THE PLURALITY OF ENGLISH AND ELF
IN TEACHER EDUCATION
Raising awareness of the 'feasibility' of a WE- and ELF-aware approach in classroom practices

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Abstract - The plurality into which English has developed, and its extended lingua franca role, have significant implications for ELT. Besides being taught as a foreign / second language, English increasingly constitutes a consistent presence in the 'outside-school' world, and encounters with (linguistic) otherness can be experienced daily, from the multicultural and multilingual school environments to mobility and digital communication. Raising awareness of the multifaceted sociolinguistic realities of Englishes and ELF in teacher education constitutes a first and fundamental step towards a more 'inclusive' and 'realistic' approach in ELT. If language educators are familiarised with the complex reality of English, and critical reflection on its implications in ELT is actively promoted in teacher education, teachers can not only realize the 'feasibility' of a WE- and ELF-aware approach in classroom practices, but also its 'suitability' to prepare learners to communicate through English in its current plural and lingua franca dimensions. An example comes from the pre-service TFA (*Tirocinio Formativo Attivo*) and PAS (*Percorso Abilitante Speciale*) teacher education courses held at the University of Verona, where part of the English Language Module focused on issues related to WE, ELF and their pedagogical implications. The Module aimed at fostering awareness of WE- and ELF-related issues, as well as critical reflection on beliefs deriving from traditional Anglocentric approaches. This, together with the WE- and ELF-aware material evaluation and the design of activities and lesson plans, that were also part of the Module, can be seen as a starting point to encourage and support a WE- and ELF-aware pedagogic perspective, one that sees communicative 'capability' (Widdowson 2003, 2012, 2015; Seidlhofer 2011, 2015) as an important aim to prepare learners to become effective and competent ELF users in today's world.

Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca; teacher education; WE- and ELF-aware pedagogical practices; English Language Teaching.

> *It is interesting to note that learners who are inhibited in school later manage to lose their inhibitions through communicative participation in authentic speech fellowships and communities of practice*
> (K. Kohn 2015, p. 64)

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1. World Englishes, ELF and teacher education

The plurality into which English has developed has been documented by research concerning World Englishes varieties and, more recently, English as a Lingua Franca. Even though ELF is a relatively recent research field, it has thrived for almost two decades now, providing an ample body of literature and findings as to its uses, users, contexts and functions in several domains, from academia to business. Interest in the implications that ELF has for ELT has grown significantly over the last ten years in particular, and implications of ELF research in and for ELT have been widely examined and discussed in terms of materials, classroom practices and, maybe even more extensively, teacher education. There has been an increasing interest in the role teacher education can have in the promotion of a reflective approach towards a WE-, and above all, ELF-aware perspective in English language pedagogy and ELT. A significant number of courses and programmes are being implemented in different parts of the world, as a growing body of literature shows (e.g. papers in Matsuda 2012, 2017a; Vettorel 2015a; Lopriore, Grazzi 2016; Cogo, Bowles 2015; Bayyurt, Akcan 2015a; Tsantila, Mandalios, Ilkos 2016). Generally, most of these teacher education proposals include aspects related to knowledge of the sociolinguistics of WE and ELF, as well as of issues their complexity raises (such as the ownership of English, alternatives to the native speaker model, plurilingual and pluricultural repertoires of bilingual speakers of English, implications in and for ELT). Most programmes also highlight how an understanding of these issues ought to be accompanied by critical reflection on current practices in ELT – both at a general and at an individual and local level, as well as by the evaluation, adaptation and development of materials and lessons plans that are informed by awareness of ELF and, more generally, of Englishes. Bayyurt and Sifakis (2015b, 2017), for example, maintain that ELF-informed teacher education should be developed along three phases: exposure to the complexity of English usage; critical awareness, both internal as to beliefs and convictions, and external as to the current complexity and variability of English; action plan, experimenting with material design and classroom implementation. In addition, experiences of these proposals for teacher education programmes often include examples of (online) resources and guiding lines, both for teacher education (e.g. papers in Matsuda 2017a; Vettorel 2015a; see also Galloway and Rose 2015), and classroom practices (e.g. papers in Alsagoff *et al.* 2012, Matsuda 2012; Lopriore, Vettorel 2015, 2016).

Providing examples of resources and involving teachers in designing WE- and ELF-aware classroom (localized) activities represents a fundamental moment to raise awareness of a WE- and ELF-informed

approach, first of all since it can contribute to bridge the gap between theory and practice – that has often been identified as one of the main drawbacks for teachers in implementing a plurilithic pedagogic approach to WE and ELF. Consequently, and particularly when active reflection is carried out as a shared scaffolded and collaborative moment (e.g. Marlina 2017, p. 111), it can allow teachers to realize the 'feasibility' of implementing a WE- and ELF-aware pedagogic approach in their pedagogical practices, alongside awareness of its importance and relevance in preparing learners for the complexity of communication through English today.

2. Issues involved

According to Sifakis (2017, p. 2) ELF awareness comprises three main components: "awareness of language and language use, awareness of instructional practice and awareness of learning". The first includes aspects related to language awareness, as well as "developing awareness of the processes of languaging […] and translanguaging" (Sifakis 2017, p. 4) in ELT pedagogy. The second component concerns the extent to and the ways in which an ELF-aware approach correlates with teachers' (and other stakeholders') beliefs and attitudes towards issues such as "normativity, appropriateness, comprehensibility and ownership of English by native and non-native users alike" (ibid.). The third component, awareness of learning, should take into account the ways in which the roles of 'learner' and 'ELF user' are closely interrelated due to the innumerable opportunities of communication experiences through ELF – both digital and face to face – in outside-school contexts (e.g. Seidlhofer *et al.* 2006; Vettorel 2014).

All three components, and the second in particular, can be set within the call that has been made for a post-normative framework (e.g. Dewey 2012; Blair 2015), whereby a critical view on how established beliefs about languages (and communities) as fix(ed) and separate entities are increasingly being challenged, responding to the deep sociolinguistic modifications English has seen over the last decades, particularly in the fluidity and hybridity of ELF communication. ELF research in teacher education has shown that

> [t]eachers have strong convictions about their role in the ESL/EFL classroom that is often in contrast to their perspective about what their learners need in order to be successful communicators. Research shows that, while there is a growing acceptance of the need for learners to use English successfully in communications involving other nonnative users, teachers consider their role in the language classroom to be one of the custodians of Standard English. (Bayyurt, Sifakis 2017, pp. 3-18; see also Vettorel 2015b, 2016)

Teacher education constitutes hence a fundamental step towards a possible realistic enactment of an ELF-aware approach in classroom didactic practices. Unless the plurality into which English has developed (WE), and its use as a lingua franca functional variety become part of teachers' knowledge and (professional) awareness, a move towards a plurilithic and ELF-aware approach in ELT would be difficult to envisage. First, teachers who have been in the profession for some time may not be familiar with WE and, above all, ELF, nor with the pedagogic implications and issues related to SLA(T) that have been increasingly raised in the last decade, by ELF and by other areas of sociolinguistic research. Furthermore, teachers' beliefs – deriving both from their experiences as learners and as EFL teachers, may be so consolidated that resistance to change is prevalent. Familiarizing (prospective) teachers with both WE and ELF would allow situating the latter within more general issues of language variability and language change, as well as language spread, globalization and superdiversity, moving away from a 'deficiency' paradigm, too.

Dealing with such topics and issues in pre-service teacher education appears even more fundamental: ELF research involving trainee teachers of English seems to point towards a shift in perspective (e.g. Bayyurt, Sifakis 2015a, 2015b; Lopriore 2016; Vettorel 2016; Vettorel, Corrizzato 2016a, 2016b) with a positive opening towards an ELF-aware approach, that may thus hopefully inform future generations of English teachers.

Teacher education can hence play a major role in: 1. familiarizing teachers with the issues brought about by the complex sociolinguistic realities of Englishes and ELF today; 2. promoting critical reflection on a) their beliefs and perceptions, b) how they relate to 1., c) how to take them into account in their (localized) pedagogic practices. With Sifakis, teacher education can prompt "a reflective dialogue *both* with their specific and broader teaching context […] *and* with their own deeper beliefs and convictions about language, communication and their own role in the ELT classroom" (Sifakis 2017, pp. 10-11; see also Sifakis 2014). As Matsuda argues, given the current complex sociolinguistic reality of English, "ELT must reflect, and also must prepare students for, this 'messiness' of English, and […] the traditional approaches to ELT do not do an adequate job in doing so" (2017b, p. xiii).

In this perspective, WE- and ELF-informed teacher education can promote reflection also on ELT practices in general (Sifakis 2017), on long-standing tenets, e.g. the supremacy of the native speaker model, native-like proficiency, as well as the prevalence of Anglo-centred perspectives in ELT. With Seidlhofer, looking at how ELF works in practice "can also make a valuable contribution to rethinking priorities for teaching", focusing attention on elements that are salient for effective communication 'despite' their non-

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conformity to SE norms (Seidlhofer 2011, pp. 207-208), and on the fact that "what is significant about ELF is not the non-conformist form it takes but how the forms function, how they are put into strategic communication" (Seidlhofer 2011, p. 198).

Teacher education can hence trigger critical reflection as to the challenges posed by a WE- and ELF-informed perspective in "a safe space for transformation", that can provide "invaluable scaffolding as participating teachers engage with and process the idea to make it their own" (Matsuda 2017b, pp. xv-xvi). Besides, active and critical reflection can foster appropriation and informed awareness of how adopting a WE- and ELF viewpoint does not mean '*to teach* ELF', nor should it be conceived of as 'a battle against EFL'. ELF-awareness is certainly not a pre-defined and imposed set of prescriptive 'rules' (Jenkins, Cogo, Dewey 2011; Seidlhofer 2011), nor "a new 'method' or 'approach' to teaching", (Sifakis 2017, p. 7). Rather, an ELF-aware pedagogy involves a shift in perspective, one that takes account of the current realities of how English is used, with teachers "co-constructing appropriate ELF-related methodologies for their learners" in their local contexts, within an 'ecological approach' (Sifakis 2017, pp. 9-10), creating links with learners/users' of English actual current and/or future experiences of language use and communication.

Along the same line, Kohn (2015, 2016) argues against a separationist view of ELF/ELT, and sets forward the case for a 'weak' vs. 'strong' orientation to Standard English in teachers' conceptualizations of language learning and classroom practices. A weak orientation

> incorporates a social constructivist view according to which learners take some kind of SE as a target model that provides orientation but at the same time leaves room for the cognitive and emotional processes by which they create their own brand of English (thereby appropriating English for their own purposes). (Kohn 2016, p. 26)

As Kohn reiterates elsewhere (2015, p. 64), rather than subscribing to a "behaviouristic cloning understanding of learning" with a strong SE orientation, a 'weak version' "opens up a new pedagogical perspective for a differentiated range of ELF-related learning objectives and activities beyond issues of normativity". Including awareness-raising moments in ELT, as well as activities related to comprehension and production skills and communication strategies, Kohn argues, would contribute towards the development of ELF competence and effective communication in the complexity and fluidity of ELF.

3. WE and ELF in TFA / PAS teacher education courses: an example from practice

In Italy, the *Tirocinio Formativo Attivo* (TFA) and *Percorso Abilitante Speciale* (PAS) pre-service teacher education courses have been offered by universities from 2012 to 2016. These programmes, addressed at lower and upper secondary school would-be teachers, comprise a general part on didactics followed by a more specific one dealing with the trainees' disciplinary areas. Unless participants have at least 3 years teaching experience to attend *PAS* courses, a consistent practicum (19 ECTS) is to be carried out as integral part of the TFA programme.

Since Academic Year 2012-2013 the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Verona has been involved in both TFA and PAS teacher education for foreign languages.[1] 18 out of the total 36 hours for PAS and 12 for TFA English Language/Didactics courses were focused on WE, ELF and their pedagogical implications, and included examination of topics and issues in the following areas:

- historical and socio-cultural factors related to the spread of English and its current pluralization (WE), including exemplifications of language variation;

- English as a Lingua Franca: characteristics and functions, speakers and contexts of use;

- active reflection on the pedagogical implications of WE and ELF, including a critical evaluation of ELT course-books, and the creation of WE- and ELF-aware lesson plans and classroom activities.

From 2012 to 2016 a total of 58 teachers attended the TFA English courses and 106 the PAS ones. In general, TFA participants had less than 5 years' teaching experience, while for PAS trainees experience ranged between less than five years and 5-10 years, involving also teaching languages other than English (German, Spanish and to a lesser extent French). Findings related to a research project for TFA and PAS courses from 2012 to 2015 have been discussed elsewhere (Vettorel 2015c, 2016; Vettorel, Corrizzato 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). The research project aimed at investigating whether, how and to what extent trainee teachers' beliefs and "pedagogic knowledge" (Borg 2006) about the inclusion of a WE- and ELF-aware perspective in their teaching practices could undergo a change after attending the course.

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[1] TFA courses for prospective teachers of English, Spanish, German and French were run in Academic Year 2012-13 (lower secondary school) and 2014-15 (lower and upper secondary school). PAS courses were offered from 2013 to 2016, in the last two years for English and Spanish only. For an overview of PAS and TFA courses see Vettorel, Lopriore (2017).

After providing an overall view of main results as emerging from the aforementioned research project, in this paper I will focus on findings related to the PAS 2015/16 course, particularly as to the reflective comments in the online Moodle forums. Examples of activities and lesson plans trainee teachers developed either as part of the course activities, or in their final reports, will also be illustrated.

3.1. Trainee teachers' reflections – WE and ELF

In general, the aforementioned Module on WE and ELF contributed to raise trainees' awareness of WE and ELF, of issues concerning this sociolinguistic complexity, as well as of their implications for ELT. It also helped promote awareness of how Englishes and ELF are characterized by variability and language change, which was at times related to reflections on the same processes in Italian as well as Spanish as a foreign language. The need to make students aware of these aspects and of the diversity and plurality of Englishes they encounter, and will encounter, was emphasized, too.

It should be pointed out that most teachers were not familiar with WE, and especially with New Englishes, before attending the course; many trainees explicitly stated that during their studies they were exposed to Standard British and, in some cases, American English. When awareness of the plurality of English was expressed, it was often related to their personal and/or working experiences other than teaching. As one trainee's comment sums up, "[in my job] I met people from all around the world and I understood that British English and its grammar were not the ones with the 'D.O.C.' label"[2] (SR, forum, PAS 2015/16).

Including awareness of WE and ELF in teacher education was deemed a very important point, both to foster knowledge of issues and, above all, to provide opportunities for active reflection for WE- and ELF-aware pedagogic practices (Vettorel, Corrizzato 2016b). Particularly significant were considered the critical evaluation of ELT course-books (Bayyurt, Lopriore, Vettorel in preparation), and the design of WE- and ELF informed activities and lesson plans, that were often created starting from the adaptation of existing materials (Vettorel 2016; Vettorel, Corrizzato 2016b).

As to students, it was pointed out that they are generally accustomed to American English because of films, songs, videogaming and social media (including twitter), and how these resources could be fruitfully used in teaching practices, too. Some trainees also referred to the possibility of taking

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[2] D.O.C. generally refers to locally-produced quality wine and food (*denominazione di origine controllata*); in this case the "guarantee of origin" implies a reference to native varieties of English.

into account the presence of students of non-Italian origin in their classes as to raising awareness of WE varieties.

Challenges concerning the perceived need to refer to 'normativity' in pedagogical practices, that have also been raised in other studies on WE- and ELF-informed teacher education (e.g. Dewey 2012, 2015; Bayyurt, Sifakis 2015a, 2015b; see also Vettorel 2015b, 2016), were mentioned, too. For example, one trainee teacher expressed her 'being confused' as to standardness and normativity issues in pedagogic practices as follows:

> it seems to me that we all agree on the importance of using English as LF, in a simplified way in order to keep or let communication going and that there is not a monolithic view of this language we love teaching. Yet, with all this that can't be denied, I have got a question for you, dear colleagues: can you go and take part in the funeral of the "s" of the third person singular with indifference? Today the "s" or the comment tag, tomorrow the saxon genitive. What about in ten or twenty years? Is most form dying out? Is it going to vanish from our lessons? Am I the only person who still buys books on phrasal verbs? (AC, forum, PAS 2015/16)

This kind of reflections emerged during class work, too, and were at times shared in the dedicated online forums (Vettorel 2016), where the perceived challenges a WE- and ELF-aware perspective poses to well-established beliefs prompted comments and discussion, as the following reply to the previous comment exemplifies:

> I agree with you, A. The fact that English has become an international language seems to be a sort of justification. But I think that it's not a question of laissez-faire or being easy-going. We should be aware and make our students aware that the world is evolving constantly and spoken languages represent the world and its changes, in primis SE. And this interpretation does not mean to deny the importance of what we were taught or what we are teaching now. (FB, forum, PAS 2014/15)

The opportunity to share reflections like the ones exemplified above in a 'safe place for transformation' was an important element also to reflect on their own experiences as L2/ELF users and as teachers in a new light. For instance, internationally oriented school exchanges – and above all eTwinning,[3] were widely mentioned as a highly relevant ELF-aware pedagogical tool, above all since they can promote opportunities for learners to communicate with peers of other linguacultures through English in its lingua franca role. Several trainees had positively experienced international exchanges either as learners,

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[3] https://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/index.htm; e.g. Vettorel (2017); Kohn (2016); Kohn, Hoffstaedter (2017) and Grazzi (2016) for telecollaboration.

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or in their teaching. One trainee teacher, reflecting on her experience when she was a secondary school student in two international exchanges, one involving other young people from Belgium, Great Britain, Spain, Greece and Germany in France and the other Danish students, commented that

> as we shared neither a common first language we chose ELF as our language of communication and even if I'm sure we made some 'mistakes' […] they were generally unproblematic and no obstacle to communicative success. I agree with E. that the most important aim is 'to keep communication going'. (ADM, forum, PAS 2015/16)

Other trainees, always referring to similar experiences their students had, shared the following reflections:

> Some of my students were very proud trying to converse with them [students of different L1s] [...] sentences were not grammatically correct and sometimes lexis was not appropriate but dialogues were on and they were satisfied. (FB, forum, PAS 2015/16)

> In the hostel, they [my students] met a group of Spanish students and they tried to speak together. At the beginning, my students were not at ease because they wanted to be grammatically correct as their English teacher taught them. I tried to explain them that the most important thing was to be effective. I told them to make short and clear sentences, with few subordinate clauses. I also suggested not to worry about mistakes and that we would have talked about them afterwards. Little by little, they understood what I meant and the communication with the Spanish kept going on. During our way home, some of my students asked me to reflect about their and their Spanish friends' mistakes. They also wanted to understand what kind of English they had used in their conversations, because they were aware that it was not the British English they were studying at school. I tried to explain them that what they committed were not properly mistakes but simplifications and simplifications did not stop communication. In front of a mistake people usually stopped talking because they wanted to be correct, but the interaction was not successful any more. We agreed that the language they had used was a sort of passe-partout to keep in contact with people from different countries and speaking different native languages. They used ELF. (SR, forum, PAS 2015/16)

These comments show how communication exchanges occurring in authentic settings can constitute not only real opportunities to experience language use in ELF contexts, but also prompt meta-reflection on how 'communication in action' works in these contexts. In the words of two trainees, "ELF belongs to the 'real world' that exists outside the language classroom" (SB, forum, PAS 2015/16); "one of teachers' aim is to teach with links with real world" (PAS 2013/14, forum). After realizing a WE- and ELF-aware lesson plan in class,

another teacher said that "[students] looked far more interested; in a sort of way they felt it really had to do with the world around us. And I could involve some students that come from WE environments too. So it was really engaging" (BT, interview, PAS 2012/13).

In this perspective, it should be noted that several trainees made specific references to the importance of including in classroom practices Communication Strategies and accommodation skills as tools that would prepare students to effectively communicate 'beyond standardness'. For example, commenting on the language use dimension in class activities, one trainee shared the following comment in the online dedicated forum:

> I always emphasize the fact they do not always have a prompter next to them in real life and so, they have to find a way to communicate, no matter how. I often suggest paraphrasing as a useful tool and I make them explain or give a definition of some words using only English words. Sometimes, we play a sort of timed game: I give them a situation and they have to set up a dialogue speaking with a partner trying to manage the conversation without any help and pretending the other person has not got all the day long to wait for the information. (CU, forum, PAS 2015/16)

The issues on WE, ELF and their implications for ELT discussed in the PAS and TFA courses can be said to have fostered awareness of, critical reflection upon, and active engagement towards a WE- and ELF-aware shift in perspective, that was then reflected in the activities and more articulated lesson plans that were devised by the trainees, as the next section will illustrate.

3.2. Teachers' proposals – examples of ELF-aware lesson plans and activities

In this section, some examples of ELF-aware activities and lesson plans that were devised by the trainee teachers during the PAS and TFA courses will be briefly illustrated[4]. In general, the plans and activities can be grouped into the following four main areas:

a) English(es) in the World: fostering awareness of the spread of English, of its diversification and of language contact (English with other languages, other languages with English);

b) Varieties in World Englishes (Inner and Outer Circle);

c) English as an International Language / English as a Lingua Franca;

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[4] For further examples see Vettorel 2016; Vettorel, Corrizzato 2016a, 2016b.

d) Intercultural perspectives in World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca.

The activities that were developed at times cut across the four areas, and aims such as the development of communication strategies and intercultural communication skills were often present as an underlying thread in several lesson plans.

The "English as a Lingua Franca in Venice" lesson plan (MDA, final report, PAS 2014/15) is addressed at lower secondary school students. After an introductory lesson based on the textbook in use and aimed at raising awareness of the spread and diversification of English in the world, the activities are centred on language use in an ELF context. The main focus of the plan is a trip to Venice, where the young learners experience English in its lingua franca role through different cooperatively-structured team activities. After a noticing task on the presence of English in the linguistic landscape, they are asked to interview tourists of different L1s at the railway station, and then to ask foreign people for help in compiling a list of lexical items in English. The interviews allow them to be directly and actively involved in using English, taking part in interactions with people of different linguacultures through first-hand experience. This 'fieldwork' lesson aims thus at fostering language use in cross-cultural contexts, as well as, more generally, at enacting pragmatic strategies in real communication and at developing intercultural communicative skills. In the trainee teacher's words, "ho pensato a un progetto che potesse mettere in contatto i miei studenti con una visione più attuale dell'inglese e riflettere sulla dimensione di questa lingua come lingua di contatto"[5]. The post-lesson feedback from the learners was enthusiastic, not least in terms of motivation; it is also interesting to note that a trainee attending the PAS course the following year mentioned this experience in a very positive way, commenting that the students "met a lot of people from abroad and talked amusingly and easily to them. More than this, they forgot the effort of speaking English all the time" (AS, forum, PAS 2015/16).

Similarly, the lesson plan "English, the Global Language!" (AR, final report, TFA 2012/13) aims at making students reflect upon the global spread of English and its presence in the environment through a series of different tasks and materials. A particularly relevant point in this project is the fact that the video that was used to raise awareness of ELF was part of a project carried out the previous year with other students, who interviewed tourists of different L1s in Venice via English. The video thus constituted not only an

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[5] "I have thought about a project that could put students in contact with a more up-to-date view of English, and allow them to reflect upon the contact language dimension this language has developed", my translation.

opportunity to come into contact with and be exposed to different accents, but also to see English in its lingua franca role at play in an environment the students are likely to be familiar with, given that the school location is not far from where they live.

A series of teaching units aimed at fostering awareness of the plurality of English and its lingua franca role were developed in the "Journey towards Awareness of World Englishes" lesson plan (CA, final report, PAS 2014/15). The six units included South African, Australian, American, Indian and British English varieties, as well as English as a Lingua Franca with a speaker from Saudi Arabia and one from Norway. Didactic activities were devised to support comprehension and to foster noticing of differences and similarities, in some cases also starting from textbook materials. The approach taken here is particularly interesting since the video-messages were produced once again by 'real' people, who, after being contacted, sent them to the class; a skype web conference was also realised. This contributed to create a high level of motivation, since the plurality of Englishes was experienced in a more 'personalised' and natural way. As the trainee commented,

> planning this ideal journey towards the awareness of World Englishes was not as easy as I had expected. It was a thrilling experience though. There is a whole world to explore out there, full of possibilities for the students to grasp. The aim behind this project is to have a glimpse of the varieties of Englishes for the students to choose their path among by presenting them with a range of perspectives to approach English and "make them ready for difference" (Crystal 2013).

As to the dimension of intercultural awareness and communication skills, some lesson plans focused on projects involving interactions in international school partnerships either face to face or via eTwinning. For instance, "Travellers' Tales around Europe" (LG, final report, TFA 2014/15) includes curricular activities, that could also be developed as a whole-year project, and are centred upon discovering the most interesting tourist spots in Verona - a city close to where the students live - and Rome. As a final product, learners are asked to write a postcard to their eTwinning European partners about what to see in Verona; the information gathered during the lessons and in the final 'postcard' are then used in a web-conference meeting with one of the eTwinning partner classes, where students interact through English with their peers belonging to a different linguaculture, exchanging information about places of interest in their respective areas.

These lesson plans, that were successfully realized in class, exemplify how the WE- and ELF-related awareness-raising and reflective moments during the PAS and TFA courses contributed to prompt a shift in perspective that was reflected in didactic action, too.

4. Concluding remarks

Teacher education represents a fundamental step in developing teachers' knowledge and awareness of the linguistic plurality of English and cultural differences, of the multifaceted reality of English today (not 'just British English'), of the important role of ELF in international communication, as well as of the relevance of pragmatic and communication strategies to foster intelligibility and effective communication, particularly in the fluidity and hybridity of ELF interactions.

At the same time, as Marlina (2017, p. 110) points out, "[a]s an anti-normative paradigm (Kubota 2012), the EIL paradigm and the teaching of EIL challenge deeply ingrained assumptions, beliefs or preconceived views of language use, language teaching and language learning that are often perceived as 'normal'" (see also Dewey 2012; Cogo, Dewey 2012; Widdowson 2012, 2015). And, as Seidlhofer reiterates (2015, pp. 25-26),

> Questioning the validity of conventional assumptions is […] to undermine teachers' sense of security. Even if they are made aware of ELF, and recognize its possible pedagogic implications, they are unlikely to act upon their awareness unless they feel secure in what they do. This suggests that any change in their teaching will have to be related to the framework of their familiar pedagogic practice, particularly the use of textbooks.

WE- and ELF-informed teacher education can hence be an empowering tool, contributing to promote active reflection and engagement in linking 'theory' and 'practice', triggering a pedagogical reasoning that enables teachers to make WE- and ELF-informed choices 'from below' in their (local) classroom practices in ways that create connections with 'real' (authenticated) contexts of language use.

Signs towards a change in perspective – realized through the presence of pages and activities related to the diversity of Englishes – are (but slowly) starting to appear in course-books; however, speakers of English with a diversity of linguacultural backgrounds, both in terms WE varieties and, above all, of ELF interactions are still largely underrepresented. Since (in the Italian context for example) teachers have a major say in the choice of course-books, an increased and more widespread awareness of the above issues could certainly impact on English teachers' decisions as to the choice of materials, and consequently, possibly, on those of materials writers and publishers, too.

Zacharias (2017, p. 163) points to the fact that trainees attending teacher education courses including topics related to English as an international language "stated that teaching through EIL pedagogy has challenged their creativity as teachers because EIL materials were not readily

available"; similarly, as we have seen in the examples of activities in the previous section, the opportunity to devise materials for PAS and TFA trainee teachers meant critically looking at course-books from a WE- and ELF-aware viewpoint, then going beyond ready-made proposals, as well as beyond the classroom walls.

In a WE- and ELF-aware perspective, the development of a 'communicative capability' to successfully interact in different contexts and with people of diverse linguacultural backgrounds through English becomes a foregrounded pedagogic aim. International school partnerships in digital contexts (telecollaboration and eTwinning projects), that seem to be increasingly incorporated in EFL curricular activities, offer opportunities of communication through English in English as a Lingua Franca communicative contexts. Such environments can therefore constitute a particularly interesting pedagogical area for ELF, and can represent an important and viable 'source of inspiration' for teachers, teacher educators, and materials writers in the development of ELF-aware pedagogic practices.

With Sifakis (2017, p. 14) ELF-aware teacher education should raise teachers' awareness of "the extent to which their current teaching and learning context is open to engage with change, and prompt them to engage in action research with their classes". I believe that collaborative Action Research projects seeing ELF researchers, teacher educators and teachers working side by side would represent extremely important opportunities in order to develop and implement 'feasible' ways of introducing an ELF-aware approach in classroom practices. Such active cooperation would on the one hand mean to discuss challenges, and on the other hand encourage to experiment and put into practice activities, materials and tasks teachers would be comfortable with, at the same time going beyond their 'comfort zone', in their local teaching context. Ongoing cooperation between researchers and teachers could also help overcome the limited time (e.g. Marlina 2017; Zacharias 2017) in pre-service teacher education programmes, and possibly extend these experiences also to in-service teacher education. This would allow to explore issues, that are often complex and perceived as challenging, more in depth, as well as implement opportunities for praxis related to a WE- and ELF-aware pedagogy.

I also feel, from my experience both as a EFL teacher and as a teacher educator, that there are some 'areas' towards which teachers can be more sensitive, and where an ELF-informed approach could be regarded as offering valuable opportunities for more 'inclusive' didactic approaches in ELT. First, since migration processes have strongly impacted schools, too, classes are more and more multicultural and multilingual since primary school. This means that encounters with several linguacultures are most often part of everyday school life, and a WE- and ELF-aware approach could offer

opportunities to take account of the diversity of experiences, languages and cultures that have become an integral part of educational realities, and as a preparation to the diversity of Englishes in 'real life' – in communicative and intercultural competence terms.

Second, and as important, it could help implement a focus on the development of communication skills and the ability – or, in Widdowson's terms 'capacity'/'capability' – to communicate. That grammatical competence constitutes but one of the three components of Communicative Competence has been a tenet since Canale and Swain's 1980 seminal paper, together with sociolinguistic/pragmatic and strategic competence. However, as several ELF studies have shown, the grammatical side of communicative competence is still a primary concern for teachers, together with monolithic ideas of one (British) standard variety (and grammar) of 'the' language, of an omniscient native speaker, as well as several other conceptual tenets that have been deeply questioned first by WE and then by ELF.

ELF research into communication strategies has amply shown that ELF speakers make effective use of communication and pragmatic moves to co-construct meaning and cooperatively reach effective communication and mutual understanding. Aiming at developing 'strategic competence' and communicative capability would seem fundamental to equip learners/users to be able to use English to communicate in its current complexity – 'Capacity', intended as "the ability to use a knowledge of the language as a resource for the creation of meaning" (Widdowson 1983, p. 25), and 'capability' as "a knowledge of how meaning potential encoded in English can be realised as a communicative resource" (Widdowson 2003, p. 177), in their going beyond the separation of different aspects of Communicative Competence, can offer teachers, and teacher educators, a broader view, one that can be projected onto language use. In this perspective, promoting awareness of the importance and relevance of communication strategies, and strategic competence, both in terms of language and intercultural abilities, can represent a further area of engagement for a cooperation between ELF researchers and teachers. It could also possibly be perceived as 'less destabilising', as many of the comments from PAS and TFA trainees indicate, since it would resonate more with their 'pedagogic reasoning' given its close connection with communicative capability as a holistic concept, that is, finding ways of understanding changes, re-thinking practices in and for their own contexts, and 'guiding' learners towards language (re)use in a communicatively effective way.

I would like to conclude with two trainee teachers' reflections, that summarize the ways in which teacher education can positively work in developing awareness of how an ELF-aware shift in perspective in ELT

practices would foster, among other things, leaners/users' 'communicative capability':

> out of school contacts with English(es) are already part of young people's lives. Consequently, teaching is not only the knowledge of grammatical rules or lexical items, but also an ability [...] to function through the practice of cross-cultural communication strategies and the development of a great tolerance of differences. (FB, forum, PAS 2015/16)

> I think a monolithic view of English can no longer represent the only reference point: as teachers, we must prepare learners to effectively use English, so its lingua franca role has to be taken into account, raising awareness through cultural exchanges, speaking and chatting via Skype with foreign people, watching films or videos in English from different countries [...] Our students must be aware that English is a means of communication beyond and across community and territorial boundaries. (ADM, forum, PAS 2015/16)

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