the English language at summer-time and city camps. The Camps are located all over Italy and in the past have included locations in Rome, Milan, Sicily, Bologna, the Dolomites, Pisa, Siena, and Naples.

Each summer ACLE sends close to 400 native English-speaking tutors to around 290 camps in Italy. Camps<sup>2</sup> are either city-based (City Camps or High School) or residential (Summer Camps), can last one, two or three weeks and provide Italian participants with a complete English-speaking environment. Both types of camps are overseen by an English-speaking Italian camp director. Directors are usually English teachers and, in the case of City Camps, usually work at the host school.

In general the ACLE camps aim to: provide a full-immersion experience in English for Italian students who are unable to spend the summer in an English-speaking country; create enthusiasm and motivation for new

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<sup>1</sup> “The conceptual framework of Theatre in Education (TIE) was established in Britain by Bertha Waddell in 1937, when she was given permission by Glasgow’s Director of Education to take performances into primary schools. TIE was subsequently developed by practitioners such as Brian Way who «stated formally that the second of the three aims of his company was to assist teachers in all types of schools with methods of approach to drama in education» (...) Research demonstrates the effectiveness of this practice in teaching and learning particularly within the field of personal and social health education, and social exclusion (Blakey et al. 1991; Perry et al. 2002), and there is also evidence to suggest that TIE «has the potential to, but does not always, influence young people’s attitudes» (Sykes 2005: 4)”, Aita, S. (2009), *The Theatre in Language Learning (TiLL) Model. Exploring Theatre as Pedagogy in the L2 Environment*, “Scenario”, 1, p. 48-49.

<sup>2</sup> Promotional videos of the camps can be seen at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzRDxRv84CM> or at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jM8TyWKIB-Q>.

multicultural experiences; demonstrate that the traditional Italian teacher-centred scholastic system of “chalk and talk” fails to stimulate the emotions and energy that an entertaining atmosphere can provide.

For the last several decades, ACLE educational programmes engage students physically, emotionally, and rationally. The slogan ACLE uses to recruit tutors all over the world is “motivate and inspire”.

The applicant tutors need to: be native English speakers without speech impediments or strong regional accents that would impede from being understood by Italian learners of English (ACLE phones to the applicants in order to state the real accent); be preferably between the ages of 20 and 30 or have completed a minimum of one year at university, college or experienced a gap year; be in possession of a valid passport; be energetic, positive, flexible and know how to smile.

The practice is not specifically directed to workers, but the methodology used and the background didactic framework are innovative and could be usefully transferred in other fields and contexts, especially those where oral competencies are needed.

Every year there are almost 150.000 people attending ACLE activities in Italy; more than 25.000 of them participate to the various kinds of camps.

In the end, ACLE is also engaged in proposing projects against school abandonment in Italy.

## **1. The needs analysis is based on a complete, up-to-date conceptual framework.**

The camps activities are strictly based over a deep analysis of participants' needs and pre-requisites. Some entry tests are provided and the camp directors also divide participants by age. Then, during the activities, the tutors support the staff in better arranging the level groups in order to make them homogeneous. The level is based on the social and cultural background of each participant, in order to have single focused activities for each one. The CEFRL reference levels are A1, A2, B1 and B2 both for entry levels and for exit outputs. After the camps, the participants have to take an oral test and are provided with a final certificate and a portfolio including the activities carried out.

The main didactic objective of the camps is to enhance the participants' aural comprehension and oral production, in order to let them achieve, at the end of the period, the following targets: being able to use a better fluency and pronunciation; using English more spontaneously and with less fears; opening to new intercultural experiences

## **2. Training is focused on the acquisition of the needed competencies identified through the needs analysis.**

The activities are based on the linguistic traits identified in the prior carried out analysis and on the elements of the CEFRL level, with specific attention on participants' needs and objectives; that is on what they intend to do with language. There is a continuous contact and reference with the real world. The camps are entirely conducted in English and allows learning in a spontaneous way and in an environment that is completely different from school. Camps do not only provide language experience, but also an intercultural exchange

There are no previously arranged syllabi, but activity groups are built on the experience and on the location of the camps, involving the cultural aspects of the various seats, and being characterized by games, songs, drama, sports and so on. The core word of the whole programme is "motivation": that is a motivated person feels much more comfortable in learning and acquiring the language.

Tutors must have not only mother tongue language skills, but also psychological and relational competencies, in order to come into a real emotive relationship with the participants.

## **3. Training objectives are realistic within the timeframe.**

Both the initial and the target level of trainees in the language/culture is considered along with the number and frequency of training sessions. The objectives are attainable within the specified timeframe of each camp.

In details the camps are characterized as follows:

- "City Camps" are usually held at a local school and the children come five days per week, generally from 9 to 5 and are coordinated by a camp director who is a local teacher, while tutors are hosted in either a flat or by a family who opens their home to them;
- "Summer Camps" are residential and usually held in a hotel where the children come and stay for a week at a time, while tutors also stay at the hotel and work all week with the children, providing activities such as lessons, drama, games, sports and evening activities;
- "High School Campus" is a programme for high school students, aiming at providing students with a rich cultural and linguistic experience adapted to their ages, abilities, and interests.

A typical day at a camp is, generally, arranged according to the following timetable:

- 09,00 meet the tutor, warm up with English songs and fun activities;
- 09,30 active graded lesson with language practice;
- 10,30 break;
- 10,45 continuation of the lesson with songs, games and leisure activities;
- 12,30 lunch break;
- 14,30 arts and crafts, theatre, City College games, fun quiz;
- 15,30 break;
- 15,45 Olympic games, sports, theatre, videos, writing your newspaper, digital camera challenge;
- 16,45 home time.

#### 4. Training is based on an updated didactic framework.

The learning methodology and philosophy of ACLE camps and activities is summarized in the acronym R.E.A.L. (*Rational Emotional Affective Learning*), which can be included in the group of the so-called Affective and Humanistic Approaches to Language Teaching, with references to the humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers. The active involvement allows participants to be at the centre of the learning process and transform language learning into language acquisition<sup>3</sup>, which contributes to store all language structures in the long-term memory.

The great importance given to the teaching of culture in the camps refers to the work of Byram (1997)<sup>4</sup> who implemented a model to include the didactic principles of the intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

People who want to become tutors apply for getting the job by sending a CV. Those who are considered valid have to follow an online course with a series of modules that will be evaluated by ACLE. At the end of the course, prospective tutors are given a 4-5 day introduction to TEFL Orientation Course before being sent to one of the camps.

The field course prepares tutors for their role by providing them with exciting activities, songs and games which can help students acquire the English language. In addition, tutors are sent to camps with manuals that contain plenty of ideas for dynamic lessons, drama activities, and classroom management techniques. Of course, the tutors' own creativity, input and ideas

<sup>3</sup> Krashen, S.D. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*, Oxford, Pergamon.

<sup>4</sup> Byram, M. (1997), *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.

are essential for making the camps more enjoyable for the students and themselves. Knowledge of songs and suitable games is vital, while some knowledge of drama will be highly useful. ACLE's introduction to TEFL is an intensive but fun course, with a high level of involvement and interaction expected from everyone. The topics generally covered during the orientation include discussions and hands-on activities in the following areas: an introduction to the ACLE philosophy and methodology; the power of theatre and play in learning, including ideas and instructions for creating drama sketches; how to communicate verbally and non-verbally with Italian people (speaking speed, intonation, pronunciation, the association of language and action/object); how to grade the tutor's language according to the syllabus and the comprehension level of the students; teaching materials for the Summer/City Camps; how to create lesson plans that balance games, drama and student workbooks; major grammatical structures; language games and songs; how to utilise and assess the children's workbooks; how to assess the children's oral language skills; Key TEFL concepts such as repetition and error correction; how to manage challenging situations that could arise concerning the children, the host families, Italian culture, etc.

## **5. Training incorporates some element of retroaction.**

At the end of each camp, the participants and their parents are asked to fill in feedback forms, in order to help ACLE to provide a better service both on a social and on a didactic point of view. Parents are asked to answer a series of multiple choice and open questions about: if English or other languages are spoken in the family; if his/her son/daughter studies English at school and/or outside the classroom; if his/her son/daughter has ever had any experience abroad or in another ACLE camp; opinions on the experience at the present camp and if he/she would like his/her son/daughter to participate to another ACLE camp the following year. Participants are asked to answer a series of multiple choice and open questions about: a general opinion about his/her experience at the camp; the aspects he/she has appreciated more; how he/she thinks his/her English has improved; the possibility to repeat the experience the following year.

## **6. Training takes into account a maximal number of constraints: absence, diversity, time and place.**

After the camps, each participant is provided with access passwords for the online platform "Play Zone" (<http://play.aclezones.it/>) containing games, songs, pictures, quizzes, arts and crafts, and other materials in order to continue practising the language. All the online activities are linked to the camp experience, furthermore, through the platform, each participant can stay in contact with the camp tutor.

## 7. Transferability assessment

### 7.1. Evidence of transfer

The policy has been transferred all over Italy for the last 28 years and the camps have been arranged almost everywhere in the Country: both in small towns and in cities<sup>5</sup>.

### 7.2. Innovation

The policy is highly innovative with no barriers to a potential transfer, since it is an example of how motivation and direct involvement can have positive results in language learning. Innovation can be also identified in the major purpose of the project: start spreading the “culture of language learning”, in terms of communicative competences to be owned by the speaker of a foreign language, expressed in the “can-do” statements of the CEFR level descriptors.

### 7.3. Dependence on political context

The ACLE philosophy strictly disrupts the general teaching methodology adopted in Italy for language learning, since its is mainly learner rather than teacher centred. The participants take an active part into the learning / acquisition process and are responsible for their choices. Furthermore, the camps offer the possibility to everyone to be in a real English speaking environment not really going abroad. The general results are very good because the language awareness of each participant is always higher at the end of each camp.

### 7.4. Flexibility

This policy appears to have some degree of flexibility. The same programme could be applied to other languages, while the overall methods and system would remain the same. Moreover, the goals described above were mainly linked to the European strategy outlined in Lisbon in 2000 and, for this reason, could be widely recognized all over Europe. Anyway, it could be necessary to define transversal plans of adaptation in order to make it fully flexible, especially in the work fields.

### 7.5. Multi-region transfer

The programme allows for multi-regional transfer, in principle, to any global region, to any region within and outside the EU and to an unlimited number of EU regions and extra-UE Countries. The target sector (students) does not limit multi-region transfer. However, adjustments might be made in order to better adapt the programme to a wider extent of flexibility.

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<sup>5</sup> Examples of transfer can be found on the ACLE website or obtained by the key contact.