INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION AND LEARNING ENGLISH AT PRIMARY SCHOOL IN TUSCANY: CREATIVE PERSPECTIVES, CURRENT CHALLENGES, AND POSSIBLE APPROACHES

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This paper considers important contributions from language teaching and learning literature, so as to identify current challenges and issues related to initial teacher education in the preparation of trainee Primary School teachers to teach English in Primary School in Italy. It then examines the role of the English Language Learning-Teaching Methodology Workshops in initial teacher education in the context of the recently instituted five-year Degree Course in Primary Education at the University of Florence (2011). This is followed by a brief account of the English Language Learning and Teaching Methodology Workshop for the initial cohorts (aa. 2011-2016), and the use of reference documents and tools (Council of Europe and National Guidelines) for language teachers as a starting-point for the development of the methodology curriculum within the degree-course. The initial English Language teacher-training gaps and a possible way to address the issues

follow.

The results of the study identify possible future directions and issues which, at least in the University of Florence context, appear to be of major importance. Said issues also have a profound impact on teaching-learning contexts, and, most likely, demand meaningful actions if they are to be resolved in a productive way both for pre- and inservice teachers as well as their learners.

1 Introduction: Voices from teacher education literature

Research into teacher, as well as language-teacher education programmes has a long history with significant contributions to the literature since, at least, the 1980s. Here, we consider the topic by drawing on important voices from teacher education literature.

In their review of language teacher education programmes, Richards and Crookes (1988) reported that 75 percent of teachers are engaged in a training-placement or practicum. The latter included a series of different activities such as: the observation of experienced teachers or peers and reflection on the 'process'; being observed by supervisors/mentors or conferencing with them; participation in peer-/micro-teaching situations, as well as assuming direct responsibility for learning in the classroom. In the 1990s, the literature on Teacher Education was prolific and highlighted serious concerns with both the topic and the process. Fullan (1991) made an indepth study of the various issues related to the introduction of educational change. Language teacher educators (Crandall, 1994, Johnson, 1996, Richards, 1990) called for longer and more intensive training-placements or *practica* throughout ITE programmes, so that future teachers could better link theory and practice, while, at the same time, ITE programmes could provide professional support to enable trainees to learn from experienced teachers, as well as promote reciprocal learning within the profession. Despite familiarisation with positive professional activities, Crandall (1996) concluded that the amount of such experiences was not enough, they happened at too late a stage in ITE programmes, and were not appropriately focused on what really happens in classroom and school-contexts, or in the overall programme. The need to envisage opportunities for collaboration and teamwork within ITE programmes is clearly stated in Kaufman and Grennon Brooks (1996, p. 231):

> if teachers are to collaborate in schools and create enhanced interdisciplinary classroom environments that better foster students' linguistic and academic growth, they must experience such pedagogy in teacher education programs at the university.

Indeed, in our context, this statement assumes even greater importance

when one considers the implementation of proposed CLIL initiatives also at Primary level in Italy.

A further issue which emerges from the literature is that, in general teacher education, ITE envisages more time in real teaching situations than happens in language teacher preparation programmes (and as we shall see later in this paper, this is also relevant in our context). Crandall (2000) appropriately considers language teacher education as being 'a microcosm of teacher education', and highlights the influence of theories and practices in general education on the field. Indeed, also Crookes and Chandler (2001, p. 131) identify a major problem with both foreign language teacher education and teacher education programmes in general. The issue is that ITE programmes:

> do not prepare the teacher to engage in a process of life-long learning, do not help teachers to use published research, and do not provide them with a problem-solving orientation to their own classroom teaching.

According to the ETUCE Policy Paper (2008, p. 15), ITE programmes in Europe:

> need to cover educational theory, pedagogy and classroom techniques as well as exposure to a range of related disciplines including child psychology and the law related to education. In addition, courses need to properly integrate teaching practice in schools, under controlled conditions, mentoring and supervision. *All this is on top of subject knowledge* (my italics). Also, as society changes public authorities regularly add new requirements to teachers' workloads, such as multicultural education, or information technology applications in the classroom; and these need to be addressed in teacher education. Teacher education students need to be able to absorb and reflect on this broad range of knowledge and competences, and they need to be supported in this process.

The problem is not isolated or found in just one place. In the US, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2010) published a report in relation to developing partnerships for improved learning. The report states that it is necessary to change the manner in which teachers are prepared for their future profession if they are to be:

> […] effective and fully prepared for the uncertainties and challenges they will confront in the 21st century classrooms. In light of this, one needs a dramatic change in how teachers are prepared. This requires two major shifts. First, the very focus of programs needs to be redesigned from beginning to end. Teacher education has too often been segmented into subject–matter, preparation, theory,

and pedagogy taught in isolated intervals and too far removed from clinical practice. But teaching, like medicine, is a profession of practice, and prospective teachers must be prepared to become expert practitioners who know how to use the knowledge of their profession to advance student learning and how to build their professional knowledge through practice. In order to achieve this, one must place practice at the center of teaching preparation.

In moving from the voices from the classroom and their action-research literature towards ITE in an Italian context, we highlight the fact that, since the year 2000, the number of learners acquiring an additional language at Primary School at a global level has increased. Together with this increase, however, educational and language researchers, as well as policymakers express their concerns as regards the appropriateness of teacher-training in all areas of language learning, the lack of preparation in language assessment (Hasselgreen, Carlsen & Helness, 2004; Guerin, 2010; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014), the real language competence levels of teachers in many countries (Nguyen, 2011), and issues related to language programme accreditation, accountability, and evaluation. In the last decade, Allen and Peach (2007, p. 23), in their exploration of the in-field and on-campus components of an ITE programme make no secret of a constant issue which dominates ITE:

> One of the major and long standing challenges of preservice teacher education programs has been to strike a balance between the theory and practice of the profession.

Furthermore, they identify a widely-held concern which has not gone away and which draws on the statement by Levine (2006, p. 12) that 'Current teacher education programs are largely ill equipped to prepare current and future teachers for new realities'. He goes even further when he states that 'one of the biggest dangers one faces is preparing teachers who know theory and know nothing about practice'.

Thus, it seems that, the overall indications which emerge from the literature seem to suggest changes are required in ITE programmes. Another essential point would appear to be that practice needs to be at the heart of teaching (NACTE, 2010).

2 The ITE degree-course in Primary Education in Italy

In light of the above-mentioned considerations, we now turn our attention to present-day Italy, where learning and teaching an additional language in Primary Education has had, and, quite probably, still has a chequered existence,

to say the least. A brief summary of this chequered existence is given here below as a background against which to set the issues raised and the related discussion in this paper.

Learning an additional language, in this case, English at Primary School in Italy, really came into the spotlight following legislation (Law n. 59/2004, art. 5) which aimed at implementing the teaching of English throughout Italian Primary Schools. From a historical perspective, as far back as the 1970s (Law n. 820/1971), and even earlier in specific areas of Italy (i.e., the 1960s in Tuscany), we can find evidence of the introduction of activities to promote the learning of an additional language in what was then Elementary School. With the University Reform legislation in 1990, the basis for the first degree-course in Primary Education Sciences was set in motion. The related details pertaining to its implementation appear in legislation in 1996 and 1997 which states that this degree-course becomes effective from the beginning of the 1998-1999 school year. In 1991, the teacher of an additional language in Primary School took on an institutional role for the first time. This saw the introduction of what is referred to as the figures of the 'specialist' and 'specialized' language teachers. From 1998 to 2006 within the context of the four-year degree-course in Educational Sciences, and from 2006 to 2010 with Primary Education Sciences, ITE included different types of courses in an additional language and in language teaching methodology - in this particular context the possibility for undergraduates was to study either English or French. More recently, in 2010-2011 with the enactment of the relevant 2007 and 2008 laws, the introduction of the new five-year degree-course in Primary Education Sciences (LM-85 bis 2011-12), admission to which is gained through successfully passing a national entrance examination, the curriculum introduced English language workshops for a total of 10 educational training credits (ETCs) for an overall total of 120 hours. In addition, there is a University of Florence (UNIFI) in-house University Language Centre (CLA-UNIFI) 'certifying exam' in English language competence at the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001) CEFR Level B2 worth a further 2 ECTs, on the basis of Law n. 249/2010 (Art. 10, comma 3e) which states that the English Language Workshops are divided over the five-year period, and on completion of the training-path students should have achieved a CEFR Level B2.

In summary, in addition to initial and in-service teacher training, national education policy now defines the recruitment procedures and the conditions of access to the role of infant and primary-school teacher.

3 A brief account of the English Language Learning and Teaching Methodology Workshop for the initial University of Florence 2011-12 cohorts

In this section, the ethnographic background to the present case-study - the English Language Learning-Teaching Methodology Workshops (hereafter, ELLTMW) during the first five-years of the newly instituted five-year degree-course in Primary-school Education Sciences at the University of Florence (UNIFI) - is presented. According to Dörnyei (2007, p. 130) the objective of ethnographic research is to describe and analyse 'the practices and the beliefs of cultures'. In point of fact, 'culture' for Harklau (2005) refers to any 'bounded units' for example communities, programmes, organizations, language classrooms, other language learning contexts etc. Thus, the approach adopted here is qualitative in nature and is based on ethnography, Action Research, and applied research with contextual experimentation and implementation.

With the activation of the above-mentioned degree-course, following the national entrance examination the number of students admitted to the course in Year 1 and enrolled in the ELLTMW on an e-Learning workspace were 375. The majority of these was students who came from all over Tuscany – on the Tyrrhenian coast from Grosseto to Stanto Stefano di Magro, and inland as far as Maraddi and down to Montepulciano – as well as from other regions of Italy such as Alto Adige, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Liguria, Molise, Sardinia, Sicilia, Trentino, though in lesser numbers. This fact is important because from the point of view of the English language competences of the learners we can identify a vast range of differences among learners as regards their perceived competences compared to their actual competences when assessed on an ongoing basis using CEFR criteria and descriptors, during the course of their first year of study as well as in the final 1st year examination. (For these cohorts, the subsequent ELLTMW examinations were also based on CEFR criteria).

On activation of the ELLTMW, one of the first things which needed to be done was to obtain as clear a picture as possible of real learner competence in spoken and written English in terms of the CEFR. It was essential to identify if there were problems and understand which competence(s) these problems were related to. Based on the previous experience gained in over a decade of language-teaching within the degree-course in Educational Sciences, in which past students demonstrated serious difficulties in relation to oral competences, it was hypothesized (Research Question (RQ) 1) that this would constitute an area which needed both specific and special attention. Oral Competence (Speaking) is viewed in terms of Spoken Production and Spoken Interaction (CEFR, 2001), as described in the numerous Oral Competence Descriptors). Hence, Oral Competence was the main focus in the action-oriented approach

adopted given that future Primary School teachers need to be able to interact socially in a meaningful way with learners *in* English and *through* English. To this end, the Workshop methodological approach was designed to be as user-friendly as possible, to lower learner anxiety when speaking, and to build teacher-trainee confidence in speaking in both spoken production (SP) and interaction (SI). Based on the number of trainees involved, it was decided initially to proceed with the self-grouping of learners in groups of five (based on concepts in Miller, 1994) with trainees speaking (SP) to all ELLTMW participants briefly about the members in their individual groups. This provided the Workshop Convenor (WC) with an initial opportunity to sample trainee-teacher English oral production, make a tentative initial assessment of oral competence based on the CEFR descriptors, and re-organise groupings so that in each group the level of language competence was heterogeneous with the objective of improving the initial language competence levels of lower-level learners through cooperative and peer-learning initiatives, reflection, project and portfolio work, which became a compulsory part of the learning, teaching and assessment in the ELLTMWs.

3.1 Reference documents and tools to develop the ELLTMW curriculum

The research approach to designing a learner-centred syllabus for Year 1 (and subsequent years) is described hereafter. The basic idea was to think long-term and develop a five-year vertically structured ELLTMW programme, based on the initial investigation of learner competences, and also drawing on elements within both the National Guidelines (2004; 2010; and later 2012) as well as some of the Council of Europe (CoE) reference documents and tools for language-teachers.

With regard to the learner-centred focus, it was necessary to intervene to provide learners with tools to enable them to work at improving their English language competences. To this end, it was decided to use a topic task-based approach working with short news topics of learner interest as well as current affairs/events available online in English both in aural and written text formats. During the twice weekly six workshop sessions, for an overall total of 24 hours, learners worked in their allocated groups with the texts chosen partly by the WC and partly by the individual learners and their groups. This work continued throughout the duration of the workshop and focused on writing short summaries and preparing oral presentations of the tasks completed. Hereafter, in Figure 1, is a sample learner-group reflection and feedback comment on the ongoing workshop and the tasks:

> In conclusion, we are very happy to have done this work because in this way we have analyzed many aspects that caracterize our society and the world.
> The world is the place where we live and we have to protect it; only in this way we will have a better future and new generations will be full of values.

Fig. 1 - Learners B, C, C, F and G, attending Year 1 workshop

The other major decision taken by the WC aimed at improving learner competences and involved the ad-hoc development of guidelines for an English Language Portfolio. Here, the starting-point was the European Language Portfolio (ELP, 200) already used in a sample of Primary and Secondary Schools in Italy in 2002. Our English Language Portfolio was developed with in-situ modifications based on previous experience gained in related courses. The idea was to provide learners with an efficient tool to enable them to determine their individual language areas of weakness, strength, and those requiring development together with how to put this development in place, and activities related to communicative language competences as well as linguistic competences, self-assessment and reflections. Learners were immediately provided with Guidelines for the Compilation of their English Language Portfolio.

With regard to the identification and selection of official reference documents and tools (i.e. National Guidelines (2012), CEFR (2001), CEFTrain (2003-5), ELP (1991) etc.) to adopt within the ELLTMWs, the starting point for the subsequent decisions taken was the following principal research question (RQ2): What is the role of the English Language Learning-Teaching methodology workshops in ITE in the five-year degree-course in Primary Education? The possible answers to this question can be found in the different versions of the National Guidelines (2004-12), the Competence Profile (2012, p. 10), as well as in the CEFR (2001) which is also the basis for the National Guidelines (NGs). In the NGs (2012, p 37ff.) we find the following output objective:

> When meeting people of other cultures [one] is able to express one's self at elementary level in English and tackle basic communication, in simple situations of daily life, in a second European language.

Put succinctly, English language learners in Primary School need to be able to communicate effectively about simple, learner-related everyday interests

and information with speakers of other languages. Essentially, the objective focuses, quite appropriately, on developing oral competence which includes phonological aspects such as pronunciation and intonation, in a plurilingual approach to learning languages in Primary School.

Thus, this further consolidates the objectives identified as regards the ELLTMW, and, thus, confirms the need for a 'tool' based on the ELP-concept (i.e. the Individual English Language Portfolio) to help learners to achieve this objective. The indication of levels of competence achievement leads directly to the CEFR tool. In a previous survey on teacher knowledge of the CEFR in the Italian context (Guerin, 2005), it was found that there was a lack of knowledge of this reference document. The study highlighted the need for both language teacher educators and trainee-teachers to become familiar with this CoE document on which the National Guidelines draw, and to which trainees and teachers need to be able to refer as future language professionals when they are called upon to develop L2 curricula and competences throughout Primary Education. Thus, in Year 1, familiarisation with the CEFR reference document was limited to an overview of the same, with a deeper study of the document in the following years. Indeed, the need to be familiar with this reference document is further highlighted by the Ministerial Decree in relation to the National Competition for teaching posts (2016) which requires future Primary School teachers to be at least CEFR Level B2 and be familiar with EU reference documents, as is clearly stated in the Art. 4 of the 2016 national competition for future teachers.

In addition, in order to try to ensure the concept of continuity and quality between learning objectives and outcomes given the underlying link between learning, teaching and assessment (Biggs, 1979), it was felt that future teachers should be made aware of the complex nature and overall implications of language assessment in both their own Higher Education (HE) context, as well as in their role as future language teachers. To this end, the Guidelines of the European Association for Language Testing and Assessment (EALTA) were also used as learner language teaching and learning material. There was also a further reason for using these guidelines. Since language testing and assessment is an integral part of the daily classroom life of language teachers, this is an area in which a major need for specific training in language assessment literacy for both inservice and trainee-teachers on a global scale has been identified in the research literature (Hasselgreen *et al.*, 2004; Guerin, 2010; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014).

Thus, these reference documents and tools began to be introduced and used from Year 1 in simple ways with a dual purpose. This meant using tasks which were considered useful for the learners to improve their communicate language competences in relation to CEFR-level descriptors specifically from

a linguistic competence perspective through receptive (listening and reading) and productive (writing and speaking – SP as well as SI) tasks.

Within the context of the ELLTMWs it is important to highlight the need to work with trainee-teachers on two parallel levels in relation to the CEFR. ITE-trainees, as language learners, are themselves working to achieve at least the CEFR Level B2 in order to be strong Independent Users of the language who can use the difference language competences for their own professional purposes such as e-Twinning, EU projects, professional development, lifelong learning approaches, etc.

On the other hand, at a lower CEFR-level, trainee-teachers need to develop a clear understanding of how to use, adapt, and where necessary, develop, and apply the CEFR Level A descriptors in relation to young learners, their interests and contexts of social experience and interaction in the different infant and primary-school contexts with their specific characteristics.

In the subsequent Years 2, 3, and 4 of the ELLTMWs, the foundation laid in Year 1 was used to consolidate learner knowledge of and familiarisation with the previously-mentioned reference documents and tools by studying a limited number of chapters per annum and using the information therein to reflect on and, then apply a number of key-concepts encountered in the sessions and in the readings through projects. These projects were developed by learners who were grouped by the WC in teams of five-member heterogeneous language competency with members in each team having a range of complementary talents and skills in areas such as creativity, drawing, organisation, leadership, and technology. Teams were constructed in this way so as to build learner confidence and value different individual competences while raising awareness, in each individual, about personal limitations and the need to look to, and work with, others to achieve objectives. From Year 2 onwards, each year a limited number of CEFR chapters were the focus of study (theory) and application (practice) as follows:

Year 2, CEFR Chapters 1, 2, 3 together with reflection about, and basic introduction to, concepts to be encountered in Chapter 4;

Year 3, CEFR Chapters 4, 5, 6 together with reflection about, and basic introduction to, concepts to be encountered in Chapter 7;

Year 4, CEFR Chapters 7, 8 & 9, together with reflection about Curriculum Alignment (Biggs, 1979) and Pluricultural concepts; basic introduction to language and neuroscience.

In our context the objectives to be achieved were the completion of tasks, as well as curriculum development related to the domains and situations which are meaningful and motivational for young learners. Trainees were required to identify, use, and explain the reasons for the strategies used in the approach

adopted. In addition, in Year 3, a further CoE document, the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL, 2007) was introduced as a reflection tool for trainees to help them plot a lifelong learning pathway with regard to their development of teacher professional competences in learning and teaching languages. Ideally, EPOSTL is a document to introduce at the beginning of ITE, and accompanies trainees throughout their HE period. This is an awareness-raising tool for lifelong professional development and lays the basis for a reflective practitioner. In addition to this reflection tool, ITE-trainees were also introduced to the CEFTrain online teacher-training Project (Guerin, 2005) which is mentioned among some of the useful resources in the CEFR CV where it appears in 'a shortlist of some of the most practical guidance documents in relation to exploitation of the CEFR for language teaching and learning' (CoE, 2018, p. 44). It was used in order to help them better understand concepts related to language-learner profiles and CEFR scales and descriptors, as well as learning-tasks.

In Year 4, the CEFTrain Project website guided ITE-trainees in planning and developing learner-tasks at CEFR Level A1. Participants also had the opportunity to come into contact with Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and to begin to get to grips with the language needs of learners in the different discipline-content areas. They were exposed to the different language levels in what Cummins (1999) describes as Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Learners in their final year of ELLTMWs, as well as degree-candidates also undertook a vertical curriculum development of English for Primary School, as well as CLIL-based projects. The results of these experiences have been presented in a number of degree theses and have offered a wonderful opportunity for the enrichment of learning in ITE.

In concluding this section on the ELLTMWs, it is worth highlighting an interesting learning experience for trainees during the academic year 2015-2016. Both trainees and the WC had two important opportunities to work with two foreign colleagues (one from the U.S. and one from Iraq), as well as share their education and training programmes with other ITE trainees. This experience is further discussed when we reflect on lessons learned in the workshops.

4 Insights gained: limitations

In this section we consider the insights gained during the initial five-year period of this newly-established degree-course. Here, we concentrate on the first two initial cohorts over the first five-year period 2011-16, and we reflect on the information collected during this period which constitutes our primary

source of data.

The main RQs addressed in this study identify current ITE challenges and issues related to the preparation of UNIFI Primary School teacher-trainees to teach English in Primary School. In order to answer the RQs, the study examines the role of the English Language Learning-Teaching Methodology Workshops in Primary Education ITE and its curriculum over a five-year period.

The methodological approach to this research is a longitudinal ethnographical case-study approach which describes the overall findings of the triangulated study. An ethnological longitudinal case-study approach was chosen for the following reasons: (i) ethnography enables the researcher to generate hypotheses about previously unexplored phenomena, permits a focus on the whole picture as well as facilitating a holistic view; (ii) by its nature a longitudinal case-study provides the researcher with the opportunity to study in depth the complexity of the multiple levels of the specific case: (i) the context, (ii) the participants, (iii) the programme. The research method is a mixed-methods qualitative-quantitative one which uses typical sampling (Dörnyei, 2007). A Qual-quan mixed-methods design is used because ethnography requires a variety of investigation methods so as to provide a rich understanding of a complex issue and avoid the limitations of the 'insider/outsider' dilemma. Moreover, by combining methods we can achieve (i) a greater understanding of the phenomenon, and (ii) to triangulate one set of data against another and, so, validate the conclusions reached in the research (Creswell, 2003).

We begin our analysis by taking into account the information collected in relation to ITE-trainees and their ITE programme. The data are based on the information gathered from a number of different sources (e.g. individual, group, and outputs) using different information-collection instruments (e.g. as mentioned in the main descriptive part of the paper: observation, audio and video-recordings, specific tools, reflection, questionnaires, interviews, assessment, evaluation) in accordance with the previously mentioned methodological approach.

The overall results obtained from the research undertaken are discussed throughout the rest of this paper.

4.1 Limitations of the study

The main limitations of the present study can be identified as: (i) the 'insider/outsider' dilemma as mentioned in the methodological approach adopted, and (ii) the fact that the study population is limited to the ITE-trainee 'population' under study in the context of the ELLTMWs in ITE at UNIFI. To further verify the results of this study it is necessary to undertake ethnographical longitudinal studies in other ITE-trainee contexts and conduct them in a similar manner.

4.2 Discussion

The information gleaned from the ITE-trainees derives from three main thematic areas (TAs): (i) Learner-Production (TA-LP), (ii) Learner Reflection Tools (TA-RTs), and (iii) Types of Assessment (TA-TA).

With regard to the thematic area of Learner-Production (TA-LP), our research draws on the oral and written texts produced by the Learners during the course of their ITE. Thus, the information sources for each individual Learner are as follows: English Language-competence and Methodology Portfolios (hereafter, Portfolios), audio-recordings of Learner performances in English during sessions (hereafter, audios), contributions within the Group Project (hereafter, Group Projects), video-recordings simulating a short English-teaching session by the individual members of the group (hereafter, DVDs), and online assignments (hereafter, Tasks).

The procedures followed include the collection, coding and analysis of the information related to individual Learners which is then analysed in relation to the other Learners in the study-context. The methodological approaches used for the TA-LP are both qualitative and quantitative and include textual analysis, process and product evaluation, as well as observation. The information for all learners is summarized in a descriptive manner later in the overall discussion.

For the thematic area of Learner Reflection Tools (TA-RTs), we refer to individual Learner reflections as presented within (i) the Reflection Section of the Portfolio (hereafter, Reflections), (ii) the CoE-European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) reflection tool for future language educators known as EPOSTL, (iii) the EALTA Guidelines for familiarisation with assessment procedures, (iv) open-ended questionnaires (hereafter, Questionnaires), and (v) observations.

The procedures followed include the collection, coding and analysis of Learner reflections as gathered from the source information related to reflection of individual Learners which is then analysed in relation to the other Learners in the study-context. The methodological approach used for the TA-RTs is qualitative and includes textual analysis, process and product evaluation, as well as observation. The information for all learners is summarized in a descriptive manner later in the overall discussion.

In the thematic area of Types of Assessment (TA-TA) the information sources for each individual Learner are the following five: (i) self-assessment using the CEFR Scales and Descriptors, (ii) diagnostic, (iii) continuous, and (iv) summative assessment procedures, as well as (v) observations.

The procedures followed include the collection, coding and analysis of the information related to the assessment of individual Learners which is then analysed in relation to the other Learners in the study-context. The

methodological approaches used for TA-TA are both qualitative and quantitative and include the analysis of the results derived from the different assessment procedures, as well as Learner and WC co-ordinator observations. The information for all learners is summarized in a descriptive manner later in the overall discussion.

Hereafter we highlight what has emerged from the study in relation to: (i) ITE-trainees and their ITE English curriculum; (ii) some important gaps in the ITE English curriculum under study, with suggestions on what one can do temporarily to address them while awaiting specific intervention measures by the competent authorities.

5 Results of the Research Study: Gap-identification, possible approaches with viable solutions

The overall impact of the ELLTMW-experience was evaluated by triangulating the different data-sets for the three above-mentioned TAs. The descriptive summary of the overall TA results which follows aims to highlight the main research findings and related considerations for this five-year ITE-experience.

Hereafter, we present our overall concluding discussion in relation gap-identification and possible solutions to ITE-trainees and their ITE English curriculum by examining: (i) the lessons learned during the ELLTMWs, (ii) the process of building the curriculum using and applying reference documents and tools in the ITE programme, as well as the importance of so doing, (iii) how the assessment results can inform our understanding of trainees language competence, and (iv) L2-teaching in the ITE training-placement.

5.1 The ITE-trainees and their ITE English curriculum

In the following section we consider ITE-trainees and their ITE English curriculum. The section examines (i) lessons learned in the initial five-years of the ELLTMWs, and (ii) building the curriculum using reference documents and tools.

5.1.1 Lessons learned in the initial five-year period of ELLTMWs

An important background-point to highlight here is that with the initial matriculation years of this degree-course, the ELLTMWs were spread over a four-year period as follows:

1st year – 2 ECTs – 24 hours
2nd year – 3 ECTs – 36 hours
3rd year – 3 ECTs – 36 hours
4th year – 2 ECTs – 24 hours.

This distribution over a four-year period meant that those ELLTMW participants who completed the required workshop requirements and achieved the set language-competence levels within the appropriate timeframe, had a lapse of at least a year with English before qualifying and undergoing school induction.

By drawing attention to the fact that the initial distribution of ELLTMWs over a four-year period created a one-year void prior to graduation, the degree-course governing body ratified the distribution of the credits over a five-year period in order to keep undergraduates in contact with English until the completion of their studies. Thus, ELLTMW-participants enrolled in the degree-course as of the academic year 2015-16, will have an ELLTMW worth 2 ECTs for each of the five years of study, as well as a further 2 ECTS for the in-house CLA-UNIFI 'certification' envisaged at CEFR Level B2.

When one reflects on the different aspects of the ELLTMWs there are a number of things to consider. The bigger issues which emerge are related to the extremely wide-ranging L2 language-competence levels of the participants. This aspect greatly influenced the manner in which the workshops were conducted. The challenging aspect was to create and work with a syllabus – and later a five-year vertical curriculum, as previously-mentioned - which needed to be accessible to all but at the same time allowed each learner to use and express language in a comprehensible way at the individual's level while also engaging them in improving their communicative competences. To do so, required a creative approach to finding a solution to the task at hand. This approach meant selecting both oral as well as written texts which, on the one hand, aimed at developing language competences while at the same time facilitating learners to work progressively towards the required exit levels – a journey as diverse as those taking it. On the other hand, the main objective envisaged for ITE-trainees was to prepare them to work with YLs so as to enable the YLs to socially interact by communicating with speakers of other languages of the same age about things immediate to YLs everyday ludic and general activities, interests and needs.

Some of the positive aspects include, first and foremost, the workshops were a hands-on apprenticeship with using L2 as an interaction tool for meaning-making through the use of a communicative approach to language learning and teaching (CEFR, 2001, p. 10) with the emphasis on acquiring language through a learning-in-progress approach which learners documented and

reported, initially, in their personal English Language Portfolios, and later, through the use of ICT outputs beginning with workshop guidelines to develop groupwork using simple thematic powerpoint presentations in Years 1 and 2. The bar was raised in Years 3 and 4. At this stage in their ITE, trainees continued to work as in the previous two years, but now they were required to start to use the reference documents and tools as professional tools to start to reflect and to develop materials to work creatively with YLs in the classroom using the activities, interests and needs which are meaningful for YLs (CEFR, 2001; CEFTrain, 2003). In addition, ITE-trainees were also required to become familiar with EPOSTL and to start to use it as their lifelong-learning teaching and learning reflection portfolio.

By targeting the YL aspect of the programme, this had advantages and also produced some interesting surprises. Some of the advantages of the approach adopted include the following: (i) it was a discrete, accessible and motivating way to work with lower-level L2 trainees who felt the language and activities were within their grasp; (ii) it engaged and motivated trainees as the activities were seen to be directly related to their role as future L2 teachers; (iii) it challenged learner-trainees to be creative in their work; (iv) it promoted the idea of teamwork and the taking-on of competence-based roles within teams – a role teachers need to be able to play in the school-context; (v) it encouraged trainees to be more independent as future teachers and, thus, rely less on standard commercial texts which at times lead to a grammar-focused approach in L2 classrooms; (vi) it helped learners to reflect on their own learning (Schön, 2003) and identify their own individual learning needs – a forerunner process for their future professional role as teachers who need to enable learners to reflect on their own learning-in-progress and identify learning strategies (Pinter, 2007); (vii) it provided the opportunity to be engaged in and with the language through the L2; (viii) it created opportunities for trainees to begin to develop phonological awareness and competences (Guerin, 2017); (ix) it introduced an anxiety-free, non-threatening, learner-friendly environment in which learner-mistakes informed WC practices to promote the facilitation of learner-focused L2 acquisition; (x) it facilitated learners in the area of lexis development which is not always given appropriate attention despite its importance for progression in and to different competence levels; (xi) it promoted the development of phonology awareness lesson plans, and (xii) laid the basis for the promotion of a vertical language curriculum for English in primary-school (Guerin, 2016).

The surprises included some unexpected aspects: (i) higher-level language learners lacked the appropriate lexis to work in a motivating way with YLs; (ii) it was extremely difficult for higher-level language-learners to rethink their language use in terms of YLs; (iii) at times, higher-level language-learners

underestimated difficulties that might be encountered in learning contexts and this had an impact on their language-scaffolding approaches.

These 'surprises' were useful for the WC to reflect for workshop evaluation purposes, and build-in appropriate scaffolding (Bruner, 1983) in that and in following workshops. The overall ELLTMW experience is extremely positive and fruitful both from methodological and research perspectives, as well as for learner-perceived training benefits related to future English teaching in primary school.

As mentioned above, trainees had interesting learning experiences during the academic year 2015-2016. Both trainees and the WC had two important opportunities to work with two foreign colleagues (one from the U.S. and one from Iraq), as well as share the UNIFI language education and training programme with some American trainee-TESOL teachers.

Thanks to a Fairfield University (CT, USA) collaboration initiative, a research-study with a colleague from the College of Education, Providence College, Providence Rhode Island (R.I., USA) was made possible since Providence had some students engaged in a practicum experience in Florence primary schools. We were both able to present and compare the ITE programmes in detail as well as share sample work within each programme. In addition, trainees from both programmes also had opportunities to meet, discuss, and reflect on the different programmes and compare and contrast them with each other.

In the second experience, the Iraqi colleague from Ibn Rushd College of Education, Baghdad University participated directly in the ELLTMW sessions, and interacted with trainees in workshop sessions (as well as in the regular English language courses provided for students of this degree-course in the form of 'lettorato'). In this way, trainees had the opportunity to learn from the Iraqi colleague about the state-of-the-art of Iraqi ITE and their undergraduate English language competence. They were introduced to what happens in ITE programmes in English Language and Teaching Methodology at Baghdad University. Trainees became aware of the UNESCO National Support Strategy (2012) to strengthen and improve the Iraqi ITE programme which, according to a 1989 report from the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Research. Unfortunately, this report seems to mirror the current educational situation for a series of reasons beyond the scope of the present paper. It identified EFL-teacher professional performance as generally unsatisfactory and judged ITE graduates and inservice teachers as being rather incompetent in their language and teaching skills. Our trainees also learned about the initiatives underway in Iraq to try to address the major issues identified above. Moreover, the shared the issues and complexities of the general Italian context with our Iraqi colleague in discussion and Focus Groups.

In addition to the Ibn Res collaboration, another study was undertaken to gather trainee-teacher perceptions of their training-programmes. This study was limited to a sample of Iraqi student-teachers at the College of Education, English Department, at Ibn Rushd College of Education, Baghdad University, and 4th. year Italian trainee-teachers from the degree-course at our University. The study also evaluated the University programme at the colleges of Education in Italy from the perspective of teachers in terms of the ELT and TESOL standards, as well as CEFR levels and descriptors.

The two above-mentioned opportunities to share and compare ITE programme approaches and curricula provided an insight for our ITE- trainees into the reality of ITE in very different social and cultural contexts. Reflections on this experience can provide useful opportunities for professional growth as well as a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in learning and teaching a language at all levels, but more especially, in the Primary Education context when working with young learners. It is important to remember that ITE also involves being able to relate and interact with people from very different cultures compared to one's own culture and society in a pluricultural manner.

5.1.2 Building the Curriculum using Reference Documents and tools

The benefits of adopting the Reference Documents and tools introduced into the ELLTMWs and used as learning tools with trainees are briefly discussed hereafter. The reference documents taken into consideration include the: ELP, CEFR, EALTA Guidelines, CEFTRain, EPOSTL, and the Italian National Guidelines. In addition we also consider the learners' individual English language portfolio (IELP).

It should be pointed out that there are a number of other useful resources to assist teacher educators as well as teacher to implement the CEFR in their teaching and learning contexts, as indicated in the recently published CEFR Companion Volume (2018, p.44).

ELP

The ELP (1991) was a useful tool to introduce ITE-trainees to the concepts of a language portfolio and to the CEFR as a reference document. It was the basic building-block on which the UNIFI IELP was developed based on UNIFI ITE-trainee language development needs. It was also useful to help future primary-school teacher to reflect on how to use this tool in different classes in Primary Education.

CEFR

This is a document which for L2 lower-level competence ITE-trainees

can prove difficult to understand and, therefore, apply. However, by working through the text, dividing it into 'digestible chunks' and referring to it and applying it over a number of years in the ITE-syllabus significant results can be achieved. Given that the CEFR (2001) was conceived of as a reference framework for adult Learners, within the ELLTMW-experience it was necessary to refer to the descriptors with the Band-Level A1 in order to adapt these to YLs in the primary-school context (Guerin, 2017). This experience provided the opportunity for ITE-trainees to immerse themselves in the real-life task of identifying language learning descriptors related to a specific domain and to specific YL-centred interests and situations. In this way trainees were put in the position of learning how to understand the role of a descriptive reference document and how to adapt such a text to their professional needs and contexts.

CEFTrain – Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in Teacher Training

The CEFTrain Project (2003-5)was a transnational initiative supported by the European Commission Socrates Programme Comenius Action with partner institutions from Finland, Austria, Germany, Italy and Spain which aimed to promote common European principles and standards in teacher education as expressed in the CoE reference document the CEFR (2001). Within the CEFTrain Project, the training materials which were developed to promote the teacher familiarisation process with the CEFR principles, scales and descriptors were informed by the needs identified in a survey carried out among teachers, teacher educators and teacher-trainees in the participating countries (Guerin, 2005; 2007).

These familiarization (www.helsinki.fi/project/ceftrain/index.php.73.html) and training (www.helsinki.fi/project/ceftrain/index.php.84.html) materials proved to be a using tool for ITE-trainees to start to come to grips with basic CEFR concepts and their operationalisation so as to be later able to implement CEFR concepts into their language teaching practice.

EALTA Guidelines for Good Practice in Language Testing and Assessment

The EALTA Guidelines (2006) proved to be an important stepping-stone to introduce trainee and inservice language teachers to basic concepts, principles, and practices associated with language testing and assessment in order to prepare them to reflect seriously on different testing and assessment practices and purposes. This was important for ITE-trainees as language-learners, and, more importantly, it raised awareness of ways and reasons for using assessment in their future professional roles as teachers of English in Primary Schools

in a European context of education, learning and assessment. The theme is further addressed in CEFR (2001, p. 177-196), as well as in other texts (e.g., the Manual, 2009).

EPOSTL

The use of the EPOSTL (2007) provided an excellent opportunity for ITE-trainees to reflect upon the competences acquired and to what extent. It also enabled them to plan the learning journey to be undertaken in terms of lifelong-learning experiences. Use of this learning tool together with reflection thereon enabled us to identify areas through which to improve this meaningful learning tool. However, this is beyond the scope of the present paper.

National Guidelines for the Curriculum

The reference to and use of the NGs in applied learning-contexts was essential in order to introduce trainees to essential school reference documents within the Italian educational system. It provided the opportunity for trainees to understand, interpret and apply concepts therein. Moreover, in relation to English in Primary School, it put trainees in the situation of having to interpret general guidelines in the context of the more detailed and specific CEFR levels and descriptors, and, on occasions, it demanded that learners interpret, adapt to context and even pilot descriptors for their specific learning-teaching contexts. This involved a 'thinking-outside-the-box' approach by trainees.

One of the most important aspects which emerged from Learners in relation to the use of these professional documents was that if Learner language-competence levels are not previously consolidated at a minimum of the CEFR Level B2, Learners will, very probably, face great difficulties when trying to understand and interact with some of the texts. This also implies they will encounter difficulties when they try to apply theoretical aspects in real-life contexts since they will probably not have had sufficient time to 'digest' certain concepts and make them part of their professional process. In other words, what Altet (1994) refers to as the 'professional' position of the Learner in the relationship between theory and practice (i.e., knowledge which results from distancing oneself from the context and reflecting on the action taken and supports the identification of the meaningful nature of the action) is missing.

INDIVIDUAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO

A Learner's individual English Language Portfolio is a competence- building and reflection tool which is an integral part of lifelong learning. In our specific context, what emerges, in hindsight, from the English Language Portfolio work produced by the learners in this area is the awareness or lack of awareness of language learners as to the relevance of a language portfolio in contributing to

building language competences. Though beyond the scope of the present paper, it is important to underline the fact that an analysis of the English Language Portfolios submitted for assessment reveals the different, attitudes, approaches, and understanding of the purposes of this education tool. This finds a parallel in what occurred with the introduction of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) in the Italian school context (2004) with the introduction of the Competence portfolio). In short, it was too much extra work and its 'learning to learn' nature was not always fully appreciated or really understood by all learners. In cases this led to a 'so why bother to invest in it' attitude by a cross-section of learners when it required such commitment, investment, and workload. Unfortunately, it would seem that even in Higher Education (HE) settings, some of the learners who would most benefit from the use of this 'learning-in-progress' tool decide to shirk their responsibility in their learning process, consider commitment to language-learning too much of a 'workload' and fail to prepare meaningful portfolios for themselves. Ironically, side-by-side with these superficial-style learners, a further two types of learners emerge: those who recognise their need to learn (i.e., aware and responsible learners) as well as the deep learners who strive for excellence in the preparation of their portfolios.

We now turn our attention to the discussion of some gaps identified in the ITE English curriculum under investigation and ways in which these gaps might be addressed.

5. 2 Some Gaps Identified and Possible Solutions

In this section we look at some gaps identified within the UNIFI ITE Curriculum Gaps in relation to trainee English language competence levels in the ELLTMWs as well as in the training-placement and possible ways to tackle them. The section is divided into: (i) how language assessment results inform us about trainee's readiness to teach English, and (ii) L2 and the ITE-trainee school training-placement.

5.2.1 How assessment results inform trainee L2 competence teaching 'readiness'

In summary, it seems important to inform the reader that the initial assessment of the ITE-trainees English oral competence-levels was wide-ranging, as expected from the wide basin of both geographical origin and the type of secondary education received, together with the differences in the number of years of study of the language. Initial investigation through classroom and homework task activities indicated that listening, reading and writing competences were generally weak. Moreover, the vast majority of learners were initially identified as being within the lower CEFR Levels A1-

A2. This was confirmed in the 1st. year examination sessions. For example, in Figure 2, we can see that of the 90 candidates who, in a given period, sat the written examination based at CEFR Level A2, 21 candidates achieved a score of 75%.
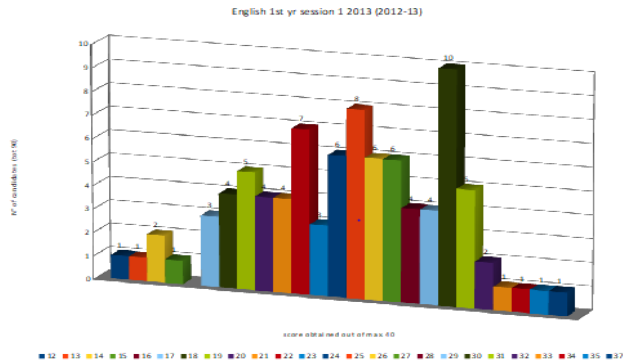

Fig. 2 - Sample of written examination results for a 2012-13 year group of Learners

The data for these same Learners is confirmed by the low number of Learners competent to sit the criteria-based 4th. year workshop examination and the results they achieved. Furthermore, assessment by a different university 'actor' confirms Learner difficulty in achieving the required CEFR Level B2 of English in a computerized-test of partial competences which addresses reading and listening.

It is important to remember that competence refers to being properly qualified to perform an activity, task or job function. This *competence* is recognized and verified by a particular community of practitioners. Hence, a competency refers to the way that a state of competence can be demonstrated to the specific community. This involves the individual's knowledge of a related theoretical and/or experiential knowledge-set(s), as well as skills and attitudes which enable an individual to effectively perform the activities related to a given professional role so as to, at a minimum level, meet the expected standards related to a particular professional role. Indeed, in terms of critical pedagogy, a competence-based education can be defined as a form of education which is the result of a curriculum based on an analysis of a prospective or actual role in modern society. Furthermore, a competence-based curriculum purports to certify Learner progress on the bases of demonstrated performance in some or all of the aspects of that role, *independent of the time required to achieve the competence*. This was the rationale behind this specifically developed overall ELLTMW curriculum.

With regard to language assessment implementation, a word of caution is necessary. It is essential for language assessors to realize that the CEFR Levels are levels of excellence which need to be *achieved* using a criteria-referenced approach before a specific CEFR-level can be certified as achieved by competent bodies. Thus, the distinction between criteria-referenced and norm-referenced approaches to assessment need to be made manifest to ITE-trainees as well as to any other WCs that might, at some later stage, work within ITE degree courses in order to avoid misinterpretation of competences by both Learners and those assessing their language competences. Failure to address the important distinction between criteria-referenced versus norm-referenced assessment practices and procedures can give rise to important washback. Such washback Wall (2012, 79) states:

> […] can either be positive or negative to the extent that it either promotes or impedes the accomplishment of educational goals held by learners and/or programme personnel.

This is an important fact to consider whether ELLTMWs adopt a system of 'marks' or 'pass/fall' based results.

From a totally different perspective, approaches to general assessment in ITE also need to examine trainee 'readiness' to teach L2. Here, the discussion becomes wider as in HE educators need to use diagnostics to inform actionable changes. At an optimum level, this requires a system of excellence to be put in place whereby a constructively aligned curriculum (Biggs, 1979) is enacted. This is what was put in place in this specific ELLTMW-experience during this five-year period.

Perhaps the most important fact that emerges from the enactment of this experience is the need to develop Learner language-competence levels based on CEFR level criteria prior to proceeding to the ELLTMWs in, at least, the final three-years of the degree-course. From the experienced gained, we are now in a position to report that, in our context, the CEFR Level B2 certification is envisaged within the 3rd. Year. Moreover, as a result of the identification of the low CEFR-level competence of Learners, the current President of the degree-course has implemented measures to consolidate ELLTMW-participant language competence, since this can also impinge on issues related to the ITE training-placement, as we can see in the following section.

5.2.2 L2 and the ITE training-placement

Briefly, the major gap identified in this specific ITE training-placement seems to be the opportunity for ITE-trainees to engage in an actual training-

placement for the teaching of English in primary-school. Based on responses from trainees, it would appear that only a tiny number of trainees has the opportunity to observe teachers of English in action in the classroom. The number of trainees who have had the opportunity to actually engage in 'teaching' English is even tinier! Reading between the lines, the information which emerges from what trainees report in their methodological portfolios, as well as through questionnaires and interviews, is that occasionally some trainees: (i) can 'mutely observe' English classes in Primary Schools; (ii) can 'collaborate with the English teacher' and if very lucky get the chance to 'do a lesson' which is previously 'approved' by 'THE TEACHER'. It is (iii) much more unlikely, that trainees have the opportunity to actually 'conduct a lesson' usually approved before it is enacted, and (iv) it is much less frequently, that trainees can actually do a lesson in total freedom i.e. manage class and do as one wants without interference during the lesson, followed by host-teacher discussion afterwards.

In an effort to tackle this real-world problem, the individual and group project to enable YLs to build confidence and develop the use of simple English, was introduced by the WC. ITE-trainees had the opportunity to work on their projects during their ELLTMWs for a number of sessions under the guidance of the WC and get feedback. During these sessions, ITE-trainees were able to draw up and confront ideas, as well as choose the relevant approaches to materials production, as well as identify the hands-on approach for their projects. They did so in their teams and also discussed ideas, approaches, materials, and related issues with the WC.

This problem-solving approach to L2 project development enabled all ITE-trainees attending these workshops to come face-2-face with the learning and teaching *process* through the reflection-development-production cycle of tasks involved in developing a lesson and putting it into action, in the scaffolded ELLTMW-context. The end-*product* was a DVD containing the lesson plans, lesson materials, and, most importantly, a video-recording of the ITE-trainee group in which each member put into practice a part of the 'lesson-in-action', at least virtually.

In Figure 3, we see a sample of an ITE-trainee English teaching group project cooperation grid for the development of learning material.

On the basis of the fact that, in this specific context, the opportunity to actually experience the English language classroom *in vivo* seems almost non-existent in their training-placement for the majority of ITE-trainees, to this end, the workshops tried to address the above-mentioned issues. The following images (Figures 4 and 5) offer examples of the ITE-learners sample English teaching project outputs.

Our Talking Book Project					
Group name: Amazons Plus One Group symbol: Beaver / Ukulele					
The members of my group are:	GM	EP	AP	SR	IS
Things they like most about the project group work:	The atmosphere created by the group. The song we wrote.	The bond born between the members of the group. Creating the activity, drawing and making photos.	Spending some time with the group. Writing the story and the song.	Have time to meet people with who I hadn't a lot of confidence. Spending time with my friends. Have fun to draw.	Having a good time with people I didn't know before. Writing the story. Drawing.
Things they like least about the project group work:	Finding the right place to make the video.	Finding the right place to make the video.	Finding the right place to make the video.	Finding the right place to make the video.	Finding the right place to make the video.
Individual qualities that make them a good group member:	Creativity, manual ability. Being able to organize things.	Ability with technology.	Musical ability, creativity.	Creativity, language ability, leadership ability.	Drawing ability.
Individual qualities that make them a bad group member:	I have many commitments so it's difficult to find a day to gather the group.	I'm not very on time.	I'm not very good at drawing.	I tend to force myself too much on others.	I'm not very patient.
What mark (out of 100) does each individual want to get for this assignment:	90	90	90	90	90
Individual contact information: e-mail: Mobile-Ph.:	removed	removed	removed	removed	removed
Individual special area of excellence: contribution to group:	organization	technology	reflections	leader	drawing

Fig. 3 - Sample ELLTMW Teamwork Guideline for a YL L2-Learning Project

Fig. 4 - Sample extract of 4th. year participant Story-illustration: C, B & Ce.
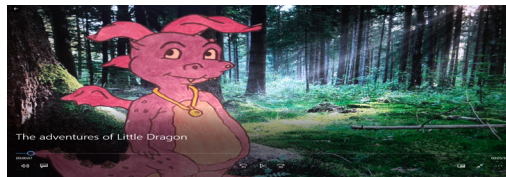

Fig. 5 - Picture Books and Story-telling by 4th. Year participants: A, B & L.

ITE-trainees also needed to continue to work on their projects after the ELLTMWs had ended. Learners who realized the importance of this training opportunity worked professionally on the end-product. A limitation of the approach adopted by the WC is that this learning-teaching project required a lot of time that not all participants could or wanted to invest. Reasons for this included ITE-trainee language competence levels, the surface-learner approach to the ELLTMWs, time-pressure from the overall degree-course attendance, and training-placements. Despite these drawbacks, many ITE-trainees put a lot of enthusiasm, energy, and reflection into their project-work and achieved

very good results in what they produced.

In the following section, we draw our final conclusions in relation to our research.

Conclusions

In this paper we began by examining a number of important contributions from the research literature related to language teaching and learning in order to pinpoint the current challenges and issues as they emerge through ITE in the preparation of trainee Primary School teachers with specific reference to the ELLTMWs and how to approach the teaching and learning of English in Primary School. What emerged overall in our context is a general concern about the inadequacies of ITE to provide future teachers of English with the opportunity 'on the ground' to link theoretical and practical aspects of their learning so as to apply it in a meaningful way for their learners in the classroom-context, as is essential in ITE.

Other important issues which emerge include the need for teacher: (i) professional lifelong-learning given that society places a growing number of requirements and responsibilities on teachers; (ii) reflection on practice; (iii) awareness of social and cultural dimensions of learning; (iv) familiarity with national, EU, and international education policies as well as reference documents and tools; (v) ability to cooperate with other teachers and staff-members to improve and promote a learning society; (vi) awareness of the complex nature of teaching and learning, as well as of the school environment.

We then examined the role of the English Language Learning-Teaching Methodology Workshops (ELLTMWs) in ITE and how these ELLTMWs were implemented over a five-year academic period for the first two ITE-cohorts within the Degree Course in Primary Education in this specific University context. This was followed by a brief account of the specific development of the ELLTMW methodology curriculum within the degree-course, and information regarding the use of Council of Europe and national (National Guidelines, 2012) reference documents and tools for language teachers. We also presented our collaboration with international colleagues within ITE-trainee ELLTMWs and reflected on these opportunities to broaden our perspectives on learning in different contexts.

The results of the study pinpoint the initial English Language teacher-training gap. What was done to address the issue is briefly presented. We identify possible future directions and issues (e.g. ITE-trainee English language competences) which, at least in the specific context examined, appear to be of major importance since, said issues, also have a profound impact on teaching-learning contexts. If they are to be resolved in a productive way both for pre-

and inservice teachers as well as their learners, these issues demand meaningful and effective actions and initiatives by policymakers, ministerial authorities, initial teacher educators, and other stakeholders.

In general terms, what clearly emerges from this study is that ITE and induction, together with lifelong-learning development strategies, could offer better learning opportunities when they are: (i) centred on practice, (ii) involve engagement with authentic teaching contexts, (iii) include reflections on experiences, (iv) experience action-research practices, and (v) encounter ongoing in-field experiences in the professional workplace.

Last but not least, Dewey (1938, p. 25) holds that all meaningful learning is grounded in experience i.e., 'all genuine education comes about through experience'. He further maintains that experience alone is insufficient. What is required is careful, disciplined and purposeful thinking about that experience in search of meanings (i.e. reflections) that can be carried forward to future experiences so that it becomes *educative*. These perspectives are important reference points to be kept in mind and put into practice especially in ITE approaches.

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