

Premessa

di James E. Purpura

Since the 1950s Italy has increasingly captivated the imagination of the world. It is a country where layers of historical intrigue provide riveting texture and depth, where cultural exploration and accomplishment have offered the world defining moments in art, music, film, and literature, where style, fashion, and design propose new imaginings of an Italian aesthetic, and where its wine and cuisine nourish the world physically and emotionally. It is also a country where tourists flock abundantly, where the decedents of its emigrants yearn to return to, and where one of the world's largest economies affords a life style comparable to few. The privileged place of *italianità* in the world has created a concomitant interest in learning the Italian language and enjoying its culture from up close. This interest has also generated a clear need for highly professional teachers of Italian as a second or foreign language (L2), as well as a need for assessment experts armed with the latest tools available in educational and psychological measurement, researchers capable of formulating questions and providing empirical solutions, and last but not least, teacher educators competent in and excited about shaping the next generation of Italian language teachers. The book, *La NUOVA DITALS Risponde 1*, edited by Pierangela Diadori and Elena Carrea, takes us one step further in accomplishing this mission by engaging teachers in a substantive discussion of the material they will need to have control over when taking the DITALS, the exam certifying their competence in Italian language pedagogy (Certificazione di Competenza in Didattica dell'Italiano a Stranieri). *La NUOVA DITALS Risponde 1* is composed of six sections. The first provides 15 very interesting articles on how to teach Italian to students who represent different age groups (Italian for children, adolescents, adults and mature learners), different social groups (Italian for immigrants, for heritage language learners), different learning contexts (Italian for university students, for clergy in the Catholic Church) and different first language backgrounds (Italian for speakers of Chinese, Japanese, Arabia, and German). These articles demonstrate how a teacher's knowledge, skills and abilities needs to be adapted to the different learning contexts, and how the sociocultural contexts impact the linguistic and socio-cognitive factors of teaching a foreign language.

The second section of the book is dedicated to a discussion on how to prepare to take the four sections of the exam. Each of the four articles provides a description of the test purpose, the allocation of grades, examples of the test with informative commentary, and practical advice for succeeding in the respective section of the exam. The tests themselves attempt, like few others in teacher certification exams, to measure not only critical components of linguistic knowledge about the Italian language, but also applications of that knowledge to solving pedagogical problems. To this end, teachers are asked to demonstrate their ability to exploit authentic texts for different learning contexts related to different proficiency levels. Finally, they are also asked to consider the assessment of learning outcomes, mostly in the form of classroom tests. This exam clearly provides a comprehensive attempt at measuring a very complex construct.

The third section of the book provides teachers with 8 articles in which a range of

resources are described. For example, one article provides an overview of Italian language textbooks, another describes Italian language teacher associations, another discusses bibliographical resources, and another provides a description of Masters programs in teaching Italian as a foreign language in Italy. These articles are intended to encourage teachers to access these important resources for further development.

The fourth section of the book is devoted to a description of the preparation of Italian language teachers in different national contexts. More specifically, the book includes articles on teaching Italian in Germany, Portugal, Macedonia, New Zealand, and Australia. In each article, critical sociocultural features of context are described along with a range of topics relevant to each respective context. This section shows how teaching Italian can differ significantly from country to country, and should provide an essential resource not only for those within the country but also for those considering teaching positions abroad.

The fifth section of the book is dedicated to a discussion of ongoing projects and research related to *DITALS*, where four initiatives are describe. In sum, similar to past versions of the book, *La NUOVA DITALS Risponde 1* effectively captures the enthusiasm and professional formation of the burgeoning field of teaching Italian as an L2. It offers a cogent and comprehensive state-of-the-art coverage of essential areas of the field for those wishing to prepare for the *DITALS*. This book should certainly be of interest to students and teachers of Italian language pedagogy as well as to others in the broader field of applied linguistics.

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