

BLENDED LEARNING BEST PRACTICES

Hybrid Italian L2 courses	
2015	Municipality of Milan, Pepe linguistic center (PLO)
Element	Guiding questions
Type of document	Experience sheet
Publisher	Rosetta Baccari
Target audience	Migrants
Field	Language learning for migrants
Objective	Deepen the knowledge of the Italian language L2 for upper-intermediate learners (course level: C1)
Location /geographical coverage	City: Milan Region: Lombardia Country: Italy
Introduction	The course was held at the Pepe linguistic center (PLO) of the Municipality of Milan. Here, a 9th level Italian course for foreigners (corresponding to level C1 of the CEFR) was launched, structured according to the "class + on-line" mode, a hybrid course which therefore includes, in addition to the development of skills, among its objectives communication and didactic objectives foreseen for this level, the achievement of the CILS 4 certificate.
Stakeholders and Partners	The blended Italian L2 course saw the participation of 20 learners (19 females and 1 male of different L1s - Spanish, Russian, Romanian, Polish, Danish, German) of C1 level. The course provided, for each week, three hours of classroom lessons plus one hour of online activities to be carried out at home according to the timing and needs of each user.
Financing Body	The cost of the courses is almost completely subsidised by Comune di Milano (Milan City Council) in order to give non-Italians a chance to enrol in our adult education courses.
Context	Over the last decade, the migratory phenomenon in Italy has increased considerably, especially in large urban areas, such as the city of Milan. It is therefore becoming increasingly important to promote the integration process, including through the teaching of the Italian language. Language training is the primary and privileged tool for adequate integration and for the protection of rights, because it allows insertion into the new social context, avoiding exclusion and marginalization.
The main objectives	Improve the level of knowledge of the Italian language of the participants, facilitate the processes of social integration.

The description of the practice

During the training course, the face-to-face and online lessons were structured to be, as in a virtuous circle, the completion of each other: the classroom lesson prepares the work to be done on the platform, the lesson on the platform enriches and prepares the next classroom lesson, where what was learned online was consolidated. All the activities planned and carried out during the course have been designed to allow each user to practice listening, understanding and production (written and oral) and to further develop, given the high level of knowledge / competence of Italian from part of the students, all the linguistic-communicative skills necessary in the natural contexts of communication and in the different domains in which the use of the language takes place (public, personal, work, educational). The teacher was able to wisely combine the dialogic-communicative approach, centered on negotiating topics, attention to the message and the ability to understand and communicate effectively (without however neglecting formal and grammatical correctness), with the humanistic-affective one, centered on the attention placed on the emotional and affective sphere of the learner with the aim of removing those factors that can limit learning (psycho-affective resistances and filters, negative self-perception, absence of a sense of belonging and participation in a community, etc).

The online lessons represented within the course a moment of integration and enrichment of the activities carried out in the classroom. They were created with the use of Moodle5, a free open source e-learning platform (technically defined LCMS6).

The platform, which virtually reproduces situated and complex contexts, has the advantage of offering a great variety of paths, alternatives and multimedia tools that allow the student to learn, interacting with other members of the community, establishing forms of collaboration, help and exchange of knowledge / information. The learner can customize their learning path according to their own rhythms and needs, thus perceiving themselves as more active and free than the traditional face-to-face lesson.

The learning environment was organized as follows:

- a) a service area with: a pre-course questionnaire; presentations by the teacher and students (forum "useful things to know about the course"); communications from the teacher; attendance register with calculation for each student of the total time spent online; logbook (i.e. the weekly update of what was done during the face-to-face lesson and the weekly delivery); "Help!" section; progress badge that is obtained at the end of a specific course in recognition of the work done; Interval forum with proposals for meetings outside the school and reports of interesting events.
- b) a workspace dedicated to actual teaching activities which includes: learning materials (summary sheets of the grammar rules and structures studied, audio lessons, interviews), sheets on Italian culture; exercises and tests created with the hotpotatoes software (multiple choice quizzes, true / false, matching and reordering sentences), links of interest and / or support to classroom lessons (youtube videos, blogs and pages related to the topics covered) and tags, internal and external resources to the platform (dictionaries, notes, text files), a forum and a wiki.

Success Factors	Openness to innovation, participation, integration actions
Constraints	In online courses there is a risk that the student will feel less helped, followed and motivated. In fact, the student does not receive immediate feedback (communication with the teacher and classmates is mediated by the computer) and may also have difficulties in managing technical problems relating to the use of materials or the platform's features. In this sense, the development of a blended course can be very useful, if the face-to-face lessons are used as an opportunity to overcome these difficulties.
Lessons learned	It is important to know how to seize new opportunities in digital innovation.
Sustainability	Social and economic investment in integration processes is essential for a more peaceful future.
Development of the practice	The courses are offered every year by the municipality of Milan.
Conclusion	Teachers who want to use multimedia platforms within the hybrid courses of Italian for foreigners can have very valuable resources to enrich the teaching/learning process of the Italian language. To fully exploit all the potential offered by technologies, however, it is essential that they "open up" to them and prepare to accept the challenges posed by the information society without reservations or fears.
Related resources that have been developed	Educational material on the Moodle platform
Language(s)	Italian
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