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## Teacher-identified spaces for integrating ELF-aware instruction: Teacher professionalism and local ecology

Lynell Chvala & Mona Evelyn Flogfeldt

Globalization and migration have led to increased multilingualism and the reconceptualization of English as a (*multi-*)lingua franca (ELF) for teaching and learning. To meet ELF user-learners' needs, teachers need to include ELF awareness as part of their professional thinking and instructional practice and as an awareness suffused with a critical stance to their own and others' language-pedagogical mindsets and attitudes. This article explores teacher perceptions of spaces that open for the integration of ELF-aware instruction across educational settings. Qualitative analysis of a teacher discussion forum that explored spaces for ELF-aware instruction in the free online continuous professional development course "English as a Lingua Franca Practices for Inclusive Multilingual Classrooms" (ENRICH) revealed a teacher professionalism embedded in shifting paradigms for English in school and shifting learner needs as central to the integration of ELF-aware instruction. Spaces were also identified in policy formulations, the use of instructional materials, and the understanding of key stakeholders in the local community. These spaces, with varying degrees of ELF awareness, were viewed as more outside the control of teachers. Teachers also positioned teacher education as central in fronting debates of English and language in society and educating pre- and in-service professionals in ELF awareness.

**Key words:** English as a *multi*-lingua franca, ELF-aware instruction, teacher professionalism, instructional ecology

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### 1. Introduction

A consequence of globalization and world mobility is increased multilingualism understood as people's familiarity with two or more languages at different levels of receptive and/or productive proficiency. Multilingualism has instigated a reconceptualization of the English language and of its teaching in school. English has become a *multi*-lingua franca, both influenced by and influencing co-existing language systems in a speaker's linguistic repertoire (Jenkins, 2015). The fact that many learner-users experience English outside of school contexts from an early age, especially through English-mediated digital applications, highlights the difficulty of continuing to treat English as a *foreign* language.

In order to act on the realization that the status and role of English is changing, *ELF awareness* has been promoted as a useful framework to underpin teaching that acknowledges English as a global language of contact for interlocutors with different linguacultural backgrounds, who do not speak nor understand each other's primary language(s). With multilingualism and speaker diversity as the norm in many classrooms today, ELF awareness targets a (re)consideration of language and language use, instructional practice and learning as it is influenced by users' experiences and practices both in and outside the classroom. Central to ELF awareness is the need for change. ELF awareness thus addresses a rethinking of teachers' professional English language teaching (ELT) practices (Jenkins, 2015; Sifakis, 2019; Sifakis, Bayyurt, Cavalheiro, Fountana, Lopriore, Tsagari and Kordia, 2022; Sifakis and Bayyurt, 2018). Paradigmatic shifts such as these are complex and arduous. This special issue, "Integrating English as a Lingua Franca in Education," opens for the exploration of language education in school, as well as in teacher education, encompassing both pre-service programs and in-service continuous professional development (CPD).

The aim of this article is to explore teacher perceptions of spaces across educational settings that open for ELF-aware instruction. The goal is to generate an overview of salient factors that enable the integration of ELF awareness across a wide range of instructional contexts. Despite teachers identifying numerous *constraining* factors, the goal of this article is to highlight contextual *affordances* or implementational and ideological spaces identified by teachers as conducive to integrating ELF awareness into ELT practice (Hornberger, 2005; Johnson, 2010). The following section presents an overview of key concepts and insights relevant for the discussion of these findings.

## 2. Theoretical background

Three fields of research are particularly useful in considering ELF awareness and change in teachers' ELT practices. The first is concerned with the current status of English in society and schooling with specific reference to ELF use (Bayyurt and Sifakis, 2015; Jenkins, 2015; Kohn, 2018; Leung, 2022; Seidlhofer, 2011; Sifakis, 2019; Widdowson, 2013). The second conceptualizes teacher professionalism and teacher agency (Evans, 2014; Larsen-Freeman, 2019; Leung, 2013, 2022; Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015), while the third presents an ecological model of the wider educational context of practicing teachers. Salient concepts from these three fields serve as conceptual tools in exploring teachers' awareness of English today and how this awareness can become an integral part of teacher professionalism and open agentive spaces within educational settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Hult, 2019; van Lier, 2010).

### 2.1 ELF and ELT

ELF researchers argue that teachers and teacher educators need to be aware that ELF is not an inaccurate variety of English that deviates from standard English norms, but the emergent deployment of English resources in context and as constructed through social interaction as part of a user's semiotic repertoire (Flognfeldt, 2022; Ellis, 2019; Kohn, 2018). In an online interview, Widdowson (2018) offers a simple and succinct definition of ELF as: "essentially an appropriate use of the resources of English for a whole range of purposes – globalized purposes". Once teachers are aware of ELF as a fluid and dynamic way of using English, ELF awareness can be invoked as a pedagogical resource for English language instruction (Bayyurt and Sifakis, 2015; Sifakis and Bayyurt, 2018; Sifakis et al., 2022). Studies suggest, however, that teachers may lack a metalanguage for describing the globalized purposes of this type of English language use (Chvala, 2020; Rose, McKinley and Galloway, 2021).

Recognizing the centrality of multilingualism today means recognizing that learners require a repertoire of pragmatic strategies over a detailed knowledge of linguistic structure in preparation for effective interaction with a diversity of speakers (Leung, 2022; Leung and Jenkins, 2020). New conceptualizations of language proficiency call for changes in teacher priorities in the English language classroom. Referencing the revised CEFR (Council of Europe, 2021), Leung (2022) emphasizes *mediation* as “a speaker’s use of language to interact and facilitate communication with others” (p. 178) as a central component in a speaker’s language proficiency. Thus, a particular variety of English is *not* singled out. Instead, the contingency and unpredictability of communicative events involving speakers with diverse multilingual repertoires is acknowledged. This emphasis requires teacher educators to prepare pre- and in-service teachers and learners to make informed interlocutor-sensitive choices that go far beyond retrieving standard English words and expressions as ways of developing important mediation strategies (Sperti, 2022).

An ELF awareness framework emphasizing this preparedness consists of three parameters (Sifakis, 2019): (a) awareness of language and language use, (b) awareness of instructional practice, and (c) awareness of learning. The focus in this article is on teacher awareness and the need for teachers to provide rich opportunities for learner exploration of the various ways in which English can be used. This also requires teachers to critically scrutinize their own attitudes, perceptions, and practices with regards to English, and how they understand proficiency in English in relation to normativity. Teachers, like their students, are likely to be ELF users and thus need to be critically sensitive to power relations involved in ELT practices. In this way, an ELF-aware teacher who is conscious of new roles of English and recognizes communicative capability as the main purpose of language education (Widdowson, 2003) will ideally be prepared to incorporate these multidimensional and critically aware insights in planning and enacting relevant instruction to meet learners’ needs. The actual instructional situation, however, may be less straightforward. Sifakis (2019) proposes a dual continuum of ELF awareness which illustrates the relationship between the extent of teachers’ knowledge about ELF issues and their local instructional context, on the one hand, and the extent to which their classroom practice aligns with this knowledge, on the other. The two parts of the continuum may in fact turn out *not* to mirror each other. Teachers may teach in a way that aligns with ELF awareness without actually having the relevant knowledge base or vice versa. This potential differential demonstrates the internal complexity of the ELF-awareness construct as well as teacher professionalism (Sifakis, 2019, p. 300).

ELF research is concerned with linguistic aspects of ELF discourse and the professional challenges that arise when educational stakeholders wish to act as agents of change. Cogo, Fang, Kordia, Sifakis, and Siqueira (2021) encourage teachers and teacher educators to couple ELF awareness with critical language education (CLE). The aim of CLE is the development of active citizens whose goal is social change, focusing on language use as a vital factor. Three recursive phases are crucial: (1) exposure, (2) critical awareness, and (3) the development of practices teachers can enact in their instructional contexts. Engagement with ELF plays an important role in this potentially transformative process. The readiness and ability required to develop ELF awareness is an integral part of teacher professionalism, which will be discussed in the following section.

## 2.2 Teacher professionalism

Teacher professionalism must also be reconceptualized in line with the shifting understanding of the status and role of English use in the world, in local contexts, and consequently in ELT. Various factors underpin teacher professionalism, where a central dichotomy exists between sponsored versus independent professionalism. Leung (2013) defines *independent professionalism* as practitioners' experiential learning, insights, attitudes, and "a commitment to carefully reflect on one's own work, to examine the assumptions and the values embedded in the prevailing established practices, and to take action to effect change where appropriate" (p. 24). In contrast, *sponsored professionalism* entails "institutionally promoted and publicly endorsed views designed to define what teachers should know and do" (Leung, 2022, p. 184).

Many studies have sought to identify what constitutes professionalism in various occupations (Day and Sachs, 2004; Evans, 2008, 2014). Insights from these studies can be contextualized to refer specifically to teacher professionalism, teacher professional development, and teacher agency, by appropriately supplying information about relevant actors and material conditions in educational settings. Evans (2014) is primarily concerned with the cognitive processes of professionals at the micro level relating to the internalization of new impulses in interaction with prior learning and experience. Impulses are acquired and elaborated in the professional's mind. Professional development has a multidimensional structure, with behavioral, attitudinal, and intellectual components (pp. 189-190). Intellectual (referring to cognitive processes and knowledge structures) and attitudinal development are vital components of a professional mindset. Behavioral development at the level of action may be the result of externally mandated changes, for example changes in national policy (sponsored professionalism). Such changes are viewed as part of professional development but not necessarily professional *learning*, as they may or may not be internalized. A central element in professional learning is the recognition of and commitment to what a practitioner considers a "better way" of performing professionally (p. 187). This recognition can be the result of a deliberate search for improvement, or simply the result of reflection on past professional experience coupled with a desire for improved future outcomes. The three components referred to above are particularly relevant for teacher agency.

Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) propose an ecological model for understanding teacher agency as an emergent capacity achieved through interplay with factors in the environment. Agency does not determine what someone *is* but what they *do*, where emphasis is on action. Priestley et al.'s model is multidimensional along temporal and relational lines and incorporates the dynamic interplay of the past, future, and present. According to Priestley et al. (2015), teacher agency is achieved through (1) influences of *past* personal and professional experience of what works, coupled with the teacher's personal capacity, values, and beliefs, (2) an orientation towards - and desires for - the future, with aspirations for improvement, and (3) the teacher's situated engagement with the present (p. 4). Teachers' engagement with the present refers to a practical-evaluative dimension, which includes cultural, structural, and material characteristics of enabling or constraining potential. Enabling factors at the material level, e.g., textbooks, technological resources, and other teaching tools, can serve as actants to support teacher agency. Priestley et al. (2015) argue that teacher education should ideally prepare future teachers for agentive practice, i.e., informed decision-making and action in the classroom, by helping students build resources and supplying opportunities for interactive reflection in various contexts. Dynamic monitoring of these processes of resources building and reflection can in turn serve as assessment for professional learning for the teacher educator.

Leung's (2013) discussion of professionalism and teacher agency aligns with Evans (2014). He defines teacher *expertise* as knowledge "gained from formal education and training and experiential learning, as well as the capacity to convert this knowledge to professional practice» (p. 14). Teacher expertise essentially consists of more than disciplinary knowledge. It includes job-related factors, such as knowledge of students' experiences, educational backgrounds, and multilingual identities (Fisher, Evans, Forbes, Gayton and Liu, 2020), the parameters in the local educational system, and curricular expectations. This wider view aligns with the temporal elements of past, future, and present in Priestley et al. (2015). Also relevant is what Shulman (1986) termed *pedagogical content knowledge*, referring to the teacher's awareness of what is more or less demanding for learners followed by appropriate accommodating procedures. A fourth component of teachers' professional expertise is the management of power and status relations within instructional communities. As a whole, these elements promote teachers' professional repertoires and enable them to make informed, locally relevant decisions. At the core of teacher agency is decision-making and the capacity for emergent professional judgement and choice (Leung, 2022, p. 183).

Teacher agency as a vital component of teacher professionalism, especially of independent professionalism (Leung, 2013, 2022), is not a skill nor a capacity inherent in a person. Rather, agency is emergent, potentially arising out of interactions in the world. Biesta and Tedder (2007) and Larsen-Freeman (2019) identify the *relational* character of agency in an environment as central. This concerns availability and recognition of choice, and – for the purposes of this study – perceived openings for reconceptualizing English and integrating ELF-aware instruction into ELT in the local context.

### 2.3 Instructional ecology

Language instruction takes place in different educational settings involving particular actors and elements in particular local contexts. Hult (2019) systematizes relationships and directions that influence teachers in these contexts by building on Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological model of human development at micro, meso, and macro levels and thus systematizes relationships and directions that influence teachers in educational contexts. At the micro level is the teacher with individual knowledge, beliefs, values, and semiotic repertoires. The teacher is surrounded by colleagues, learners with diverse needs, parents, technology, and instructional artifacts. The interaction of teachers and the immediate surroundings occur at the micro level, for example, in classroom teaching and learning (Hult, 2019). The meso level consists of sociocultural institutions and communities, such as schools, educational authorities, national and regional educational policies, and any mandated instructional materials. The macro level is more abstract and characterized by ideological values and structures that may or may not encompass interculturality and multilingualism. Relationships and influence between levels is not hierarchical but in constant interaction and may shape each other on any level (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). The individual teacher is embedded in and interacts with the educational ecology at various levels in their day-to-day professional work. Based on the insights from studies of ELF, teacher professionalism, and instructional ecology, this study asks:

*What spaces do teachers across educational contexts perceive as opening for the integration of ELF-aware teaching and learning?*

### 3. Method

The aim of this article is to explore spaces teachers identify as conducive to integrating ELF aware instruction in their teaching practice. Data consist of discussion forum entries (n=185) for 97 teachers from ELT contexts around the world. Entries were generated in the course module “Instructional Context” in the free online course “English as a Lingua Franca Practices for Inclusive Multilingual Classrooms” (ENRICH). The goal of the ENRICH course is to serve as a catalyst for change to support teachers in developing ELF awareness and enhanced criticality in interaction with teachers and teacher educators from other countries and contexts and, ultimately, to identify ways of integrating ELF awareness in locally relevant ways into teaching practices (Cavalheiro et al., 2021; Sifakis and Kordia, 2021; Sifakis et al., 2022). Collaborators in the formation of the ENRICH course included the Hellenic Open University (Greece), Roma Tre University (Italy), Bogazici University (Turkey), University of Lisbon (Portugal), Oslo Metropolitan University (Norway), and the Computer Technology Institute and Press “Diophantus” (Greece). Teacher educators from the collaborating partners served as course mentors, and teacher participants came from these countries as well as Argentina, Brazil, Pakistan, Qatar, and Ukraine.

The “Instructional Context” module, from which the data come, was one of 28 modules in the course and preceded by a module investigating the status and use of English in larger society. The “Instructional Context” module asked teachers to generate a map of their local educational context guided by the investigation of a) “English” in central educational policy documents, b) salient features of “good” English teachers locally, and c) constructions of “English” in instructional materials. Teachers then used this map to formulate and share opinions about the inclusion of ELF in their local teaching context and to identify next steps for integrating ELF-aware instruction locally (see Appendix). Teachers shared and commented on each other’s opinions and next steps in a written discussion forum where course mentors encouraged, supported, and attempted to extend these discussions.

The data set includes teacher comments and responses exclusively. Comments from the course mentor are not included. Teacher comments were anonymized for analysis, using a coding system that allowed for retrieval and reference in the reporting of findings. Recursive thematic analysis moved the findings from descriptive codes to interpretive categories of pedagogical spaces for ELF-aware thinking and practices as perceived by teachers across instructional contexts (see *Figure 1*). Final analysis positioned interpretive categories in relation to one another out from the data, as represented in *Figure 2* (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Richards, 2009). The next section presents findings and a discussion of findings from the perspective of 21<sup>st</sup> century shifts, ELF, ELF awareness, ELF-aware instruction, teacher professionalism, and instructional ecology. Findings are presented using referenced excerpts from teacher comments. Additions to excerpts were made solely to enhance the meaning in presenting findings and not to promote traditional views of accuracy in ELF exchanges. These changes are marked in brackets.



Descriptive codes	Interpretive categories		
Holistic language learning	Paradigm shift	21st century shifts	<b>21<sup>st</sup> century shifts</b>
Teacher professionalism Teacher collaboration Assessment Accessibility to/use of technology Teacher education	Teacher agency Classroom demographics Technology accessibility Teacher education	Teacher professionalism and agency Teacher collaboration Teacher education	<b>Teacher professionalism</b> (agency, collaboration, teacher education)
Flexibility in selecting/adapting materials	Instructional materials	Producers of instructional materials	<b>Instructional materials</b>
Support from educational authorities	Support from educational authorities Parental influence	National policy/policy makers Local educational authorities Parent and student beliefs	<b>Policy</b> (and policy makers)  <b>The local community</b> (local educational authorities, parents, and students)

Figure 1: The analytical process

#### 4. Findings and discussion

Figure 2 represents spaces teachers identified as conducive to integrating ELF-aware instruction in the educational context. Teachers positioned their professionalism as central to this integration, as embedded in institutional and real-world contexts, and as potentially supported by teacher education. Key stakeholders – e.g., policy makers, materials publishers, educational authorities, and the local community – could open for ELF-aware instruction or could constrain its integration. For this reason, these openings are shaded, as they are nebulous and viewed as more outside of teachers’ control. The key categories presented and discussed below include: 21<sup>st</sup> century shifts, teacher professionalism, instructional materials, and the local community (e.g., educational authorities, parents, and students). Key points for discussion will center around ELF and ELF awareness, teachers’ professionalism, learning, development, and agency, and an ecological model for exploring directions of influence.



Figure 2: Spaces for integrating ELF-aware instruction as positioned in teacher perceptions

#### 4.1 21st century shifts

Teachers identify “a great change in English teaching since the 2000s” (T13) and a desire to meet the “needs of our 21<sup>st</sup> century students” (T15). They describe a multilingual world, where “the majority (of speakers) use English as a Lingua Franca” (T18) and where ELF “allows people, especially learners, to see English as part of their repertoire” (T17). They describe technology as a “coping mechanism” (T33) for embracing new realities in the classroom and for equipping learners “to think for themselves and to communicate in effective ways in a jungle of complexity” (T15). The institutional contexts in which teachers practice are viewed as embedded in these larger developments (see Figure 2). This embeddedness applied to more homogenous and regional, as well as diverse and urban, environments:

*“Even if our local context is not yet multicultural or multilingual... sooner or later it will be... the principles of multiculturalism, of accepting others, accepting your own unique identity...are principles of utmost importance... [and we should] promote [them] to our students” (T35)*

Findings suggest that teachers *have* experienced a paradigmatic shift in understanding English as a contact language for multilingual speakers, as used for multiple globalized purposes, and in relation to learners’ changing needs for English (Jenkins, 2015, Widdowson, 2018). Findings also indicate that teachers experience new levels of complexity in multilingual communication using English. They consider learners’ criticality important in ELT that can enable them to function effectively within this complexity (Cogo et al., 2021). Technology not only highlights globalized purposes and multilingual communication, but highlights learner needs for exposure to and interaction with globalized complexity, regardless of the degree of local diversity.

#### 4.2 Spaces: Teacher professionalism

Teachers placed their professionalism at the center of spaces for integrating ELF-aware instruction. An initial site for integration was in the “broad psychological spectrum” (T3) of teachers’ experience and thinking that could afford the expansion of “parameters for what English actually IS” (T19). A secondary site for integration was a professionalism centered on teachers’ flexibility and willingness to adopt an experimental stance towards ELF integration, described as “a leap of faith” (T32, T14). This took shape in conducting a “class experiment [in ELF-aware instruction] from time to time” (T22) and sharing successful practices as a “multiplier effect” (T16) in moving the profession forward. The support of “like-minded” (T18) teachers in this pursuit could enhance teachers’ feelings of adequacy and a positive mindset towards professional learning processes that “rethink, re-evaluate, and reshape” (T31) instruction to incorporate ELF perspectives and use. Collaboration and community in this process created “a window of opportunity” (T24) for “new types of interaction between teachers and learners” (T23) that could challenge more traditional or well-established views of good practice.

These findings place openings for ELF-aware instruction in the cognitive and social processes of teachers at the micro-level and primarily in teachers’ independent professionalism (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Hult, 2019; Leung, 2013). ELF and ELF awareness as cognitive constructs that provide a metalanguage for “English” are constructed as a pre-requisite for integration of ELF-aware instruction (Bayyurt and Sifakis, 2015; Chvala, 2020; Rose et al., 2021; Sifakis and Bayyurt, 2018; Sifakis et al., 2022). Adopting the construct is the first step in adopting a willingness to accept a certain level of professional risk in entering uncharted territory. This risk is an essential part of independent professionalism, as it allows practitioners



to incorporate experiential learning, insights, attitudes, and critical reflection on established practices as a means of initiating appropriate action and change (Leung, 2012). This means that, for these teachers, teachers' thinking, experience and psychology precedes action, as argued by ELF-awareness scholars (Bayyurt and Sifakis, 2015; Sifakis, 2019; Sifakis and Bayyurt, 2018). However, ELF awareness scholarship suggests the possibility of ELF-aware instruction integrated into practice *without* an explicit and conscious relationship to ELF awareness (cf. the dual continuum in Sifakis, 2019). This allows for the possibility of teachers integrating ELF-aware instruction without a conscious awareness or metalanguage to explain this inclusion.

Findings also indicate the importance of social, as well as cognitive, professional learning. Local professional communities consisting of positive, like-minded, and collaborative colleagues support social processes for raising ELF awareness and applying it as a pedagogical resource in the classroom. This form of learning reflects the relational characteristics of teacher agency as social and embedded in the local environment (Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2019). Developing *expertise* that encompasses both disciplinary knowledge and experiential learning is aided by social learning processes amongst colleagues in similar settings (Leung, 2013; Evans, 2014). Assuming an experimental stance to develop this expertise involves a certain professional risk. Teachers emphasize the importance of community support in developing this expertise and exerting teacher agency as decision-making and the capacity for questioning and developing professional judgement and choice (Leung, 2022). Exerting agency also entails managing relations of power and status, where a supportive and collaborative community is seen as inherently useful in challenging the power of established practices to open spaces for ELF-aware instruction at the micro level.

Teachers also invoked teacher education that supported their professionalism, especially in instigating and fronting a "counter-trend" (T11) to traditional notions of English and English language pedagogy. They called for teacher educators a) to engage actively in public debates that could raise ELF awareness in professional and public discourse, b) to challenge possible disconnects between the English taught in school and English used outside of school, and c) to dislodge and disrupt established beliefs about ELT amongst educational authorities. In this way, teacher education could crucially support teachers in creating spaces for ELF-aware instruction in school.

Findings that call for support from teacher education resonate with sponsored professionalism in that teachers look to teacher education to promote and legitimize ELF awareness in extending definitions of what teachers should know and do in their institutional settings (Leung, 2022). This sponsored professionalism entreats teacher education to exert influence at the meso level, engaging sociocultural institutions and educational communities at the regional and national level and to challenge larger ideologies of language that may or may not encompass diversity, multilingualism, and interculturality at the macro level (Hult, 2019). While Priestley et al. (2015) identify the responsibility of teacher education to prepare teachers for independent professionalism and agentive practice, these findings highlight responsibilities of teacher education to challenge the status quo at the meso and macro levels in opening spaces for ELF-aware instruction locally.

### 4.3 Spaces: Policy

Teachers described shifts away from native-speakerism “in the official discourse” (T29) as positive, especially “government policies [that] seem to have open the door on a new perspective of teachers and learners of English” (T32). Policy goals to foster “global citizen identity” (T29) and active citizenship and to meet “21<sup>st</sup> century educational and job market needs” (T16) were seen as conducive to ELF-aware thinking and teaching, though often these goals were anchored in general policy and curriculum and less so in the English subject curriculum. While teachers described overarching policy as conceptualizing spaces for ELF-aware instruction, some viewed the situation as exclusively policy-based and “stuck in the first theoretical step” (T30), with less “challenging [of] traditional ELT practices in school” (T31). Policy constructing “English as a means of communication rather than... language as a topic of study” (T12) and clearly referencing CEFR levels of communicative performance provided, for many, “the perfect context for including and/or developing ELF-aware activities” (T6).

Teachers also described the usefulness of creating local curricula sourced from central curriculum documents that made visible stages of learner development and expected performance. This was referred to as a local “vertical curriculum” (T6) that could follow the learning trajectory across grade levels in developing English proficiency. A local vertical curriculum that integrated the “intercultural domain” (T7), accounted for “the use of new technologies” (T26), prioritized needs to communicate “national and internationally” (T37), and immersed students in the “authentic use of language” (T27) focusing on the “How and Why in language rather than merely [the] What” (T27) was seen as useful in bridging overarching educational and curricular intentions and creating “space to expand our teaching” (T21). Teachers described the creation of “[our] own [local] syllabus ...with supplementary materials...[adapted] according to learners’ profile and needs” (T26) as creating “room for an ELF-aware approach” (T7). Curriculum providing direction but allowing “freedom of choice” (T24) was seen by teachers as opening spaces for teacher professionalism and agency in meeting 21<sup>st</sup> century realities through integrating ELF-aware instruction in locally relevant ways.

These findings suggest a possible gap in the interaction of a) the meso level of policy makers and macro level ideologies of citizenship, cultural and linguistic diversity, and neoliberal values, and b) the micro level of teaching practices, values, and beliefs in English as a school subject (Hult, 2019). While relationships and influence across levels may shape thinking and action on any level within the educational ecology, larger educational vision and goals may have less influence on teachers’ day-to-day professional practices in the English language classroom (Hult 2019; Larsen-Freeman, 2019). Local engagement with curriculum and transformation of curricular documents into local curricula that highlight authenticity, diversity, situated communication, and technology seemed, in teachers’ views, to allow for greater exertion of professionalism and agency in actively interpreting policy intentions, transforming them for local use, and enacting curricular intentions in practice in the classroom. This engagement clearly opened spaces for the inclusion of ELF-aware instruction, as it allowed teachers to understand their expertise in light of larger aims for English education in school.

#### 4.4 Spaces: Instructional materials

Teachers described freedom from state-mandated textbooks as allowing “more room to maneuver” (T5) and “to go beyond” (T8, T34, T36, T21) established practices. The freedom to adapt or incorporate other instructional materials opened for a more “learner-oriented and communicative approach” (T12) appropriate for the needs of English learner-users today. Creating, extending, and supplementing instructional materials with “experiential and task-based learning through mediation” (T20) was seen as highly relevant for integrating ELF-aware instruction. Mediation tasks described by teachers could include “information processing, [the] negotiation of meaning” (T9), “[the use of] multiple channels” of communication (T27), and the integration of different language skills. Mediation tasks were seen to align well with curriculum that intended to “serve students’ intents and purposes [as characterized by their] everyday needs for language use” and to be prioritized over tasks more “associated with exams” (T25).

These findings highlight the need for mediation tasks in instructional materials (Sperti, 2022). This refers to tasks that capture learner needs for English and allows for the mediation of information as well as the negotiation of meaning through interaction and the use of various (linguistic and other) modes. Processes of mediation as central in a task-based approach reflects constructions of learner proficiency in line with ELF scholarship that views communicative performance as emergent, constructed, contingent, pragmatic, strategic, and less predictable (Ellis, 2019; Kohn, 2018; Leung, 2022; Leung and Jenkins, 2020; Widdowson, 2018). The last line above suggests that teachers prioritize this view over tasks that seem to have a more predictable outcome in formalized examinations.

Findings also suggest a task-based approach to learning and mediation as central in understanding English proficiency and in opening spaces for ELF-aware instruction. When these tasks are not available in instructional materials, teachers must rely on their own professionalism to create, adapt, or extend instructional materials. This requires teacher professionalism, expertise, and agency at the micro level and a desire to engage with what they may experience as constraints in materials, such as textbooks, technological limitations, or other teaching tools (Priestley et al., 2015). Constraints of instructional materials may also be exacerbated by meso-level control that mandates the use of certain materials over others (Hult, 2019).

#### 4.5 Spaces: The local community

Teachers described local access to CPD opportunities such as workshops, seminars, in-service education, and professional conferences as important for opening spaces for ELF-aware instruction locally. Training opportunities, however, were described as “[often more] inclined to standard norms and unaware of the global changes in language teaching” (T10). Conversely, the use of “catchphrases like ‘gamification’, ‘Project-based Learning’, or ‘21<sup>st</sup>-century Classrooms” (T29) in local educational documents and among regional advisors, principals, and school boards was seen as advantageous in raising ELF awareness in the local community and, consequently, creating space for ELF-aware instruction in school. Moreover, local discourse that focused on the importance of speaking English over grammatical knowledge of English was viewed as “hopeful” (T2) in raising ELF awareness among parents, students, and local authorities and in dislodging more traditional views of grammatical knowledge as the goal of learning and a transparent and easily understood construct of assessment. Acknowledging needs for change in thinking about English and English competence within the local community allowed teachers “to be more patient with parents

and, sometimes, principals who feel the grammar-based approach is better than the communicative one” (T4). The productive dialogue of local stakeholders was seen as important for enhancing local consensus around English as a contact language and “useful tool which can broaden horizons...and open a window to the world” (T9). This dialogue was seen as beneficial for promoting ELF awareness locally and thus generating space for integrating ELF-aware instruction in the local community.

Recognizing local needs also helped teachers to argue for learner-centered pedagogy that could “accommodate students’ needs, prior experiences and expectations” (T34). Local support for professional flexibility and teacher agency, in combination with technological and material provisions, were also seen as crucial in initiating and maintaining this form of English pedagogy. Freeing teachers from school policies requiring that “all classes are at the same point of the curriculum throughout the school year” (T1) also opened for the experimentation necessary to integrate ELF-aware instruction in local practices. Diversity in the student population – though not a requirement - was also seen as advantageous for raising ELF awareness, as “a lot of classes can only be spoken in English...[where] ELF stands as the medium of communication... [and where students] draw on linguistic resources to better communicate” (T28). In these settings, teachers could lean on the local use of English as a multi-lingua franca as representative of much of the English used in the world and, in doing so, open for ELF-aware instruction as a natural part of classroom practices.

Findings connected to the local community indicate the importance of micro-meso-macro level interactions in opening local spaces for ELF-aware instruction. Interestingly, teachers find the early focus of ELF scholarship on speaking as useful for counteracting ideologies emphasizing linguistic knowledge over soft-assembled language resources in communication and semiotic repertoires (Jenkins, 2015; Kohn, 2018; Flognfeldt, 2022; Widdowson, 2018). Viewing local diversity as conducive to the relevance and naturalness of multi-lingua franca practices also provides teachers with useful synergy in opening local spaces for ELF-aware instruction in the immediate context. Teachers also exhibit professional development in recognizing and committing to a “better way” of performing locally in dialogue with the surrounding community’s shifting ideological positions for English and English competence (Evans, 2014). Interaction with parents, students, and school authorities seems to interface micro, meso, and macro levels in reconsidering and creating spaces for ELF-aware instruction in locally meaningful ways.

## 5. Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to explore spaces teachers identify as conducive to integrating ELF-aware instruction in their local teaching practice across a wide range of instructional contexts. Findings suggest that the contextually diverse teachers in this study identified their own professionalism as central to any integration of ELF-aware instruction in the classroom. This professionalism was neither developed nor exerted in isolation. Professionalism was both individual and cognitive in grasping ELF as a metalanguage for understanding much of the use of English in the world today, as well as social and experimental through the collaboration and support of professional learning communities. Professionalism also involved exerting agency to facilitate openings and opportunities for ELF awareness and ELF-aware instruction in locally appropriate ways. This could include creating, supplementing, or extending instructional materials, as well as generating local curricula. Sponsored professionalism that emphasized different influences within the instructional ecology and the embeddedness of independent professionalism invoked the support of teacher education, educational policy discourses, and

the productive dialogue of administrators, parents and learners in the local community in moving the profession forward.

The contribution of these findings is that they provide an initial overview of processes and mechanisms that create spaces for ELF-aware instruction from the viewpoint of teachers and across the specificities of individual contexts. This article seeks to better understand English learning and teaching as complex and dynamic and to better understand teacher agency to include 21<sup>st</sup> century complexity and dynamism in local contexts. It explores teacher views on current uses of English, learner needs for English, teachers' own agency and professionalism in developing practice responsive to these realities and needs, and their identification of spaces of opportunity for these pursuits. The findings are unique in that they "explore independent teacher professionalism and teacher agency in diverse educational environments" in light of "the protean nature of language knowledge, the dynamic and contingent ways in which language can be used in different social interactions, and the complexities of learning-teaching processes" (Leung, 2022, p. 185). In addition, findings reflect an understanding of teacher agency "in respect of the activities of teachers in school" and as embedded in their instructional context (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 3). In doing so, they provide guidelines for the implications of educational decisions across micro, meso, and macro levels of institutional ecologies that may or may not open for learner-centered 21<sup>st</sup> century English pedagogy.

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## Appendix

### Activity 1: Reflecting on your contextual map

Using the table that you have created or the 'map' of your instructional context, consider:

- To what degree do you find a balance between foreign language thinking and ELF-awareness?
- What was surprising about your instructional context or something you had not considered before?
- Did you find that thinking across ELT policy, the ELT profession, and ELT instructional materials aligned, or not? What disagreements or tensions did you find, if any?
- Finally, what space or possibilities do you see for integrating ELF-aware teaching and learning in your instructional context?

**Lynell Chvala** ([chvaly@oslomet.no](mailto:chvaly@oslomet.no)) is an Associate Professor of English language pedagogy at Oslo Metropolitan University. Her research focuses on in-service teachers and expanding landscapes for English as a multi-lingua franca in schools.

**Mona Evelyn Flognfeldt** ([monaf@oslomet.no](mailto:monaf@oslomet.no)) is a Professor of English language pedagogy at Oslo Metropolitan University with extensive experience with all levels of English language teacher education. In recent years, her main focus has been on continuous professional development programmes for teachers. Her research interests include vocabulary development, teacher learning, multilingualism with English, beginner education, and English as a lingua franca.