

A NEW PHASE FOR ENGLISH TEACHER EDUCATION IN ITALY

Testing and training for
Tirocinio Formativo Attivo (TFA)

Virginia PULCINI

It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent. It is the one most responsive to change.

Charles R. Darwin

ABSTRACT • This article is a report on the programme of teacher training education, known nationally as *Tirocinio Formativo Attivo* (TFA), i.e. *Active Educational Training*, implemented at the University of Torino in 2012-2013, with particular reference to the training of teachers of English in Italian secondary schools. The novelty of this programme lies in the fact that, compared to the past, for the first time courses were entirely planned and managed by universities. The purpose of this report is to bear witness to a procedure which, in spite of its transitory nature, will contribute to the organization of future teacher education programmes, when they come into force, showing both weak and strong points that emerged throughout this experience. First, the criteria adopted for designing and evaluating competitive admission tests are described. Then the contents of the ELT course offered to trainees are presented and discussed.

KEYWORDS • EFL teacher education, ELT, language testing.

1. Teacher education: from SSIS to TFA

AFTER a 3-year gap following the shutdown of the SSIS (*Scuola di Specializzazione per l'Insegnamento Secondario*¹), initial teacher education for secondary school teachers in Italy has been revived through a new programme known nationally as *Tirocinio Formativo Attivo* (TFA), i.e. *Active Educational Training*. In the past secondary school teacher education consisted of a post-graduate two-year programme implemented by the SSIS, where courses and initial training for prospective teachers were jointly planned and managed by secondary schools and universities. At the end of this programme trainees were qualified to enter the teaching profession in secondary schools (Capra 2007). The novelty of the TFA programme lies in the fact that for the first time courses are entirely planned and implemented by universities, while the role of regional schools is to host trainees for teaching practice, observation and active

¹The SSIS programme started in 1999-2000 and was closed in 2009 at the end of its 9th cycle.

participation in classroom activities under the supervision of a tutor/mentor. It is important to stress that TFA was introduced as a transition from the SSIS model to new degree programmes specifically tailored for teacher education, which were approved by the Ministry of Education,² and will consist of a 5-year degree for nursery and primary (including teaching practice) and a 5-year degree followed by 1-year of TFA for secondary schools.³ In the first place, the new model reduces the length of secondary school teacher education from 7 to 6 years. Secondly, it brings back the main responsibility of teacher education to the institutions which are historically the repository of high knowledge and academic research, i.e. universities. At the same time, it confirms and reinforces collaboration with schools, the place where first-hand know-how and experience are developed, as aptly stated by Pozzo: “La costruzione del sapere professionale non può avvenire che attraverso la pratica, e dunque a scuola (Pozzo 2007, 55).

A synergy between these two worlds – universities and schools – is deemed indispensable for providing high-profile disciplinary knowledge and rigorous training experience in European teacher education, as claimed by Kelly et al.:

Close cooperation between foreign languages departments, teacher education units and schools is crucial in achieving the integration of academic subject and practical experience (Kelly et al. 2004, 5).

A further departure from the SSIS model is that teacher education is separately handled by each relevant department – for modern languages by the Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Modern Cultures. As a consequence, disciplines which were common to trainees of all subjects, such as pedagogy, used to be jointly taught, whereas in the new model, each training programme is responsible for the teaching of such disciplines. Whether this is an advantage or a disadvantage is open to controversial debate, which is not relevant to the present report.

The selection and admission procedures for the first edition of the TFA programme was very long and complex. Because of the time lapse, many graduates and teachers had been waiting for an opportunity to access courses in order to obtain a professional secondary school teaching qualification. The Italian Ministry of Education decided that courses would begin in 2011-2012, but a further delay postponed the whole procedure which actually only began in July 2012. Admission to the TFA programme was gained through an initial selection process run on a national level.⁴ The number of applicants for English was 369, including both middle and high school candidates; the selection was passed by 153 candidates (41%). This was to be followed by a further admission examination locally organized by the *head* university in each Italian region, i.e. the University of Torino for Piedmont.

Another crucial component of the procedure was the competitive selection and appointment of school tutors, which was carried out by each local Departmental commission. School tutors would supervise the practical teaching experience of trainees, in joint collaboration with another teacher from the school assigned to each trainee. Only in January 2013 did teacher training internships and university courses actually start, so that the first group of trainee teachers obtained their professional qualification in July 2013.

² Law approved by the Italian Ministry of Education on 10 September 2010, No. 249.

³ <http://www.tfa-piemonte.unito.it/do/home.pl/View?doc=manifesto_degli_studi.html>.

⁴ The national test consisted of a multiple-choice test in English covering the disciplinary areas of linguistics and pedagogy (10 questions), use of English grammar and idioms (20 questions), British and American literature and civilization (20 questions), and two reading comprehension activities (5 questions each).

In this article we report on, and assess, two components of the TFA procedure for the area of English which were designed and implemented in the Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Modern Cultures of the University of Torino in 2012-2013, focussing in particular on the criteria adopted for designing and evaluating local admission tests, described in Section 2 of this article, and the English Language Teaching course, illustrated in Section 3. The purpose of this report is to bear witness to a procedure which was quite demanding for both academic and administrative staff, and secondly to contribute to the organization of future teacher education programmes in Italy, when they come into force, showing the weak and strong points that emerged throughout this experience.

2. The admission tests to TFA

Before TFA began, the Ministry of Education had provided the numbers of trainees to be admitted to the selection process on the basis of the needs for new secondary school teachers in each Italian region. For Piedmont the number of trainees for English would be 50 (20 for middle school and 30 for high school), about 1/3 of the candidates already filtered through the national test. Considering the high level of competitiveness for admission to TFA for English and the social responsibility involved, it was of paramount importance that the testing committees should guarantee validity, accountability and fairness in the construction, administration and assessment of the admission test (McNamara 2000).

According to ministerial guidelines (D.M. 11 November 2011), the local admission tests were to check the candidates' disciplinary knowledge and comprehension, and their analytical and argumentative competence; therefore it should consist of open-ended questions. In addition, for the areas of modern languages the tests should be administered in the foreign language involved. On the basis of these requirements, a panel of professors of modern languages in charge of the TFA procedure for English, French, German and Spanish agreed that the local test would consist of three parts:

- a) reading of a text (about 2,000 characters long) and comprehension questions;
- b) grammatical transformation of sentences;
- c) questions on culture and civilization (for middle schools) and culture, civilization and literature (high schools).

The admission test was to be entirely in the foreign language, as required, and no dictionaries were to be allowed. Furthermore, the balance between language and civilization was to be 2/3 (language) and 1/3 (civilization) for middle schools, whereas for high schools it was to be 1/2 (language) and 1/2 (literature and civilization). Answers were open-ended, in order to test candidates' competence in expressing and organising information and ideas, as required by advanced language proficiency testing (Finocchiaro, Sako 1983; Bachman, Palmer 1996). The contents of the test were to be embedded in language and civilization of the disciplinary area involved, e.g. English language, Anglo-American literature and civilization for candidates in the area of English.⁵ The candidates who passed the admission test would be admitted to the oral interview.

2.1. The reading comprehension

The texts chosen for the reading comprehensions were: "The death of chick lit?" (adapted from *The Economist*, March 6th 2012) for middle school, and "Business English. Useful, yes.

⁵These requirements were established by the University Decree which regulated the TFA procedure. (Decreto Rettoriale no. 2604, 3 May 2012).

But mandatory?" (adapted from *The Economist*, April 30 2012) for high school. We will consider here the criteria adopted for the evaluation and grading of these tests. As mentioned above, the questions posed by the reading comprehension envisaged open-ended answers with a limited number of words, from a single line (about 10 words) to more complex paragraphs (about 70 words). Open questions may involve a more subjective assessment than multiple-choice tests, and must be marked by hand, but are more suitable for testing advanced candidates. Subjectivity may be partly overcome by preparing model answers (after sampling a good number of test papers) and getting more than one tester to assess the same paper.

Since all the candidates had a degree in English and some had already had a few years' teaching experience, most candidates had a good command of grammatical correctness, choice of vocabulary, punctuation and spelling. The examiners decided to consider the following checklist of components for assessing the reading comprehension answers (adapted from Finocchio, Sako 1983, 231):

- a) the production of the requested length for each answer (in number of words);
- b) overall comprehension of the text;
- c) comprehension of writer's ideas and line of argument;
- d) correct punctuation and spelling;
- e) grammatical correctness and appropriateness;
- f) choice (richness and appropriateness) of vocabulary and idiomatic expressions;
- g) style (appropriateness, coherence).

By way of example, the reading comprehension chosen for the middle school admission test involved familiarity with the contemporary fiction genre called "chick lit".⁶ The text dealt with the weakening of this genre and the reasons for this. Most candidates seemed to grasp the overall meaning of the text and managed to explain the reasons for the decline of this genre of women's fiction. Some candidates did not seem to be familiar either with these novels or other genres referred to in the text such as vampire fiction. The richness in figurative expressions contained in the text allowed the examiners to discriminate between those candidates who demonstrated that they had understood these images and were able to discuss them in a creative way, and those who provided vague answers. Question 3, for example, was: "The text above contains several figurative expressions. Choose one and explain it in your own words with reference to its context." Many instances were available to the reader, such as "the bloom is off the 'chick lit' rose" (the decline of chick lit compared to the fading of a rose), "It's tempting, too, to blame vampires for putting a stake in chick-lit's heart." (reference to the success of vampire fiction taking over chick lit, with a mention to piercing the heart with a wooden stake, i.e. the way in which vampires can be killed). But the most meaningful figurative reference was related to the name of this fiction genre, which the writer identified as being one of the reasons to blame for the downturn of chick lit: "it's the dubious and denigrating label that has hung on it like an albatross from the start." Many candidates detected the intertextual reference to Coleridge's "The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner" and to the albatross, a symbol of nature, which is killed by the Mariner and hung on his neck by his fellow sailors as a reminder of his crime and of the sense of guilt that will prevent the offender from reaching his goals. In fact, the details of this literary reference were explained in varying degrees of correctness and detail, which weighed on the scores attributed to candidates' answers. Finally, the question regarding the reason why chick lit may be considered a denigrating label gave rise to a variety of answers that only partly highlighted the negative connotation of the term 'chick' (a simple, unintelligent

⁶ Chick Lit is the name of a fiction genre which became very popular in the 1990s and was represented especially by British and American writers. Novels are light-hearted and romantic, addressing especially young, single and career women and their existential problems. The first best seller of chick lit was *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding, which was turned into a popular film.

animal) but left out the core point of the answer, i.e. that chick is a slang term for a young woman.

Turning to the other reading comprehension for high school candidates, “Business English. Useful, yes. But mandatory?”, this text presented a proposal put forward by an American professor at Harvard to make English competence mandatory for all employees of multinational companies in the world. In this reading comprehension it was important to understand the writer’s point of view on this issue which was already quite clear in the title itself. However, even if most candidates grasped the general sense of the text, i.e. the doubtful attitude of the writer towards a generalized imposition of Business English, the candidates’ answers were often vague, ineffective or out of focus. Greater difficulty was noted especially with regard to more specific questions, such as the following:

- (1) Question 3. Explain the meaning of “economic powerhouses” (par. 2). Use your own words. (About 20 words)
- (2) Question 5. In par. 6 the writer compares English to weeds. Explain this image in your own words. (About 20 words)

The answer to Question 3 and Question 5 were to be found in the following passages:

(3) English is spoken by lots of people, including the citizens of such economic powerhouses as Australia and Nigeria, she writes.

(4) Like the weeds that seem always to reappear despite the best efforts of pernickety gardeners, English finds its way into other tongues and cultures.

In both cases, many candidates failed to grasp the meaning of ‘powerhouse’ (‘place of intense production’, *not* ‘a place of power’) and ‘weeds’ (‘a wild plant growing where it is not wanted’).

In sum, both reading comprehensions were journalistic articles written in general English and dealing with topics relevant to English majors. The components of language ability tested in the reading comprehensions were both reading (interpretative and analytical competence) and writing skills (argumentative). It may be hypothesised that general weakness in writing, especially academic writing of argumentative texts, may be ascribed to the fact that in the Italian university system most exams are oral and submission of written papers, especially in foreign languages, is not a common practice.

2.2. Sentence transformation

The university panel in charge of the admission procedures agreed on the inclusion in the test of an activity of sentence transformation, aimed at checking competence in advanced grammar. This decision was supported especially by professors of German and French, because of the particular morpho-syntactic complexity of these languages. In the English test, this activity consisted of the presentation of a complete sentence stimulus and the beginning of a transformation to complete using a given prompt so that the second sentence had exactly the same meaning, as in the following model:

- (5) Example: What is his surname? (know)
Do... you know what his surname is?

Quite surprisingly and unexpectedly, the overall mean score obtained by the English candidates was good but not excellent (see Table 1 below). This confirms the hypothesis

(already advanced with reference to the reading comprehension results) that emphasis on oral communicative skills which has prevailed in EFL teaching over the past decades has caused a decline in the teaching of grammar and writing.

Another problem related to this type of testing activity is that it must be carefully designed so that not many grammatical transformations are possible, preferably only one, to facilitate correction and evaluation. This was not the case for some of the test sentences, which triggered a great variety of unexpected transformations which had to be separately considered as acceptable or not, as, for example, the following:

- (6) “Why don’t we have the old lawn-mower fixed?” (suggested)
John suggested having / (that) we have the old lawn-mower fixed.

The verb *suggest* can have several patterns of complementation, including a non-finite -ing clause (John suggested having...) or a finite clause (John suggested that ...). The subordinate clause was also transformed in a variety of ways, some of which unexpected but acceptable, such as ‘...that we fix the lawn-mower’, ‘...that the lawn-mower is/should be/must be/will be fixed’, etc...

2.3. Civilization and literature

The final section of the test consisted of questions regarding civilization for middle school, civilization and literature for high school. This part of the test was the most predictable for the candidates and therefore was the part that scored the best results. The requested answers were open-ended and about one-line long. Some examples for civilization (examples 7, 8 and 9) and literature (examples 10, 11 and 12) respectively are:

- (7) What did the “Great potato famine” in 19th century Ireland lead to?
(8) Who is the political head of the Church of England?
(9) What is the name of the royal anniversary that was celebrated in June 2012?
(10) Mention three American cultural texts (novels, essays, films, songs) directly engaging Cold War related topics.
(11) What is the title of a famous satirical pamphlet by Jonathan Swift which deals with Ireland?
(12) Name a South African writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

2.4. Results of the written admission test

Table 1 shows the mean scores obtained by the candidates in the various parts of the admission test for middle school (121 candidates). Scores have been normalised as the weight of the three parts was different.⁷ The reading comprehension scored the lowest average grades, which can be explained by the fact that it was comparatively more complex than the other two parts, as it involved a variety of advanced language skills. Overall, candidates performed better in the sentence transformation activity, although the mean score was only ‘good’, whereas the results for the civilization questions were on average very good.

	reading comprehension	sentence transformation	civilization
mean score/10	6	7.2	8.2

⁷The total score was 30. The reading comprehension scored a maximum of 15 points, the sentence transformation activity 5 points and the questions on civilization 10 points.

Table 1. Mean score of the written admission test for middle school.

2.5. The oral exam

Both written examinations, the national one and the local one, were highly competitive. The examining commissions drew up a performance ranking taking into consideration not only the scores obtained in the national and local tests but also a set of parameters related to the candidates' academic and professional profile.⁸ Therefore the oral examination was only partly competitive, and nobody failed it, although different levels of fluency and accuracy emerged. The interview consisted of spoken interaction prompted by a short text. Candidates were asked to select a text from a variety of passages prepared by the examiners, read it out loud and comment on it for a few minutes. A short exchange with the examiners followed on this topic or about the candidates' teaching experience. Marks were attributed on the basis of: a) pronunciation and intonation, b) fluency, c) grammatical correctness, d) vocabulary (lexical variety and complexity, use of idioms), e) communication and interaction skills.

3. The course of EFL teaching for the TFA programme

In this part of the article the EFL course contents will be illustrated.⁹ The course was addressed to a group of 20 trainees, both for middle and high school, who had had no or very little teaching experience.¹⁰ The EFL course consisted of 4-hour weekly lessons spread over 6 weeks (about 26 hours of classroom contact), whose main components can be summarized as follows:

a) Classroom management: how to deal with mixed levels of language competence; how to handle students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds; how to face problems related to different learning modes and language-based learning disabilities; how to increase motivation and involvement.

b) Time management: teacher time vs. student time; lesson planning and activities; organization of pupils' learning time.

c) Teaching methodology: how to develop the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) according to various competence levels.

d) Testing, correction and evaluation.

e) Use of audiovisual materials.

f) Use of online resources: learning English websites; e-learning platforms (e.g. Moodle).

g) Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

Selected materials for the course were taken from the following websites:

⁸The parameters were: the grade of the candidates' university degree, the grade average of BA and MA degrees (or equivalent degree), the number of years of teaching experience in state schools, further qualifications such as a PhD, research activity and publications.

⁹The course tutor was Prof. Elena Vietti, teacher of English at *Istituto Tecnico Industriale Statale "Amedeo Avogadro"* in Torino and language assistant at the Department of Management of the University of Torino.

¹⁰Some candidates had already had teaching experience and were not required to obtain credits for this course. Some candidates (15 trainees for upper secondary schools) attended this course in the University of Eastern Piedmont "Amedeo Avogadro" at Vercelli.

-
- a) Teaching English British Council: <<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/>>
 - b) Learning English for Teachers BBC: <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/teach/>>
 - c) ESL Teaching Resources: <<http://www.usingenglish.com/teachers/>>
 - d) Cambridge English Teaching Support: <<https://www.teachers.cambridgeesol.org/ts/>>
 - e) English Club: <<http://www.englishclub.com/>>
 - f) English4U: <<http://www.english-4u.com/>>

Reference books and magazines:

- a) J. Comyns-Carr, J. Parsons, *Speak Your Mind on CLIL*, Pearson, DIGIlibro, 2011.
- b) A. Ferraiolo, *Time for a film. A Movie Guide for Spotlight on You*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 2004.
- c) Language Mags, Pearson.
- d) P. Mehisto, M.-J. Frigols, D. Marsh, *Uncovering CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning in Bilingual and Multilingual Education*, Macmillan Education Australia, 2008.

The EFL course was delivered in a seminar/workshop mode. The tutor introduced the topic of the lesson (e.g. how to plan a reading comprehension lesson) and the selected materials for the specific activity; in the next lesson some trainees prepared and delivered a lesson in front of the class using their own selected materials. Observation and discussion followed to point out strengths and weaknesses. The teacher training technique followed a circular pattern of presentation, simulation, observation and group discussion.

An important component for the success of a course is, on the one hand, the motivation of the trainees and, on the other, the ability of the tutor to create a feeling of trust, respect and collaboration within the group. To this end, in the first lesson the tutor raised the question of what is involved in being a teacher and the pros and cons of the teaching profession, which helped to create a sense of community in the group. This was an example of how to approach a class for the first time and conduct a warm-up activity. It was very motivating for trainees to hear that foreign language teachers play a key role in today's education because of the importance of languages in international communication and in the achievement of the European Union's objective that all EU citizens should be competent in two foreign languages beside their own mother tongue. For this reason teachers should receive excellent training and be given opportunities to grow professionally throughout their careers. The European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a reminder that foreign language learning is a common goal that the EU is promoting and supporting, and we have shared objectives in language education.

Another pedagogical principle introduced in the class was the importance for a teacher to be flexible. Starting from Darwin's statement that "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent. It is the one most responsive to change" (chosen as epigraph to this article), it was highlighted that it is not the students who must adapt to teachers, but teachers who must adapt to students in many different ways, depending on their nationalities, social backgrounds, and learning abilities. The teacher is involved in many tasks at the same time, from teaching to monitoring, from assessing to counselling. In this light, real educators must free themselves from prejudices to develop their own professional identity and find pedagogical solutions that can fit in various contexts. This ability is part of the cognitive, social and emotional profile of the trainee teacher. Flexibility in handling specific problems of classroom management was the main focus of the 'problem solving corner', i.e. a period during lessons when specific issues were raised and collectively discussed such as "What can I do

when some students misbehave?”, “What do I do if my students don’t hand in their homework?”, “What to do if your class performs poorly in a test”, etc...

Grammar was introduced theoretically in its multi-faceted aspects, from prescriptive to descriptive, from deductive to inductive. Practically, the teaching of grammar was applied and integrated into reading and writing lessons, through the presentation of the different techniques to teach vocabulary (e.g. collocation spider grams or mind maps¹¹) and build various types of grammar exercises, i.e. multiple-choice, fill-in-the-gaps techniques, sentence building, sentence transformation, and vocabulary collocation.

The teaching of reading was dealt with using a variety of texts suitable for various competence levels and for improving reception, production, interaction and mediation skills in learners. Trainees were reminded of the importance of warm-up activities to map out familiar vocabulary (through a spider gram technique, for example) and were taught how to build comprehension questions for different level tasks and expected answers from students. Focus was placed on aspects of textual analysis, e.g. co-textual signals (synonyms, opposites, anaphoric and cataphoric references) and contextual clues (cultural allusions, logical inferences), rhetorical devices and register/stylistic features (technical vocabulary, formality/informality).

The teaching of writing focussed on technique for introducing students to the composition of various types of texts, of different length and complexity, from a single paragraph, to a review, a short story and finally an essay, explaining and illustrating the various component parts of each text type. For example, for essay writing there was a step-by-step analysis of how to teach pupils to plan the general structure of their essay (choose a topic – organize your ideas – write a draft). Then the textual organization was considered (introduction – main body – conclusion), specific rhetorical strategies of argumentative essays (topic sentence, bold statement, supporting examples), leading up to the drafting of a one-page essay (e.g. Do people depend too much on technology?).

In order to teach the techniques of a film lesson, the tutor chose the popular film *Billy Elliot*. Being set in the dramatic years of the coal miners’ strike in Britain in the 1980s and the harsh opposition of Margaret Thatcher’s conservative government to trade unions, the teacher may map out the vocabulary to describe workers’ living conditions, drawing comparisons with other periods of Britain’s history (e.g. the Industrial revolution, the Victorian Age). The film offers many thematic elements for discussion, relevant to teenage life, such as the phenomenon of bullying (Billy is ridiculed and ostracized by his family for wanting to become a ballet dancer), the relationship between father and son (Billy’s father becomes the hero of the film when he understands that his child’s ambitions must be encouraged), but also opportunities to practise grammar, e.g. modal verbs and conditional clauses (*What would your father say if you took up ballet / boxing for girls?*) and introduce writing activities.

Other films were presented as prompts to expand on historical and social issues, like *Shakespeare in Love* to introduce and illustrate features of the Elizabethan theatre and *Erin Brokovich*, to discuss environmental issues. The latter is the real story of a woman who unveils a case of environmental contamination caused by an energy plant, which triggered cancer and other illnesses in the workers. This film also offered a link to introducing CLIL and showing a CLIL lesson on the language of science.

¹¹ A spidergram is a diagram drawn in the shape of a spider’s body, with a word or concept placed in the centre and associated words and concepts radiating from it. A mind map is drawn in a similar way to visualize connections around a core concept.

4. Final remarks

The TFA experience reported in this article was extremely demanding in terms of time and efforts for the members of the Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Modern Cultures involved in this procedure, particularly for English, given the high number of applicants. Candidates too had to go through an exhausting and ruthless selection procedure, and in the end only 52 out of the 369 initial applicants for English managed to gain professional qualification, but unfortunately not a job. Most important, however, were the design of testing procedures, the development of assessment criteria, the selection of contents and the choice of training methods.

Nevertheless, the shift from the SSIS to TFA has now taken place and hopefully in the near future a new, stable university degree programme will come into force for graduates wishing to train as teachers. If the TFA procedure implemented in 2012-2013 remains a one-off experience, the university will certainly benefit from the work done as far as testing and training are concerned. In the new forthcoming programmes of teacher education, implemented by universities, specific pedagogical education will be combined with instruction of disciplinary areas; efforts will have to be made in order to integrate theoretical background and applied components for teacher education.

As for modern languages, Italy needs to make a giant leap forward. In the past, graduates would find themselves in charge of a class without having had any previous training or experience. Over the past decades, training and qualifying as a teacher has been a path fraught with difficulties, professional instability and dissatisfaction. In Italy there has always been a widespread belief that teachers are not true professionals, like doctors or lawyers, and good teachers have inborn qualities and instinctive motivation, which makes training superfluous. This prejudice has been disproved by ample evidence that well-trained teachers produce better students, and an overall upgrade of the educational system in a country can only bring long-lasting benefits in terms of social and economic growth.

As far as ELT is concerned, academics and educators must take advantage of the SSIS experience (Capra 2007, 2009) and of the huge amount of theoretical insights and know-how coming from the Anglo-Saxon tradition (Grenfell et al. 2003; Kelly et al. 2004; Hüttner et al. 2012), which has always been deeply rooted in applied linguistics with a strong pedagogical component. Among the many pre-service TEFL qualifications, TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and CELTA (Cambridge Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults) stand out as the leading models of the rigorous training which is considered to be indispensable for a true professional teacher of English.

The EFL course taught in Torino in 2013 was designed on the model of teacher training programmes in the British tradition, in such a way that pedagogical principles and methodology were closely related to what the trainee will experience in the classroom. Feedback was positive, as shown in several comments made by trainees at the end of the course:

I enjoyed every minute of your lesson, which I found really interesting and helpful, especially for teachers who haven't had the chance to teach in a regular school yet -

This is the best feedback I can think of. The lesson was interactive, easy to follow and brought me back to Wales where all the lessons were like yours.

In spite of trainees' enthusiasm, we are aware that, for lack of time and resources, some important aspects of modern language teaching were not given the full attention that they deserved. One of them is the use of online resources and e-learning platforms, which have

become key resources for teaching and learning foreign languages. English trained teachers must be able to access and exploit the wealth of tools and resources available online, such as dictionaries, practice and testing materials, and audio-visual resources. Moreover, they must be able to integrate *e-learning*, *blended-learning*, and *task-based learning* into the EFL curriculum. These new methods move away from traditional teacher-centred instruction to develop student-centred interactive and collaborative processes (Bozzo 2012). These may greatly increase students' motivation to communicate in English in real situations and for meaningful goals. For the future we may also envisage TFA courses for modern languages which are delivered in a blended-learning mode, that is, partly through traditional lectures, seminars and partly administered through online workshops, to enhance tutor-trainee collaboration, allow virtual teaching and feedback and increase productivity of collaborative tasks.

REFERENCES

- Bachman, L.F. / Palmer, A. (1996), *Language Testing in Practice: Designing and Developing Useful Language Tests*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Bozzo L. (2012), *Il blended learning all'Università: sperimentazione di un paradigma di apprendimento esperienziale costruttivista*, in T. Roselli et al. (a cura di), DIDAMATICA 2012 – Informatica per la Didattica. "Mondo Digitale", XI, 2, 2012. <<http://mondodigitale.aicanet.net/2012-2/didamatica/PAPER/FULL/F23.pdf>> [last accessed on 7 May 2014].
- Capra U. (2007), *The making of the making of language teachers*, in "LEND – Lingua e Nuova Didattica", 5: *Imparare a insegnare. La formazione degli insegnanti di lingue*, pp. 40-54.
- Capra U. (2009), *La formazione degli insegnanti di inglese come lingua straniera*, in Lucietto (2009), pp. 90-105. <http://try.iprase.tn.it/prodotti/materiali_di_lavoro/alis2008/download/Alis_2008.pdf> [last accessed on 15 March 2014].
- Finocchiaro, M. / Sako, S. (1983), *Foreign language testing- a practical approach*, New York, Regents Publishing Co.
- Hüttner, J. et al. (2012) (eds.), *Theory and Practice in EFL Teacher Education: Bridging the Gap*, Bristol, Multilingual Matters.
- Grenfell, M. et al. (2003), *The European Language Teacher. Recent Trends and Future Developments in Teacher Education*, Bern, Peter Lang.
- Kelly, M. et al. (2004), *European Profile for Language Teacher Education – A Frame of Reference. A Report to the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture*. <<http://www.lang.soton.ac.uk/profile/report/MainReport.pdf>> [last accessed on 7 May 2014]
- Lucietto, S. (2009) (a cura di), *Plurilinguismo e innovazione di sistema. Sfide e ricerche curriculari in ambito nazionale e internazionale*, Trento, Provincia Autonoma Trento, IPRASE del Trentino. <http://try.iprase.tn.it/prodotti/materiali_di_lavoro/alis2008/download/Alis_2008.pdf> [last accessed on 15 March 2014].
- McNamara, T. (2000), *Language Testing*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Pozzo G. (2007), *Pratiche di formazione, formare alla pratica: osservazione e ricerca azione*, in "LEND – Lingua e Nuova Didattica", 5: *Imparare a insegnare. La formazione degli insegnanti di lingue*, pp. 55-64.

VIRGINIA PULCINI • Full Professor of English Language and Translation at the University of Torino, Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Modern Cultures. She has published over 40 journal articles and book chapters in many fields of English linguistics, including phonetics and phonology, ELT, discourse analysis, learner English, lexicology, lexicography and corpus linguistics, mainly from an English-Italian cross-linguistic perspective. She has taken part in international research projects such as the compilation of the Dictionary of European Anglicisms, edited by Manfred Görlach (Oxford University Press 2001) and the LINDSEI corpus (Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage 2010). Her most productive research area is the lexical influence of English on Italian. She is now Principal Investigator of the project

“English in Italy: Linguistic, Educational and Professional Challenges”. Her most recent volume is *The Anglicization of European Lexis*, co-edited with Cristiano Furiassi and Félix Rodríguez González (John Benjamins 2012).

E-MAIL • virginia.pulcini@unito.it