

A PARENT'S VIEW ABOUT OUR "LIGHT ITALIAN CLASSES"

A chat with Marco's mum, Angelica, about our relaxed classes, with a higher level of support for students with special needs or learning difficulties

by Ester Cilento

In January this year we started our Light Italian Classes and we are happy so see that the feedback we are receiving is very positive. Here we chat with the first parent that chose the class for her son.

Hi Angelica, thank you for accepting this interview. I am so glad I met you and your son, Marco. It is a real pleasure to play and learn with him in our Light Italian Class. It's now almost three months that we started the class, is Marco enjoying it?

Hi Ester, thanks for asking me to participate in this interview. I'm happy to have the opportunity to talk about my experience with Light Italian lessons. Marco has been doing Italian lessons since the beginning of the year, and I can say he enjoyed them from the first session.

I think it is important to underline that my family is half Spanish and half Italian and my four children (now 13, 12, 9 and 6 years old) were born in Italy and lived there between eight and two years. When we moved to England in 2016, it was clear to us that we would need to do an extra effort with the children to keep their fluency in our native languages, Spanish and Italian. For that reason, from last year we decided to look for a private tutor for two of them, the 12 and 9 years old. My eldest son has Down syndrome and needed a different approach for his learning. I didn't want a formal and traditional lesson, I needed something practical, or what is called functional communication.

Our idea was exactly to offer classes for children with special needs. It seems so difficult to find them. What did you think when you read our advertisement? Why did you decide to enrol him?

It sounded that it was what I was looking for! Something focused on communication and adapted to people with disabilities. I was already convinced about the benefits of learning a new language on a cognitive level: improve memory, concentration, listening skills, and so on. I only needed to find the right tutor for my son. I always try new activities for all my children, but especially for Marco, as I see it's quite difficult to find something in which he can participate. Marco is home educated since the first lockdown. He is very happy being at home and learning at his own pace, but under the actual circumstances, he has lost opportunities to do activities in groups or with other adults. These sessions were an opportunity to socialize in Italian out of the family. Another reason was that for him speaking in Italian represents a secure space. Italian is his first

language and makes him feel at home. It was a very positive situation for him: socialize in Italian with more people, learning to communicate more effectively in his first language and finding a secure space where he can be understood more easily. After our first conversation, I decided to enrol him.

Marco is a happy and sociable boy indeed, it is just a joy teaching him. We are playing and doing activities on greetings, rooms, furniture, position of objects in the house, numbers, colours, food, simple recipes. Last time we played a game that involved asking each other to do something. I am trying to stimulate him to use two or three words in a simple sentence and we are regularly reading Italian phonemes. Do you see an impact of the class on his communication, on his Italian and on his English or Spanish?

Absolutely! I have to say that Marco has also weekly sessions of speech therapy as well as lessons in English. But what I see is that the combination of all his learning is now having a clear result: he can read better and easily both in English and Italian, his comprehension has improved as well as his communication. I can't say the impact that every activity is having on Marco, but globally, all these activities have helped him to improve his communication and wellbeing. Marco participates with motivation in everything he does, he is happy and willing to learn more than ever, and for the first time, he is applying his knowledge and using it. Marco definitely benefits from having lessons in Italian, for the structure of the sessions, for the language, and for your patience and empathy.

I am very happy you and Marco feel so, for me it is a pleasure. Would you recommend our Light Italian classes? Why?

Yes, I would recommend it. Our experience is very positive for the reasons I explained above.

Is there anything else you would like to say about this experience for Marco?

We are already waiting for the next session, and what I would love is that Marco could speak with other peers in Italian. I'm waiting for the possibility to do sessions in small groups. That would be great!