

# ACTAS

## I Congreso Internacional de Enseñanza de Inglés en Centros Educativos

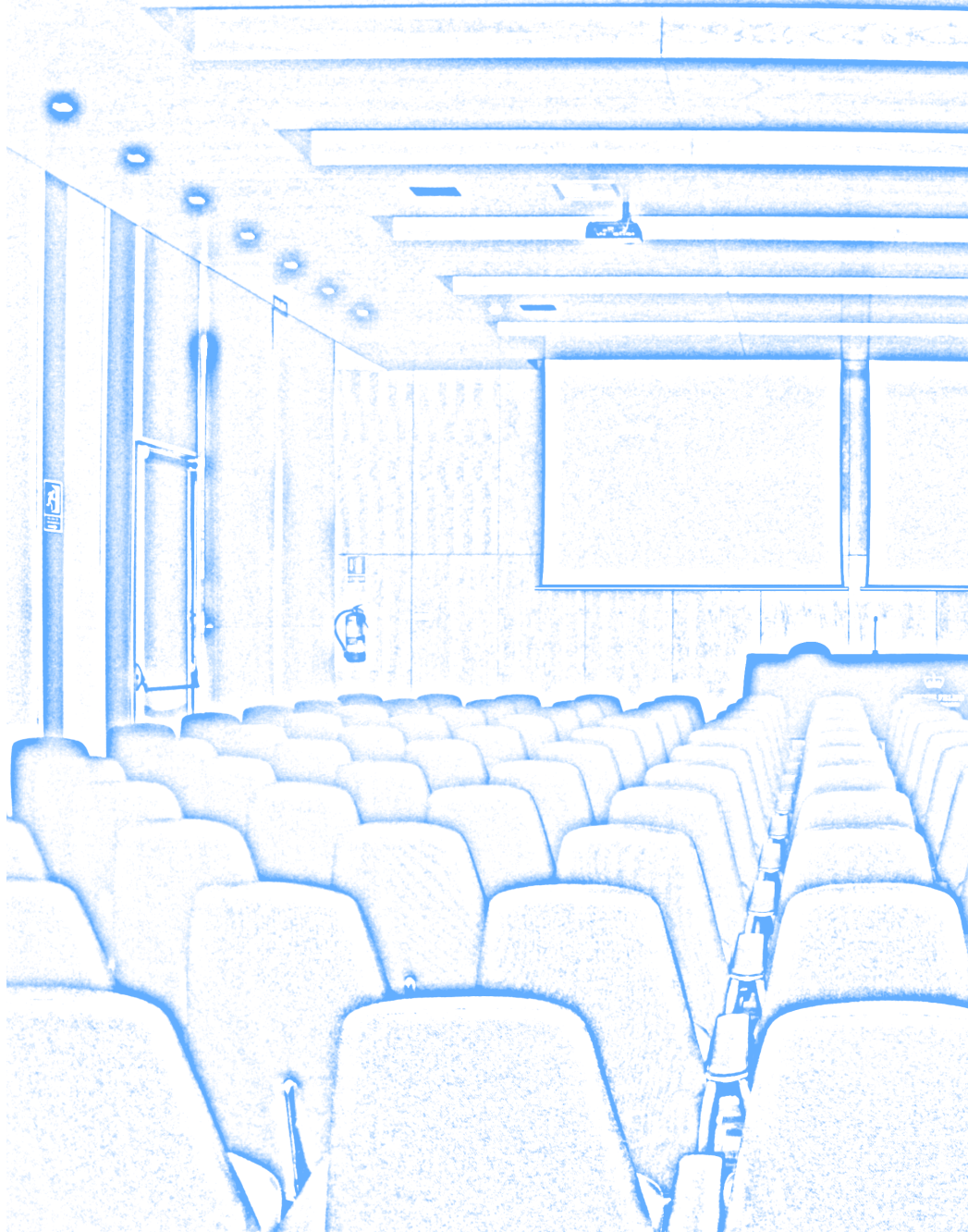


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Enseñanza de Inglés en Centros Educativos**



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(Coordinadores)



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## How can learning and development be fostered amongst teachers in bilingual schools?

SARAH PRIESTLEY. BILINGUAL PROJECT COORDINATOR, BRITISH COUNCIL MILAN, ITALY

What springs to mind if you are asked to identify what is at the heart of a successful lesson? Surely many factors. These may include students being motivated, students taking risks and lessons that are practical. In this article I propose that for successful bilingual education we also need to focus on the role of the teacher by ensuring that training motivates teachers, encourages them to take risks in the classroom and is practical. The British Council Italy Bilingual Education Consultancy Service strives to provide training and support that contains these features.

This article is based on the experience and lessons learnt from the Bilingual Education Consultancy Service that the British Council Italy offers to schools wishing to teach part of their curriculum in English. Key learning points are also taken from a 5 year project between the Italian Ministry of Education and the British Council Italy from 2010 to 2015, where 6 primary schools in the north of Italy taught core subjects in English.

The first strand of the Bilingual Education Consultancy Service that teachers come into contact with is the face-to-face training course we deliver in Italy. All teaching staff and school management are strongly encouraged to attend the training course to ensure that all staff understand the beliefs and teaching approaches behind learning in a bilingual school. Our training courses are very practical in nature. Teachers experience lesson activities first-hand and then plan lessons, based on ideas and teaching techniques they have seen on the course. Group lesson planning and peer feedback are also built into the training sessions so an environment of sharing and learning is created amongst all the staff. At the end of the training course teachers have a whole array of lesson ideas and teaching techniques to try out in their class. What could be more motivating?

The second strand, following on from the training course, is support throughout the academic year through the bilingual teacher mentoring scheme. This provides academic support to individual teachers, where the teacher identifies personal teaching areas of development and an action plan is then drawn up to achieve these goals. Monthly phone or Skype calls are agreed upon between the teacher and myself to discuss progress and any related questions or issues. I encourage the teachers I mentor to experiment in class and we then discuss their own reflections afterwards.

The third strand is access to an online group of other bilingual teachers in Italy through the platform [www.edmodo.com](http://www.edmodo.com). It's like a virtual staffroom, where the teachers and I can post messages about a great lesson we've just taught, share a link to a useful article or upload teaching materials, such as a worksheet or lesson plan. The aim is to bring teachers together in order to share experiences, teaching tips and materials.

Finally, the fourth strand, that pulls the other 3 strands together, is the school visit. We visit the schools once or twice a year to observe the teachers in class and to meet the School Head for an update on the bilingual programme. Afterwards, the teachers receive written individual lesson feedback, with suggested further reading related to their teaching skills and the observed lesson. Areas of personal interest or to be further developed arising from the observed lesson can easily be included in the teacher mentoring scheme.

What are the lessons I have learnt from coordinating the Bilingual Education Consultancy Service in Italy? Teachers may need time to take in and absorb the content of sessions from the bilingual training course. Giving the wide levels of English amongst the teaching and school management staff, there should be careful consideration of the groupings of staff for pair and group activities and also the time needed to complete tasks. On the plus side I have found that these training courses provide a great and often rare opportunity for the whole school to come together and learn and share ideas.

Regarding lessons learnt from the mentoring scheme, I believe that focussed and personalised tasks encouraging teachers to experiment in class work best. This is then followed up with guided reflection questions



for the teacher to consider. The online Edmodo support group needs careful setting up and managing and active online teacher participation can be encouraged in a variety of fun ways. See the end of this article for a link to my article on how to do this. By encouraging teachers to be a part of the lesson observation process (for example, by encouraging them to identify areas for the observer to focus feedback on) the school visit and lesson observation can be seen as a positive and developmental opportunity for the teachers.

To conclude, by intertwining the 4 strands together (a practical training course, teacher mentoring in the academic year, online collaboration with other teachers and schools and lesson observations which are developmental and forward-looking) I believe we have the key ingredients to foster learning and development amongst teachers in bilingual schools.

### **Sarah Priestley**

Sarah's teaching and teacher training career over the last 20 years has taken her to Eastern Europe, the Far East and Europe. She currently works at the British Council Milan and is Bilingual Project Coordinator Italy, as well as a teacher to both adults and young learners. Sarah is also a Cambridge CELTA and Young Learner extension tutor and has trained both teachers working in the state sector and in ELT. For further information please contact her at [sarah.priestley@britishcouncil.it](mailto:sarah.priestley@britishcouncil.it)

### **Useful links**

<http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/continuing-professional-development/nurturing-professional-development-online-community> for my article on setting up an online teaching community through Edmodo. More articles on professional development and how the British Council supports English Language teaching around the world can be found at English Agenda <http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHQMjY9eLxg> for a video about Sarah's typical day at the British Council Milan.

<https://www.britishcouncil.it/en/english/training-services/schools/bilingual-education> for a video on the 5 year Bilingual project between the Italian Ministry of Education and the British Council Italy. Details of our Bilingual Education Consultancy Service in Italy can also be found here.

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/> the British Council and BBC website for lesson plans, teaching methodology articles and news for teachers of adults, young learners and teens.