



End of Year Report for Board of Directors *The Sicilian Project*

12/12/12

Submitted by Donnamarie Kelly Pignone

What started out as a project with a mission to teach English in Sicily quickly metamorphosed into an injection of hope and inspiration for the Sicilian families and students *The Sicilian Project* touched. In July 2012 the first group of 10 middle school students arrived in class eager to learn and committed to taking full advantage of the opportunity *The Sicilian Project* afforded them through the generosity of U.S. Italian-Americans and friends of Sicily. Although one of the prerequisites was previous study of the English language in school, along with a teacher's recommendation, it was quickly recognized that the students were near absolute beginners. With the creativity and skill of a seasoned teacher, Deb Bennett achieved significant success with the first group as evidenced in their development from having difficulty introducing themselves, to completing final projects involving conversations in real life situations. The videos chronicling the students' progress clearly illustrate the students' growth. By the finish of the first session each of the students was requesting to continue and additional parents and students were contacting Babilonia to apply for the program. Fortunately funding was available for both continuation of study for the first group and the addition of a second group of slightly older students. At present, *The Sicilian Project* has funded and completed five sessions in Taormina – three sessions by the first group and two by the second group and interest is still strong. The students understand that there are many other students anxious for the chance to replace those already in classes so they recognize the importance of producing results.

Site of classes – Babilonia – Center for Italian Language and Culture

Babilonia , an Italian Language school and cultural center programs are housed at "Casa Silva" an historic villa, just 200 meters from the Greek Theatre. The villa is hidden from view by an impressive stone wall that separates it from the steps of Via Timoleone. Built in 1811, in the park that at the time included the current public gardens, the property was owned by Professor Salvatore Cacciola, mayor of Taormina for many years during the 19th century and husband to Lady Florence Trevelyan, a cousin to the

English royal family. The villa still today boasts a luxurious botanical garden filled with citrus trees, Mediterranean plants, centuries-old palms, monkey puzzle trees and magnolias, as well as many other exotic trees and plants.

“Casa Silva” is protected by the Sovrintendenza alle Belle Arti (the National Agency for the preservation of Art and Monuments) which means it is historically registered as a national site to be preserved by law.

At “Casa Silva”, BABILONIA hosts Book Presentations by authors, a Cine-Forum and in summertime, Painting and Sculpture exhibitions in its 1,000 square meters of botanical gardens. Additionally, Live Theatre Performances and Live Concerts (jazz and classical music) are offered. In the net-café located in the WI-FI garden students enjoy their leisure time under the lush green trees to study, relax and meet their classmates.

A kitchen hosts cooking courses and students can buy coffee, cappuccino, fruit salad, croissants, cakes and typical Sicilian dishes in our cafeteria.

While maintaining its high caliber of academic teaching qualities, Babilonia is not just a language school, but truly a Cultural Center, open both to the local community and to international students who gain a wider cultural experience and the chance to easily interact and integrate with the local community.

Babilonia is accredited by:

- the Italian Ministry of Education
- A.S.I.L.S. - Association of Schools of Italian as Second Language -
- the University for Foreigners of Perugia as Authorized Exam Center
- the University "Ca' Foscari" of Venice as Teacher Training Center for graduating teachers of Italian as Foreign Language Master ITALS
- Agency for Higher Education for C.S.N., for loans and grants to students in Sweden
- Frei and Hansestadt of Hamburg for Bildungsurlaub in Germany
- U.S. College & University Credited

All teachers at Babilonia are university graduates (most hold Master's Degrees) and speak at least one or two other foreign languages. Most have studied foreign languages at university and abroad and all have been trained to teach Italian as a foreign language. Teachers participate in an in-house teacher training program along with regularly scheduled teacher training seminars and workshops offered by the A.S.I.L.S., and other professional national and international organizations. English and Russian are also taught at Babilonia and the faculty for these languages are equally certified and trained.

For a visual presentation of the school click on the video at: www.babilonia.it

Alessandro Adorno, Founder and Director Babilonia – Center for Italian Language and Culture

After completing his university studies in Foreign languages (translation and interpreting) in Florence, being a native Sicilian, Adorno founded Babilonia - Center for Italian Language and Culture with the intention of offering those who love Italy and the Italian language and culture an opportunity to learn Italian in Sicily. Adorno's dream to teach Italian in the south of Italy was considered ridiculous at the time. Through Adorno's persistence, Babilonia now celebrates more than 20 years of passionate dedication to promoting Sicilian heritage and culture along with teaching the Italian language to numerous students from around the world.

Sample Student Agreement for *The Sicilian Project*

Through the generosity of Sicilian Americans, the foundation, *The Sicilian Project*, has been established which provides scholarships for Sicilian youth interested in learning English in Sicily. The mission of the project is to advance Sicilians in their knowledge of English in order to increase the future economic opportunities for young Sicilians.

Grazie alla generosità della fondazione dei Siciliani in America, sono state istituite delle borse di studio per i giovani siciliani interessati ad imparare l'inglese in Sicilia. La missione del progetto è di promuovere i siciliani nella loro conoscenza della lingua inglese al fine di aumentare le future opportunità economiche per i giovani siciliani.

Students accepting a scholarship from *The Sicilian Project* scholarship must agree to the following/

Gli studenti beneficiari della borsa di studio "*The Sicilian Project* scholarship" si impegnano ad accettare le seguenti condizioni:

- Student must attend all classes (see dates below).
- Student must arrive on time and attend entire lesson.
- Student must complete all assignments prior to class.
- Student must have an introductory knowledge of English.
- Student must participate in all classroom activities.

- Lo studente deve partecipare a tutte le lezioni (vedi le date di seguito).
- Lo studente deve essere puntuale e partecipare all'intera lezione.
- Lo studente deve eseguire con diligenza i compiti prima della lezione del giorno successivo.
- Gli studenti devono avere una conoscenza di base della lingua inglese.
- Lo studente deve partecipare a tutte le attività in classe.

In support of *The Sicilian Project*, Babilonia – Center for Italian Language and Culture, Via Timeleone 10, Taormina is providing a fully equipped classroom. Debbie Bennett, the teacher of the course, is certified in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) and has a specialized certification in teaching middle and high school students. All students who complete *The Sicilian Project* English language course satisfactorily will be issued a certificate.

A sostegno del *The Sicilian Project*, Babilonia - Centro di Lingua e Cultura Italiana, Via Timeleone 10, Taormina metterà a disposizione un'aula attrezzata. Debbie Bennett, l'insegnante del corso, è abilitata all'insegnamento dell'inglese come lingua straniera (TEFL) ed è specializzata nell'insegnamento agli studenti delle scuole medie e superiori. A tutti gli studenti che completeranno il *The Sicilian Project*, corso di lingua inglese, in modo soddisfacente, verrà rilasciato un certificato.

Classe date:
PM to 7:30 PM

Class tempo: 6:00

Lun. Lul 2	Mer. Lul 4	Ven. Lul 6
Lun. Lul 9	Mer Lul 11	Ven. Lul 13
Lun. Lul 16	Mer. Lul 18	Ven. Lul 20
Lun. Lul 23	Mer. Lul 25	Ven. Lul 27
Lun. Lul 30	Mer. Ago 1	Ven. Ago 3

Name of Student/Nome Studente: (in stampatello) _____

Address/Indirizzo:

Telephone

Number/Cellulare: _____

Name of Parent/Nome di un genitore: (in stampatello) _____

Telephone Number/Cellulare:

By signing below I agree to the above conditions and accept a scholarship for English classes from *The Sicilian Project*.

Firmando accetto le condizioni di cui sopra e accetto la borsa di studio per un corso di inglese istituita dal *The Sicilian Project*.

**Signature of Student/Firma dello
studente:** _____

Signature of Parent/Firma del genitore:

I agree to allow my child's photo to be taken as part of The Sicilian Project reports and promotion.

Sono d'accordo per consentire foto di mio figlio da adottare nell'ambito delle relazioni sui progetti siciliani e la promozione.

Signature of Parent/Firma del genitore:

Students who have completed one course during the summer and two sessions in the Fall

FILISTAD	CLAUDIA
CACOPARDO	CLAUDIA
PRIVITERA	DEBORA
CARDONE	FEDERICA
PREVITI	FRANCESCA
PREVITI	CHIARA
ROMEO	ADRIANA
CACOPARDO	AGNESE
PUGLIA	GIULI
BENIGNI	DAVIDE

Student who joined the first group in September to replace BENIGNI DAVIDE who was unable to continue classes in Fall.

MAZZALA	FLORA
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Second group which started in September and completed two sessions in the Fall

LOMBARDO	GABRIELE
D'AGOSTINO	ALESSANDRO
BUCIUNI'	ENRICO
LA FACE	LETIZIA
GULLOTTA	DARIO
GULLOTTA	FRANCESCA
RUSSOTTI	ANTONIO
ARDITO	GIAMMARCO
CACCIATORE	SIMONE
GRASSO	DARIO
CIFALI	SIMONE

Introductory videos are posted on the *The Sicilian Project* Facebook page.

***The Sicilian Project* Syllabus for 2012-2013 classes**

The following are the main weekly points covered over the Fall and those which will be covered in Spring classes. The topics are adapted depending on how each individual group progresses. Discussion and pronunciation work will be a specific focus rather than some of the grammatical points as students receive very little work in these areas in the Sicilian school system. Themes/activities roll over to the following lesson when it is considered beneficial to the students.

Main points and grammatical /lexical areas covered:

1. Getting to know you

- meeting new people, introducing yourself
- talking about your life and asking about others
- discussing interests & hobbies
- establishing class rules and the use of classroom language & vocabulary

2. All around the world

- learning about other countries & nationalities
 - cultural and language differences
 - how we learn a language
 - why is English important for you
 - making suggestions
 - study skills and discussion on ways we can improve our English
- Role play : enrolling in an American school

3. My town

- talking about Taormina
- use adjectives & comparatives
- finding your way around
- describing where things are
- asking for and giving directions

4. All in a day's work

- talking about daily routines
- using time expressions
- weather and time vocabulary
- talking about jobs at home
- using the present simple tense

5. What are you wearing?

- physical descriptions and clothing vocabulary

- talking about appearances
- introduction of the use of present continuous

6. Making plans

Using the present continuous to describe current actions

- Using the present continuous to make future plans
- How to make arrangements with others

Role play : A day out in New York/Boston

7. Let's hit the shops!

- Shopping vocabulary
- Discussion of shopping habits / use of the internet
- Useful phrases to shop

Class role play activity: shopping

8. Sports

- Sports vocabulary / verbs used for movements
- Using modal verbs to describe sport rules
- Discussing the Olympics /
- Answering a quiz on sports

9. Keeping well!

- Discussing what's healthy and unhealthy
- Practice giving people advice
- Vocabulary review of the parts of the body
- Dealing with health problems

Role play : At the doctors

10. Let's eat!

- Food types – vocabulary review
- Countable and uncountable nouns
- How to talk about local foods

Role play : Eating out

11. Yesterday

- Using the past simple of regular verbs
- Pronunciation focus of 'ed' endings
- Using music to improve pronunciation – Song

12. Story telling

- Using the regular and irregular forms of verbs to produce stories
- Recycle vocabulary studied up until now
- Practice telling the stories with a focus on pronunciation

13. That is the question!

- Studying how to form questions in English
- Looking at the use of question words and word order
- Intonation

14. At the movies

- Film vocabulary – film genres and adjectives to talk about them
- Understanding a film review
- Using questions to make a film quiz

15. My island

- Talking about Sicily
- Using adjectives to describe
- Using the correct vocabulary to describe the island's sights
- Talking about distances, travelling & transport

16. Sicily in the future

- Use 'will' to talk about predictions in the future
- Discussion on the future of Sicily

17. Future forms

- Contrasting 3 uses of future forms
- Going to, present continuous and will
- Free practice using a board game

18. Our environment

- Talking about environmental problems and solutions
- Discuss local campaigns & what we can do
- Produce a poster campaign for local area

19. Superstitions

- Discussing superstitions and customs of Italy
- Practice use of 1st conditional

20. If I saw a crocodile . . .

- Use animal vocabulary
- Practice 2nd conditional

21. Recycling

- Review of tenses and vocabulary

The last three lessons will be evaluated nearer to the time scheduled and will depend on how the courses have progressed and whether the students need more time to focus on one particular area.

Sample adjustment for levels: Lesson Making Plans – students planned a day out in the city of London using a tube map. Students were given a budget and planned accordingly. For homework they researched New York City to find out what to visit there. In the second group this was expanded to combine with the Sports lesson which described the rules and related vocabulary. Students bounced a ball around the class to learn verbs like 'pass', 'throw', 'bounce' etc. leading in to a study of the Olympics. Students then prepared presentations to promote Sicilian towns as possible host cities for the next Olympics. One group served as the International Olympic Committee and decided on the winner after questioning the applicants. Students presented their towns and logos for the games arguing the merits of the Sicilian town.

Short videos of the first sessions' final project are posted on the *The Sicilian Project* Facebook page.

Faculty: Deborah (Debbie) Bennett

In addition to Debbie's university degrees, Debbie is certified by Cambridge CELTA, the most widely recognized teaching certificate in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Since her original certification, Debbie has continued to advance her skills through workshops and conferences. Most recently, during the first two weeks of September Debbie completed a two week intensive course specifically focused on teaching children English as a Foreign Language resulting in her attaining the Young Learners Extension Certification. At Babilonia Debbie has been highly successful with her students of English which has earned her significant respect and warm appreciation by her students. The first group of Sicilian Project students arrived with limited knowledge and exhibited substantial improvement at their last class session. The 100%

student attendance of classes and enthusiastic continuation of the students' study is a testament to Debbie's outstanding teaching skills, her relevant lesson plans and her creative classroom exercise.

The Sicilian Project 2013

In 2013 The Sicilian Project will expand to include two more locations: Catania (Sicily's second largest city) and Gaggi (a rural agriculturally based town). Additionally in Taormina, current teachers of English in the Sicilian school system are being offered an intensive advanced English program. All three programs will begin the third week of January.

The targeted student population in Catania is young adults who live in an area of the city which has been challenged by unemployment and resulting criminal activity. This project is particularly important to Alessandro Adorno, the Director of Babilonia, as he is Catanese and is committed to improving the opportunities for these challenged youth. Classes will be housed in a youth hostel which is centrally located in the area targeted. The director of the hostel is enthusiastic about partnering with Babilonia in order to promote a positive change and optimism for the future among the youth.

Gaggi is a small town with a forward thinking mayor who is working on creating business opportunities in his town. Since Gaggi is significantly agricultural, the possibility of creating agritourism is being considered. For any business to be successful in attracting visitors, knowledge of the English language is required for workers. With the Schengen Agreement which allows for citizens of any of the 26 country participants to move and work easily in Italy, workers from outside of Italy are being hired to work in businesses in Sicily since many from Schengen countries have a strong background in the English language. Jobs that could be filled by Sicilians are going to non-Italians. Therefore the programs established by *The Sicilian Project* are critical in assisting to improve the employability of Sicilians not only globally, but also within Sicily.

The intensive teacher workshops are intended to increase the English language proficiency of the current teachers of English in Sicilian schools. This program will be organized so that it can also be delivered in the Catania location should funding become available. Teachers have already expressed an enthusiastic response to the proposal.

The beginnings of the *The Sicilian Project* have been resoundingly successful as evidenced by the significant improvement in English language skills in the early participants. It has also been successful in recharging the spirit of the Sicilian families who are benefiting. There is a genuine appreciation for the opportunities that the

organization is providing. Attached is a short, heartfelt note written by some of the students involved. Two short video thank you messages are also attached. Babilonia looks forward to partnering with *The Sicilian Project* in its mission.

Attachments:

Thank you letter from *The Sicilian Project* students

Thank you video message from *The Sicilian Project* students