

TRE LINGUE TURNS 10

Brisbane's only tri-lingual conversation group, Tre Lingue, celebrates its 10th anniversary this year.

Tre Lingue participants meet once every month at the Coffee Club in West End to speak in French, Italian and Spanish.

The group breaks into smaller groups and rotates groups or languages as desired.

Tre Lingue was founded in 2005 by Alex Stratton-Funk and Mark Carrol. Both are language enthusiasts and students at UQ's Institute of Modern Languages (IML).

It is free to attend, and speakers of all levels are welcome.

Group founder Alex Stratton-Funk said that Tre Lingue was a freestyle conversation group, not a language school.

"We have about ten people on average. About a third can speak two or three languages. If you can speak one language, that's fine. If you can speak three, that's fine," he said.

"I change places for the meeting, I speak Italian for a little while, and Mark speaks French for a little while, then we wrap it up in the afternoon and get some Spanish in. Your mind goes through all three languages, which is the ultimate European experience."

Mr Stratton-Funk was inspired to create the group after a trip to Europe.

He was sitting at a breakfast table at which people were speaking different languages, seamlessly moving from one to another.

He wanted to recreate that with Tre Lingue, to improve his language skills and also to become more comfortable switching between the different languages.

"With Tre Lingue the three languages aren't diverse. Grammatically they're virtually 80-90% identical. So you may not know the vocab but you know the grammar."

Mark Carrol, Co-founder of the group, shares Alex's enthusiasm for



foreign languages.

A speaker of Spanish and French, Mark started to learn Spanish before a trip to Peru. "I'd always wanted to learn a language and I really immersed myself in Spanish for 18 months before I left; 12 months of that at the IML."

Both Mark and Alex have studied a variety of languages at IML, including Spanish, French, Indonesian, Dutch and Chinese. Mr Carrol said that he found IML to be a very beneficial place. "It really did help me at work," he said.

"I started working for a big Belgian company. It helped me understand a bit more about the culture. They were very impressed. The General Manager thought it was fantastic that an Australian had actually gone to the trouble of learning it."

Mr Stratton-Funk said that he had started to learn Italian because he married an Italian.

His mother also spoke Italian and Spanish because she had lived in the Philippines.

"It's good PR on my part, to be accepted by them," he said.

"It's also exploring my past. In my experience at IML, a lot of the students were from those sorts of families. They have gone looking for their languages later on. I've probably been at IML for 15 out of the past 20 years."

A ten year anniversary is significant

for a group like Tre-Lingue.

Mr Stratton-Funk said that he had been in other foreign language conversation groups over the years and that they had only run for one or two years, while Tre-Lingue has endured.

He believes that the key to their success has been their unique combination of three languages, as well as their monthly schedule. "People have got busy lives these days," he said.

Mr Carrol added that meeting only once per month, instead of weekly has meant that they always have something to talk about.

Tre Lingue participant Liana, a writer and published poet who was attending the group for the second time, said that she came to the group because she wanted to practice her Italian.

"I was in Italy for 3 or 4 years, but I get no practice. This is what I'm looking for. Maybe I can pick up some French as well; I studied French at school," she said.

"I just enjoy coming here so much. I'm really looking forward to coming every month now."

Tre Lingue meets on every 3rd Saturday of the month at the Coffee Club at West End.

Tre Lingue website:
www.trelingueconversationbrisbane.info

IML-UQ's recreational languages courses:
www.iml.uq.edu.au