



## Service Learning in Italian

A range of service learning modules are available at NUI Galway whereby students undertake accredited activity of specific relevance to their chosen subject for the benefit of the community

Teaching Context	
Subject	Italian
Department	Italian Department
Participants	3 <sup>rd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup> Year Arts students
Pedagogy	Service learning / community based learning
Method	Classroom preparation followed by work in local primary schools.
Participants	20 students.
Hours	24 hours (12 in community).
Credits	5 ECTS
Materials	Classroom teaching plans and game kits.
Assessment	Assessment methods incorporate validation of the individuals' active participation in their own learning. They include: a personal learning profile, class plans and reports.
Length	Runs over two semesters
Community Partners	Scoil Bhríde, Shantalla; Belmont NS, Tuam; Scoil Chroí Íosa Newcastle; St. Nicholas NS, Claddagh; and Galway Educate Together NS, Newcastle.
Optional/Mandatory	Optional
First Piloted	2006/2007

## Introduction

Service learning seeks to reinvigorate the civic mission of higher education and instil in students a sense of social responsibility and civic awareness. It is a pedagogical tool that encourages students to learn and explore issues vital to society inside and outside the classroom. Students learn from engaging with communities by active participation.

### Service Learning in Italian

This module gives students undertaking Italian as part of their BA Arts, the opportunity to learn about language acquisition. The students put this learning into practice by teaching introductory classes in Italian in local primary schools. This initiative aims to foster positive attitudes towards language learning for all involved, both primary and third-level students.

### Academic Basis

The service learning programme is an optional module accruing five ECTS. In the first semester the focus is on the theory and practice of language acquisition and on integrating this with practical work. Lectures concentrate on topics including; introduction to foreign language teaching and language acquisition; designing a language class; the use of games as a teaching tool; culture and context; and service learning – concepts, protocol and the reflective process.

During the second semester, with the support of the academic co-coordinator, students develop 40-50 minute Italian lessons on defined areas of the curriculum. The third-level students then teach Italian in local primary schools for eight weeks.

The key objectives of service learning are to create opportunities to integrate and relate theory to practice, to enhance partnerships between the University and the wider community and to increase the civic, academic, personal and professional capacity of students through experiential learning.

### Assessment

On completion of the Italian teaching, students take part in a reflective process which is an essential element of service learning. During this process the success or otherwise of the classes are evaluated. The students must also reflect on their individual learning outcomes achieved through participation in the programme.

## Student Benefit

Service Learning in Italian provides university students with an opportunity to integrate their learning in a real context, giving them a pride in their learning and increasing their confidence as individuals, while also adding an extra element to their skills set. The module also develops links with the community, giving students the opportunity to exercise social responsibility and civic engagement.

Furthermore, students teach a class in front of their peers in order to try out some of their ideas for classes and to gain in confidence. Issues relating to classroom management are also raised and relevant strategies discussed in the preparatory classes.

## Community Benefit

The service learning module allows local primary schools access to a continental language class, without having to commit to extra resources. Primary school children who participate range from ages eight to ten and are taught in an interactive and fun way. Their interest in new languages and their aptitude for language learning are fostered and promoted.

In the pilot programme, none of the children had any previous knowledge of Italian and for most it was their first experience learning a continental European language, so the onus was on language teaching through fun and games.

At the end of the programme, the children were invited to the NUI Galway campus to participate in an 'Italian Day'. Almost 100 school children were awarded certificates for their participation in the Italian classes and took part in an Italian quiz followed by pizza.

## Academic Comment

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Dr. Anne O'Connor of the Italian Department at NUI Galway, commented on the success of the pilot service learning module, "This is an innovative way of providing exposure to language in primary schools, at no extra cost to the school, with benefits for all. The University students benefit by getting involved in community and gaining practical teaching experience. Primary school children benefit from increased exposure to modern languages so that when they progress to second level, they will not be daunted by the prospect of learning a new language. The schools also benefit from the University's support in developing and maintaining a foreign language curriculum".