

Arizona State University Student Experiences Italian Classroom Life

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PERUGIA, Italy — There is no better way to experience a culture than to be immersed in it – just ask Arizona State University student Ayanna Akinyemi, who’s studying human development as it relates to interactions across cultures in Italy this semester. Akinyemi is taking the “Human Development in Culture” class at the Umbra Institute, a study abroad program in Perugia, Italy. The course includes a service-learning project focused on engagement with two different Italian schools.

Led by Professor Christian Tarchi, Human Development in Culture combines theory and practice with a hands-on project that places students in the heart of Perugia’s community. Through visits to two separate Italian schools, Umbra students acted as both observers and participants in the classroom.

First, the class visited a Montessori elementary school in Perugia to observe student and teacher interactions, classroom organization, and teaching styles. These observations will be used in an ethnographic research project on the implicit school curriculum. The second school visit allowed students to actively participate in the life of an Italian classroom. Akinyemi and her classmates led English language activities with the Italian students to research the interactions within the space.

“What I found most interesting was that children are children no matter what part of the world you may be in,” Akinyemi commented. For their English activity, she and her partner sparked the third-graders’ imaginations by talking about superheroes and super powers.

The principals of the two schools enthusiastically embrace collaboration with Umbra students because it gives local children the unique opportunity to practice English with native speakers rather than passively listening to the language through tapes and lectures.

In addition to this course, the Umbra Institute offers an Education Internship each spring that features weekly visits to Italian classrooms. In these courses, students gain intercultural communication skills, work with Italian teachers, and explore how their roles as interns connect them to the local community.

Along with bringing change to the community in Perugia, the students themselves have also been affected by what they have experienced in the course. “The kids knew all about the superheroes and were eager to talk about them. It was really cool to see that they were as excited about it as many other children in America would be.”

The Italian students were equally enthusiastic about meeting new American friends, demonstrating that a love of learning transcends cultural boundaries.

About the Umbra Institute:

The Umbra Institute is an American study abroad program located in the central Italian city of Perugia. Often called a “big university town in a small Italian city,” Perugia is the ideal setting to [study abroad in Italy](#), with fine arts, business, and liberal arts courses. It also offers a wide range of service-learning offerings including academic internships and community-based courses. For more information about the Umbra Institute, see the website above.



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