

E-Newsletter

Bulgarian English Teachers' Association

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Editors' Corner

Dear Readers,

In this issue you will have the pleasure of reading a bit on the current work of some of our regular contributors. We have tried to ensure that all links and materials included are active, so you can get the maximum out of this experience.

Customarily, we open with a read by Bill Templer. This whole section cannot hold a full account of how rich and stimulating Bill's article is. His contribution is an attempt to battle very familiar problems of our workaday lives. The message is clear – through dialogue we can face all the problems we experience together and talk about solutions, may be even solve some of them. Bill presents 'a potpourri of questions probing the actual often difficult realities of teachers' professional daily lives' (7) to get us started. Thank you, Bill, for this food for thought!

Next, we have another contribution by Nataša Intihar Klančar. Nataša, like all of us connected through BETA, is not only very enthusiastic about working with her students, but she also goes a long way to ensure that as teachers we are well equipped to deal with our classrooms. In this paper she introduces us to *The 8 keys of excellence* and she outlines how she presented them to her class and incorporated them into her methodology. Her account of their application is inspired, insightful and genuine. She is convinced that '[they] work not only at school but also at home,' she insists that 'the Keys are a way to a successful living' (13; my emphasis).

In the final article of this issue, Diana Velcheva-Emmanouilidou takes a different approach – teaching English through Drama. Through reflection and the feedback of her students, Diana presents the success of her class at the 10th International Festival for Children's Creativity in English "The World in Children's Hands" in Balchik. Have a read to find out what her students thought about their feat.

In the concluding pages find details about forthcoming ELT events and be sure not to miss the 28th BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference in Plovdiv – 2019 European Capital of Culture.

Happy reading!

Polly Petcova

Issue Editor

Mournful Tidings



In September 2018 the world of ELT lost **Simon Greenall**, President of IATEFL 1997 - 1999.

I had the honour of knowing him in person, and the pleasure of teaching using his courses, Reward in particular – a title that surely many of you are familiar with. He was a brilliant presenter at numerous events worldwide. He was also the architect of the IATEFL Wider Membership Scheme – and again many teachers of English in our country benefit from it. In 2013 he was awarded an OBE (Officer of the Order of the British Empire) for services to English language teaching. I can only fully agree with the official statement by IATEFL, quote “During a long and distinguished career Simon made a huge contribution to English language teaching. Those who knew him valued his generosity, warmth, kindness and caring for everyone around him. He will be hugely missed by friends and colleagues around the world.”

RIP, Simon.

On behalf of BETA,

Georgi Geshev



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Breaking the Silence: Discussing the Realities of Our Own Workaday Lives as Teachers

Bill Templer



Source: <https://tinyurl.com/yb7vp296>

Teachers everywhere today are facing mounting problems, neoliberal austerity cutbacks, new on-the-job pressures: listen to [NEU /UK](#) colleagues, ‘enough is enough!’ Sound familiar? In *self-reinventing* as a teacher,

Markova and Velikova (2017) stress the need for all teachers to engage hands-on in “mapping out their ‘stories’ or ‘ways of addressing recurring problems’ as one of their main sources of knowledge about

language teaching and learning,” within a mode of “dialogic spaces where multiple perspectives and voices of the community of language professionals” can be explored and deepened (p. 12). They see the conference space as creating inventive “[communities of practice](#)” (CoPs) for teachers in Wenger-Trayner’s core sense, energizing robust Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The present

article foregrounds the need to spur such dynamic “multiple perspectives and voices.” This can yield fruitful change, such as new *local* branches of BETA as grassroots “dialogic spaces,” as well as more school-based *internships* for teacher trainees (Ivanova, 2017), a key learnscape.

I assemble below a potpourri of questions probing the actual often difficult realities of teachers’ professional daily lives. Such questions can serve to help spur emergent, face-to-face or digital CoPs or small local “peer circles” – dialogic spaces clearly needed in Bulgaria. In his excellent needs survey in Bulgaria, Jesse Kiendl (2016) reminds us of that desideratum, closing with the engaged bright hope for “more collaboration and sharing of knowledge and skills in workshops, of experience from mentors, and of awareness from discussions in professional learning communities” (p. 26; see [EB](#)). His findings are worth *careful rereading* in tandem with the medley of queries seriatim below. Juggling/exploring such questions together can also help us as harried educators to “unlearn ‘learnt helplessness’” (Szesztay, 2015), an existential challenge in all our workaday *and* private lives. It requires *rediscovering* “teacher voice,” airing realities and grievances, criticizing, speaking up, evaluating, praising. Our CPD motto: *Making Change Happen*.

Questions to raise, ponder, discuss

The article presents a largely rough-hewn catalogue of questions you can choose from and combine – and add new questions of your own or rephrase – as focal

points for interviewing, self-reflection, idea interchange with colleagues in “peer circles of practice” in your own local setting, and in various digital spaces, within BETA and beyond. It also has a number of hyperlinks worth exploring at your leisure. In connection with this article, teachers should best (a) also read my online essay “[Exploring Teachers’ Real Lives and Voices: A Neglected Research Focus](#)”(2009), published in Malaysia, and (b) reread “[Lives of Teachers as a Focus for Research and Sharing in Bulgarian ELT](#)” (*BETA E-Newsletter* 17 (May-June 2015, pp. 7-30). The two articles, at various points overlap/ crossover, provide a broader research frame of LOT (Lives of Teachers). Both contain a mixed mélange of queries, here significantly expanded. Many are germane to what really (de)motivates teachers, as focused on in Markova & Ivanova (2016); see there esp. Appendices A & B (pp. 90-95). Reflections and responses to a interweave of these questions – multiplex options via narrative and open-ended inquiry for probing classroom realities and experiences, frustrations, constraints, high points and low, deficiencies and needs in teachers’ lives and CPD – can also be written up as LOT narratives, a core genre of teacher ‘auto-ethnography.’ Such qualitative research is worth shar↔ing in this *Newsletter* & elsewhere, spotlighting at conferences, workshops. A new paper (2018) on LOT by Brazilian colleagues on how teacher identity and ‘postmemory,’ teacher narratives are shaped is also worth careful reading, also applicable to experience in Bulgaria. Walsh & Gorman present six EFL teacher tales (one in BG), download & enjoy; here Paul Walsh’s [LOT site](#).

Working Catalogue of Questions

- What do you find hardest, most stressful about being a teacher now?
- What has given you the strongest sense of achievement / success / accomplishment in your work? Has it been recognized by others?
- What makes you feel frustrated in your teaching? Boring textbooks? What is your biggest *hassle at work* right now? What was your biggest single challenge when you began to teach, and why?
- What would you really like to refresh (or have changed) about your own teaching, and in your own workplace ecology to improve it?
- Do you feel free to experiment in class, in what ways? Are you encouraged to do so by a language inspector or your school director?
- What role has your school director played in your own professional growth, or (as you see it) hindering that growth? Be specific.
- Are your relationships with pupils great? Listen to [Rita Pierson](#) [!].
- Describe one of your worstdays as a teacher? One of your bestdays.
- Discuss an incident that left you depressed (or elated) as a teacher.
- What would you like to transform / experiment with in the way you *assess* students? Is there too much testing, imposed from above?
- Has there been some seminar/ workshop that really changed your thinking about teaching, and set you off in new, creative directions? Who organized this CPD training? Why did it impact you so strongly?
- How have you dealt with managing curricular reform, restructuring? Do you feel the EdMin provides good support for coping with changes in the curriculum introduced from above? Give examples.
- If you had 30 minutes alone with a top EdMin official, and s/he encouraged you to be perfectly frank about your problems as a teacher, obstacles to your own CPD, what would you stress?

- How free do you feel to openly criticize what you believe is wrong with your own syllabus, school administration, Ministry guidelines?
- In your view, what factors play a concrete role a role in keeping teachers from saying what they think in your ownworksituation, and clearing the air for open candid, critical discussion of real problems?
- BULLYING AT WORK: Have you ever experienced bullying of any kind in the workplace? Describe the situation, your feelings. How can this be dealt with? A colleague writes about [professional bullying](#), *power games* in EFL teaching spaces. Discuss this lesson plan on [school bullying](#); re: sexual harassment and other bullying in the UK House of [Commons](#), and a BBC report on a '[culture of bullying](#)' and of 'denial.'
- How much do you collaborate with other teachers, team teach, or invite teachers to observe your own classes, comment? Edge (2002) is a major book on the topic. Kiendl (pp. 18-21) has rich data on 'collaboration,' its urgent need; see also Markova & Ivanova (2016).
- In many countries, teachers work in an envelope of 'privatism,' isolated from or competing with other teachers, in dealing with their own efforts to develop, poor inter↔action. Is that true in your case?
- The politics of power and interpersonal relations among colleagues, often cooperative – may also be marked even by intrigue, tensions and rivalries ("the morass of яд + завист, ревност endemic in many BG teaching ecologies" (Markova & Ivanova, App. A, p. 91) – can be dismaying. What is your personal experience? How common is that?
- How much have you learned from other teachers on the job that has really helped you develop as a teacher? – tell some *positive* stories.

- Kiendl (2016, p. 14) states that many teachers received CPD input from textbook publishers. How do you, do colleagues see this close nexus between workshop training financed by private corporations?
- What is your experience with *mentoring* and how do you see this? Kiendl (2016) notes (p. 24): “Most teachers currently report that they are not mentored, and there is no official recognition of a mentor role in the education system.
 - Teaching organizations, like BETA, can set up mentoring forums and meet-ups where experienced teachers make themselves available to answer questions, network, and to help newer teachers plan lessons and address teaching challenges.
 - 35% of the teachers cited that they used Facebook to collaborate with other teachers. This would provide an easy and strong platform to develop online mentoring networks that are neither reliant on schools, nor require a physical space in which to gather.” Such mentoring forums and meet-ups could become seeds for local BETA branches, *transforming templates of interaction*. BETA can experiment with local ‘mini-branches’ for grassroots growth. In TESOL Italy, five members can establish a [local branch](#); they have [18 local groups](#). ELTA Serbia has 37 [regional coordinators](#), a paradigm.
- Should BETA create a fledgling **SIG**? Maybe like that of ETAI in Israel, their [TTD SIG](#)? SIGs are great for hands-on CPD. [E-TAS](#) (Switzerland) has 12 SIGs, IATEFL Poland 9, one is [TT SIG](#). TESOL Greece has [6 SIGs](#).
- How much **concrete CPD input** have you gotten from the British Council, the US Dept. of State? What could these agencies be doing for teaching in your specific situation that they are not doing?
- The US Fulbright Commission (funded by the [America for Bulgaria Foundation](#) ABF) places 30+ [English Teaching Assistants](#) (ETAs) in Bulgarian

schools. How could they be better integrated into the work of BETA, the BETA conference, local workshops and much more? How could they be stimulated to contribute an article, an interview to this *Newsletter*, become involved in the 2019 BETA conference? There are currently 32 such [ETAs 2018-2019](#) in the schools right across the country. Have you met any? Reach out and contact them!

- In what concrete ways has the **ABF** helped your own teaching situation in your school or English Dept.? What more could it do?
- In some countries, teachers who join a teachers' association or attend a conference, a workshop can earn '**credit points**' with the EdMin for advancement and promotion, a recognition of their own effort toward CPD. ETAI in Israel is one example offering [PD Credit](#) (*Gmul* גמול), [TESOL Italy](#) another. Do you think the EdMin should strongly encourage (or even require) EFL teachers to join BETA, and create some kind of special 'credit' in recognition of being an active member or attending/ presenting at a conference? Perhaps both the British Council and the US [Regional English Language Office](#) (RELO) Belgrade could suggest that the Bulgarian EdMin stimulate this, hands-on formal 'incentivizing,' and support that through advancement credits, various benefits such as even funding attendance at annual conferences or material support for more regional mini-conferences.
- TIME is always a scarce commodity for teachers. In what senses are you under time stress? Discuss personally what is called the "hidden work of teachers – not just marking and meetings, but increasing administration, counseling and work associated with educational reforms" (Tattam, 1998, p. 6). How has this affected you concretely?

- Do you live near work? Some BG teachers commute 2-3 hours daily to/from work. Should teachers receive ‘**travel time pay**’ as a bonus?
- What did your study/ preparation as a teacher not prepare you for? How could/do you change that now in your career, tyro or veteran?
- CAREER TRAJECTORY: What phases do you see in your own personal development? How have you changed your approach, outlook over the years? Are you now changing your pedagogical mindset? How?
- How would you characterize the *kind of a teacher* you are now? Student-centered? Constructivist? Traditional? Experimental?
- What do you do in your teaching that is esp. “creative” in your eyes?
- Have you begun to experience “[rustout](#),” i.e. a loss of interest, enthusiasm, more boredom? Does the EdMin, BETA or your school administration provide ways to help deal with “rustout”? What about teacher “[burnout](#),” examples from your experience? What are the symptoms, and in your experience the [causes](#)? Are there possible remedies in Bulgaria now? Cf. also Markova & Ivanova (pp. 87, 89).
- RETENTION: Have you ever reached a point where you wanted to quit teaching? Have some of your colleagues dropped out? Do you feel stronger for having coped with that and continued to teach?
- RECRUITMENT: fewer [young teachers](#) are now in the schools. Why?
- RETIREMENT: Teachers in Bulgaria are [retiring](#) in ever great numbers. How do you and colleagues view this? Should they be encouraged to stay on, since fewer new teachers are entering the TEFL field? The ‘Education Syndicate’ in Podkrepa Labor Union notes: “even at 2000 leva teacher's salary, this will not lead to attracting the best teachers and keep them in educational institutions unless the indirect causes of repulsion from the

profession are overcome. ... Without changing the communication with parents, with public institutions, without the help of the government in the fight against global problems, the profession of the teacher will not be revived” (Novinite, 2018). Do you, your colleagues (& students) concur with that dark prognosis?

- How do you reach out to **parents**, [bridging the chasm](#) between them and teachers? Describe your experiences of parent-teacher interaction, positive or negative. Is this in need of change? Are parents’ days, common in schools, effective? How to improve that?
- How much **individual autonomy** do you have on the job? In what way is your work regulated by prescribed syllabuses, new directions in “accountability” imposed from above? A kind of ‘*deskilling*’? Could that be changed – more “genuine teacher voice”? This on [LASIG](#).
- How do you assess the [physical state](#) of the schools you have worked at: classroom facilities, class size, technology on hand? Read [this](#). Do you think students should use smartphones, tablets, [laptops in class](#)?
- Read and discuss this report on [Literacy in Bulgaria](#). An eye-opener?
- TEACHERS AS EDUCATORS: Are we just purveyors of a set of language skills, or also educators of [the whole person](#), exploring/teaching questions of values, ethics, notions of ‘global citizenship,’ openness to diversity? And a more democratic and equitable world – honing student empathy (Templer & Tonawanik, 2011), and interest in questions of social justice in our global mayhem: [war](#), [famine](#), [pollution](#), poverty and inequality, discrimination, [racial bias](#), [human rights](#) issues, [modern slavery](#), refugees/ [migrants](#) smuggled (Templer, 2017)? The crisis of [Human Flow](#). And listen to [Pete Seeger](#) + images.

- EXODUS BG: many Bulgarians have become migrants since 1990, and this continues. Students dream of migration, a huge brain and skill drain. How do you, colleagues, students perceive the demographic crisis and exodus, BG as a shrinking nation? Any options to halt this?
- GISIG: How can teaching about social justice and delving into ‘critical pedagogy’ be anchored within an ELT syllabus? How can we educate learners to help transform our society, protect the planet? How do you see this? Is it doable, realistic? Colleagues in the Global Issues SIG are trying, our motto is >**CARE GLOBAL! TEACH LOCAL!**< A brief introduction to GI is Margit Szesztay’s 2015 interview at IATEFL. A book (pdf) from GISIG: Global Issues in an Uncertain World. See also Templer (2014), Pohl & Szesztay (2015), books by Linda Ruas and M. Szesztay (2015); also watch Pohl & Szesztay (2017). The 2019 IATEFL TDSIG/ GISIG joint PCE is: >Exploring the ifs, whys and hows of social justice in our practice<. To my mind: we need to learn to address the structures of power, to teach that. Controversial, never easy. Chris Hedges is a key US ‘dissident’ voice, many talks on YouTube, RT, and 11 books on what ails our System. US filmmaker Michael Moore is a singular critic, funny, radical, incisive; here an interview on his newest film, “Fahrenheit 11/9.” Students will appreciate the candor.
- MORE MALES TEACHING? Speaking of controversy: do you think we need to attract more men into careers in teaching in ELT at all levels, and why (or why not)? Ponder this recent video discussion on UK Sky News. Read & discuss this article from Canada, this from the US, from site from N. Ireland. Yes, perhaps a highly sensitive issue, but the gender imbalance in many school systems *worldwide* is striking, a form of ‘feminization.’ Should that be transformed – if so, how?

- **КТ „Подкрепа“:** Are you, close colleagues active in the '[Education Syndicate](#)' of Podkrepa? How would you size up your membership? Do you think a strong bottom-up [teacher union](#) could improve your situation: teacher voice at work, income levels, teacher status today, teachers' rights? Here a [detailed lesson plan on trade unions](#) (B1/B2 level): teachers can discuss various questions the LP raises. TEFL [mini-unions](#) are crystallizing. A site to explore/discuss is [Teacher Solidarity](#).
- **WALKOUTS:** The US has seen a [huge 2018 upsurge](#) of angry teachers in unions staging walkouts, warning strikes. How do you see such strikes and teacher solidarity? Remember Bulgaria [autumn 2007](#).
- The lesson plan above comes from the organization [ELT ADVOCACY IRELAND](#): Teachers can explore the EAI site, many points applicable elsewhere. Is an ELT Advocacy Bulgaria or a similar NGO possible?
- **TaWSIG:** [Teachers as Workers](#) SIG was formed in 2015 to discuss and address the workaday situation of EFL teachers worldwide. Perhaps you, your colleagues might like to join the active TaWSIG [discussion list](#). Here an article by [P. Walsh](#), TaWSIG founder, based in Berlin.
- **PROFICIENCY:** Do you feel your **English skills** need upgrading? What kind of *new ideas* for in-service professional development might help you improve your EFL fluency? Can you find the *time* to read/listen?
- **EXTENSIVE READING:** In various approaches to improving student skills, how much have you experimented with Extensive Reading, even at elementary A1/A2 level? ER is often lacking in most schools in Bulgaria, why? No graded readers, no [picturebooks](#), no time? Alan Maley (2018) is a key [must-reading](#) on ER. Funding for 'graded-reader libraries' in BG is necessary, a *priority* for the EdMin to promote, at schools, in [publiclibraries](#), and local bookstores.

The BC, U.S. Dept. of State and ABF could fund such new 'book' ventures, even [English Clubs](#) for learners. Maley's article is at BC [TeachingEnglish](#), intriguing to explore. Here [Rob Waring's](#) site; see also my Ruse 2012 [ER article](#).

- ER, linked with EL ([Extensive Listening](#)) is also great for teachers to *improve their proficiency*. Do you work with [Al Jazeera English](#), [NI Easier English Wiki](#), [VOALearning English](#), [RT Question More](#)? These are superb sources for ER/EL: for students, for yourself! *Listen up!*
- FINALLY: ♦ How would you evaluate the site <https://teacher.bg/> ? Do you check it regularly? Are the articles accurate, relevant? ♦♦ If you can, attend/share the IATEFL [22-24 Nov. 2018](#) Web Conference: >*Finding yourself as a teacher*< (to be video-recorded).♦♦♦Reread Markova & Ivanova (2016), its App. A/B, *makingself-change happen*.

Find the courage to breakthesilence. 2Teach is +2 Touch Lives 4 Ever.

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8 Keys of Excellence in Practice – A Primary School Camp

Nataša Intihar Klančar

Introduction

8 Keys of Excellence is an educational program that aims at young people and helps them to develop their confidence, motivation levels, it supports team work and collaboration, leadership and it teaches valuable life principles. We decided at our primary school to put these ideas into practice with our 6th-graders who went on a two-day camp to start implementing the 8 Keys of Excellence into our education and lives.

Each class teacher worked with their classroom and tried various activities and workshops to set the 8 keys in motion. We first discussed the term »excellence« and *what* and *who* it actually applies to. I provided my class with posters of famous athletes and it was

through team work that they found out the characteristics of these people. We shared the ideas, compared and discussed them. We agreed there are some traits they all have in common and thus started talking about keys of excellence – the principles that help us to develop our strengths and talents to the maximum.

We should, however, point out that excellence does not equal perfection. It is merely the ability to develop and unleash your potential and enjoy the process. This is all a habit. It makes us achieve more and it encourages us to do our best.

8 Keys of Excellence:

1. Ownership – Take Responsibility for Actions

We agreed that it is of great importance to be responsible for your thoughts, words, feelings, and actions. We should own the choices we make as well as the results that follow. It is only us who are in full control of our lives. This leads to happiness and success. It is advisable to always try to find different options and strive for solutions, even though the situation might sometimes seem hopeless.

I added some practical examples that helped our students understand the idea and get the grip of this concept. One of the topics we dealt with was owning a dog and the responsibilities that follow, e.g. you should take it for a walk regardless of the weather or your mood.

We talked about school life as well, and pointed out the familiar situations when a student forgets their homework and brainstormed some of the most common replies. They ranged from blaming others and making excuses, to denial and surrender. We agreed that when we take responsibility for our actions we stop blaming things outside ourselves for situations that occur in our lives. Moreover, ownership is a whole-life process and it affects various aspects of our lives. We are then proud of our achievements and feel good about them. Our confidence grows and we feel fulfilled, which brings about great results.

2. Commitment – Make Your Dreams Happen

Here are some pointers to take into account: take positive action and follow your goals and vision without wavering. Be enthusiastic about what you do, make a decision, jump in, and do not give up. This is often a hard thing to do but you should not be afraid. Go for it and things will work out fine sooner or later.

We chose team work to discuss the lives of famous sportsmen and their training regime, their lifestyle, their ups and downs. What is it that keeps them going and not giving up? It is the act of commitment that sets in motion an energy field that propels them to do the impossible.

Successful goal setting is by far one of the most important things anyone, who wishes to accomplish anything in life, must do. It is about taking control of your life and enjoying the journey plus knowing where you're headed. We talked about our talents and what we do to develop them. We should strive for a creative and motivating environment that will boost our confidence at the same time. It takes time, effort and hard work but it definitively pays off.

You should have faith in yourself and concentrate on your strengths and work on your weaknesses. To put that into practice we drew a table and wrote our wishes on one side and our goals on the other. We learned about the techniques to use in order to reach these goals (they should be realistic, it must be noted). We shared the opinion that it is our commitment that inspires us along the way to take positive actions and overcome obstacles. Therefore, in order to get good grades at school we need to work hard, not give up, have faith and energy to achieve our best.

3. Speak With Good Purpose – Speak Honestly and Kindly

You should always think before you speak because words are extremely powerful. Make sure your intention is positive and your words are sincere and respectful.

We imagined some names that our schoolmates called us and then wrote the positive ones above the line and the negative ones below the line. How did they make you feel? A vivid discussion followed and we learned that the words do stay and make a huge impact. They may uplift and enlighten us or put us down and depress us. This is how strong they are.

We should keep in mind that sometimes a few kind words can make a very positive difference in how we feel about ourselves – sometimes even for a lifetime. On the other hand, a few cutting and insulting words in a moment of anger can affect us for a long time – perhaps even a lifetime.

Here's a lesson we learned: students drew a boy and a girl on two big pieces of paper and colored them. They looked lovely. Then we took one of them, let's say the girl was the first one to go, and I told the kids to remember some names others called them or some insults they heard about themselves at school, on corridors, in the school cafeteria, etc. With every single negative word I crumpled the piece of paper, slowly making it into a disfigured ball. Then – as the students spoke positive words they received about themselves – I tried to flatten it, smooth it, and make it look like it did before. Guess what: it did not work. No matter how hard I tried, the paper still had uneven lines in it. The message of the story was strong and so were the feelings. Once something is said, it has an impact on us, be it positive or negative.

Therefore we should do our best to speak with good purpose and consider the intention of our words. We should communicate honestly, clearly, positively, and directly. Our words will build someone up or put them down. There will, of course, still be times when we need to share critical thoughts, let us consider the way we share them.

As you can see, this key fosters a positive and safe emotional environment where people are more productive, feel good about themselves, are happier, and are more likely to succeed.

4. Flexibility – Be Willing to Do Things Differently

We should try and recognize what is not working, be willing to change our perspective, and change what we are doing to achieve our goals. We should be able to adapt and try something different, maybe something out of the ordinary and out of our comfort zone.

It was time for pair work, where we discussed what happens when your friend cancels a game of football you previously agreed on. What are some of the things you can do? Is there a middle way? Could you work something out? Of course, there is always something you can do to solve the problem or to change the course of the action. It is often so that we are faced with situations in everyday life that are different from what we had originally planned.

We usually have a choice and then decide what to do. Either we stick to the original plan rigidly and continue to do things in the same way over and over again or handle them with flexibility, the latter being a much better option, of course. It

means being able to respond to the changing of new situations in ways that move us forward and give us new ideas and better results.

We put our heads together to discuss the situation where a student and their friend decide to go to the movies together but end up wanting to see a different movie. What is there to be done? It is important not to stay locked into one way of doing things and persisting there.

Flexibility is all about recognizing all kinds of patterns, habits, and activities that do not work well and then change them again and again until we find the one that actually works. We came to an end of this key by solving the problem of getting up too late in the morning and being late for school. What can we do? We came up with different ideas and I am sure some of the students do not have this problem any more.

5. This Is It! – Make the Most of Every Moment

We should focus our attention on the present moment and make the most of it by keeping a positive attitude. It is all about focusing on now instead of later, next week, or next year, and the like. The This is it! attitude can make everything we do enjoyable, productive, fulfilling, and fun. It is just the positive attitude we take right here and now.

Together with the students we worked on the topic of school life and being attentive and cooperating during the lessons. My students agreed that it is truly precious when they pay attention and are actively involved in the process of learning. Then, much less work is needed at home and more time is left for free-

time activities. Moreover, the lessons are not dull and an increase in academic performance is shown later on.

How do we take the most out of lessons in class? Here is what our students suggested when we used a brainstorming technique in small-group work: it is good to come to school well-rested and fed, this will then improve your brain capacity to learn. When at school there are many distractions and opportunities to do something else and many use a lot of time thinking about those other things. It is of vital importance not to do so and rather live in the now. Then we have the power and the energy to follow the lessons and make the most of them.

Taking notes is another great way to stay focused and to pay attention to the information being given in class. Not only will this help the students focus, but notes will also come in handy when they need to study. Being organized is a wonderful trait that helps the students to achieve more in a shorter period of time.

Many pointed out that participating actively in class makes the classes much more interesting, enriching, and fun. Sharing your opinions, asking questions, engaging in class discussions, helping others, comparing and contrasting ideas and arguments, being encouraging and motivated is the way to go.

Needless to say, the This is it! attitude works not only in school life but also in real-life situations. It may improve the quality of your life to a great extent, so do not be afraid to try it out.

6. Failure Leads to Success – Learn From Mistakes

It is of great importance to see that failure is just a stepping stone and serves as feedback that provides us with the information we need, in order to learn, grow, and succeed. Failure represents opportunity and growth, and not deficit and loss. It is sometimes hard to see this, though.

We tried to remember the first time we learned how to ride a bike without the training wheels. We talked about how many times we had to repeat the procedure before mastering it. All in all, everyone learned to ride it – just not at the same time and not at the same pace. The methods leading to this were different as well. Students shared their stories, we laughed about the sweet childhood memories and agreed that failure did not stop us from trying again and wanting to learn.

Mistakes are definitely a proof someone is trying. They have the power to turn us into something better than we were before. They are a tool that helps us to do something again, but this time with more wisdom, knowledge, and intelligence.

We created mind maps to see what mistakes and failure can be a sign of, here are the most popular choices: a source of understanding and a tool, guidance, feedback, learning steps, and the like. Failure brings new opportunities and when one door closes, another one opens. It is often just a matter of perspective. Creating a positive atmosphere helps too.

Another important issue is related to our comfort zone – a place where we feel most comfortable in and sometimes become either bored or too relaxed. Why is it good to stir things up a bit? We should keep in mind that other people are scared

of trying something new too. We might discover something we love and enjoy. New challenges and experiences will widen our horizons and give us extra energy and motivation, making our brain more adaptable, stronger, and healthier. Moreover, our confidence will grow.

In order to live this Key successfully we may need to change the way we think about failure. Rather than viewing it in a negative way, think of failure as a valuable learning experience, seek inspiration, get organized, and take action. Then you will soon be on your path to success. The only real failure is doing nothing and not learning from your mistakes. It is far better to do something imperfectly than do nothing perfectly. Inaction puts everything at risk.

The key to success is to look carefully at what went wrong, change what we did the first time, and then try again by applying what we learned. Keep in mind that every expert was once a beginner.

7. Integrity – Match Behavior With Values

Integrity seems quite a strange word that my twelve-year-olds have mostly never heard of before. So how to present it and make it more familiar? By showing them some examples, of course, for teachers are role models and this value is acquired from us (as well as from peers).

Living in integrity means that everything we say and everything we do is a true reflection of what we value and it shows what is important to us. This means that you keep your promises no matter how hard you have to try and how much extra effort they take. It also has to do with not giving away the secrets someone shared

with you. Or showing up on time, for example. These actions show how committed and honest you actually are. Moreover, do you spend your time with the people and activities you value or is your focus elsewhere?

We thought about our behavior and what it says about us. We shared the opinion that it clearly shows others what we stand for and what we believe in. We worked as a team to come up with various associations that explain the above-mentioned behaviors. Most commonly mentioned adjectives were: responsible, honest, fair, truthful, just, and respectful.

Integrity is often tested in academic situations and I conducted a survey, asking the students to confess about whether they have ever cheated on rules and/or tests at school. The results showed that many students violated standards of academic integrity to some sort and extent. Some bended the rules to win competitive games against schoolmates and some cheated on tests by either using cheat sheets or copying from other students. Many of 'the cheaters' believe cheating is wrong but feel that it could be acceptable under certain circumstances. They feel increased pressure to be dishonest because there is such great emphasis on grades in primary school.

So is there a way to improve this? There surely is. The whole class brainstormed some of the solutions and here are the most popular choices: learn more, be prepared, do your homework regularly, participate during the lessons, be inquisitive, ask for help, co-operate, be honest and real, stand up for what you believe is right. The kids today are looking to adults and society for a moral compass, so let us set a good example for them.

8. Balance – Live Your Best Life

'What does your usual day look like?' Make a list of things you do – from morning till night. Are you aware of the fact that it is really helpful when your life is in a balance? Different parts of your life should be taken care of – from school to family, friends, being active outdoors, fostering creativity, doing sports, having fun, and the like.

It should be noted, however, that balance does not mean devoting equal time to everything that matters to us, and it is not about totally immersing ourselves in one area of our lives, while excluding all others. The bottom line is to try to live with peace and harmony, while taking care of various aspects of our lives.

Students shared and compared their notes about their typical day. There were many activities they did in the afternoons and evenings, ranging from sports to hanging out with friends, or studying and doing homework, or exercising and chatting on the phone.

One should always get enough sleep, to start with. Getting more sleep improves the way children feel when they are awake. Sleep deprivation will likely lead to problems, such as difficulties in handling challenges and dealing with strong emotions. Students shared their stories of bedtime routine and it turned out that the more balanced it is, the more likely it is for a child to get a good-night sleep, which will then in turn help them feel better and ready for the challenges of a new day.

When we are in balance we know how to make time for the things that matter to us. Staying in balance is an ongoing process that involves making choices over and over again – be it about what we do or say, feel or think. We need both quiet and down time which helps us recharge our batteries and fun and playful time.

Balance may mean different things to different people. It is primarily the opportunity to create time for the things you must do and at the same time for the things you love to do. Students agreed we should take care of ourselves and be mindful of others while focusing on what is meaningful and important to us. Inner happiness and joy come when your mind, body and emotions are nurtured by the choices you make. As Thomas Merton once said: 'Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance and order and rhythm and harmony.' Let us spend our time and energy towards reaching this goal.

Conclusion

Perfection is an impossible standard so rather than getting everything just right we should strive to excel in our own way. The 8 Keys of Excellence is a positive approach where everyone tries to be their own best.

I hope you will be able to find the 8 Keys of Excellence a valuable addition to character education in all areas of life. The more people get involved, the more results we can expect. We should cooperate because together we achieve more, we feel good about ourselves, we are happy, motivated, healthy, productive, fulfilled, and successful.

It all has to do with the learning process. The 8 Keys of Excellence serves as a guide towards a positive future, filled with confidence, team work, motivation, creativity, leadership, and valuable life principles. It works not only at school but also at home – the Keys are a way to a successful living. You are more than welcome to try them out, step by step. Believe me: once you start, you cannot go back. Good luck!

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Learning a Foreign Language through Drama: An Innovative and Necessary Approach in the 21st Century

Diana Velcheva-Emmanouilidou

Learning through experience is one of the most modern and effective methods of learning that not only creates a stable and long-lasting relationship between students, teachers and the educational institution, but also provides for the rapid and lasting acquisition of lexical and grammatical units by the students.



The drama method has gained wide popularity in countries such as Finland, where the innovations in the learning process and the adaptation to the individual characteristics of each student is essential for the whole development of the individual, for his/ her future realization in society.

The use of storytelling and drama in foreign language learning, especially from an early age, is of particular importance to the child's positive attitude towards learning. Nowadays, children are literally 'attached' to smartphones and begin to lose important interpersonal relationships, their communication is getting worse. In this 21st century society with specific needs, teaching English as a foreign language only in the standard way, especially to young learners, marks lots of minuses. Children fail to concentrate enough, they easily lose interest, quickly dissipate, they become bored and the educational process fails.

In my work as an English language teacher I began to feel that I had to change something in my classes to awaken the interest of my students and to make them study with desire. I started to include in my lessons more interactive activities such as songs, dances, games and projects that require creativity. Also, I started writing scripts and participate with them in international competitions. Our latest project was the theatrical play "The Fairy Night". I wrote the script using most of the new words and grammar, required for their grade/3rd/ and took into account the specific features of each student – some students liked hip-hop, so I had hip-hop in the king's dance.



Girls loved to be fairies, so I included fairies that sing and dance in the script. Another boy wanted a leading role, so I wrote a special role for him. One of the

boys wanted to be a dragon and did not want to say lots of words – a dragon was immediately included in the play. One of the girls was a brilliant choreographer; she created the dancing of "The Fairy Night" and taught her classmates to dance even during school breaks. This was the birth of a very different play, which had diverse and interesting characters. All children were pleased and their every wish was respected, so they began to take a radically different approach to English language, the teacher, and the school.

In July 2018 we presented the play at the 10th International Festival for Children's Creativity in English "The World in Children's Hands" in Balchik with director Mrs. Svetlana Atanasova, where we won second place, a cup, medals, diplomas, and other material prizes. Here are some thoughts and feedback from some of my students about their experience in the festival:

"The Fairy Night was a unique chance for us to show our English knowledge and to learn English in a new, interesting way."

Yan Damyanov

"The day of the performance was the best day in my life! It was very interesting and I especially liked being with my friends, and our teacher was really the best, and the only one that gave us the chance to dance and sing while studying!"

Stephania

"It was a great challenge, but we did it and we all played in the best play ever!"

Gabriella

“It was unforgettable! I had the great opportunity to learn to speak English and have fun with my friends on stage!”

Teo



“I liked it very much when we were on the Balchik stage. It was a lot of fun and we had the best costumes.”

Lydia

“I really wanted to put this play on stage. The dance took lots of work, but this was what I liked the most.”

Veri



“The play was great! We worked hard, but with this great teacher we succeeded!”

Maria-Magdalena

In conclusion, I must say that Drama learning creates unforgettable and magical experiences for the children and evokes their positive attitude to the subject, the teacher, and the educational institution. It not only allows the permanent memorization of grammatical and lexical units, but also enriches, re-creates, spiritualizes children, and makes them learn a foreign language in a non-intrusive and effective way.

Forthcoming Events in the World of ELT

BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference

28th BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference to be held 3rd-5th May 2019 in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Follow the conference and news section on our website for more information: <http://www.beta-iatefl.org/>

IATEFL monthly webinars

For further information, visit: <http://www.iatefl.org/web-events/webinars>

IATEFL SIG Webinars

For further information, visit: <http://www.iatefl.org/web-events/sig-webinars>

TESOL Online Courses & Virtual Seminars

For information visit: <http://www.tesol.org/attend-and-learn/online-courses-seminars>

BETA Partners' Forthcoming Events

BETA members can attend the conferences for the registration fee paid by the members of the Host Associations

- [17th National ATECR Conference 'No Limits'](#), Hradec Králové, 14-15 September 2018
 - [27th IATEFL Poland Conference 'Wrocław 2018 – the Meeting Place for Experts'](#), Wrocław, 21-23 September 2018
-

Writing for the BETA E-Newsletter

Have you ever wondered if you should write an article for the E-Newsletter of BETA?

- Please DO! Your contribution may act as a springboard for discussions, inspiration for colleagues or facilitate the work of fellow teachers!

What exactly do you have to do?

If you feel you have something you would like to share:

- Send us your article in MS Word format.
- Send us a photo of you (in jpeg format) and short biographical information (about 50 words) which will accompany your article.
- You will receive feedback from us within 10 days of your submission.
- Please, check the deadlines and the topics of the forthcoming issues. Note that the topics announced are just illustrative; if you would like to submit an article on a different topic, please do. It will be considered for publishing.
- We are looking forward to your contributions.

For further information contact: beta.iateflbg@gmail.com

Notes for Contributors

- Your article must have not been previously published and should not be under consideration for publication elsewhere.
- The length of your article may vary - short contributions of 300 – 800 words are as good as long ones.
- Electronic submission of your article is preferred to the following e-mail address: beta.iateflbg@gmail.com
- Text of the article: Calibri, 14 points, with 1.5 spacing.
- Headings and subheading: Calibri, 24 points, bold, centred; first letter capitalized.
- Author names and title as well as contact details should be submitted in a separate file accompanying the article.
- About 50 words of biographical data should be included.
- New paragraphs – to be indicated with one separate line.
- Referencing should follow the APA referencing style.
- References in the text should be ordered alphabetically and contain the name of the author and the year of publication, e.g. (Benson, 1993; Hudson, 2008).
- Quotations have to include the relevant page number(s), e.g. (Peters, 2006:76).
- Tables, figures or diagrams should be numbered accordingly and included in the relevant part of the text. Each should have an explanatory caption.
- The editors will not return any material submitted, but they reserve the right to make editorial changes.

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