

E-Newsletter

Bulgarian English Teachers' Association

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Editors' Corner

Dear reader,

The September-October issue of the BETA-IATEFL E-Newsletter (no. 43) shares with you the experiences of two seasoned professionals.

In "The Importance of Effective Feedback in the Classroom" Nataša Intihar Klančar explains how to make feedback effective for students to help them achieve their goals. She carefully explains how crucial it is to give proper feedback: she warns against the dangers of too much feedback; encourages us to steer clear of creating a buzz of information; and advises us to "[l]et the feedback feel like a precious resource rather than unwanted criticism" (7). She stresses the importance of bringing students in on the feedback process to increase efficacy.

In "SOuL camp, Sremski Karlovci, Serbia, 7-14 July, 2019, Impressions, notes, reflections" Aglika Dobрева, our lucky winner from the 28th BETA-IATEFL conference in Plovdiv, 2019, refreshed and energised shares her experience of the SOuLful camp. And her excitement is palpable:

The course aimed at stimulating 30 teachers from 13 countries to reflect on their professional identity, future path of development and role as English language teachers. (13)

Please note that some changes in style have been introduced since issue no. 39 of the BETA E-Newsletter and our publication is now strictly following [MLA 8th edition](#), in case you missed that, check out the Notes for Contributors Section in any of the subsequent publications. You will find other minor points in the Notes for Contributors section that can help you and guide you in the submission process.

Feel free to get inspired and send us your work, presentation of classroom experience or project! Or why not send us a letter to let us know what you thought about some of our recent papers? Publications and commentaries, as well as inquiries, should be sent to the Editorial team at betaiatefl.publish@gmail.com.

Happy reading!

Issue Editor

Polly Petcova



Nataša Intihar Klančar, OŠ Brezovica pri Ljubljani, Slovenia. Nataša Intihar Klančar graduated from the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, where she also earned her Master's and Doctoral degrees respectively. She has been a teacher of English at a primary school for almost 20 years. She enjoys being a teacher and sharing her knowledge and experiences. Her free time is devoted to family, friends, travelling, reading and sports.

The Importance of Effective Feedback in the Classroom

Nataša Intihar Klančar

Feedback is an integral part of the learning process. It is commentary on the student's work and it should be individualized to best accommodate for the needs of each student. Therefore, it constructs a part of a valuable learning experience. It is information about how someone is doing in their efforts to reach a goal. It tells the student whether some changes need to be made or everything is going according to

plan. Here you will find some tips on how to make the feedback highly effective in a school environment.

Effective feedback requires that a person has a goal, takes action to achieve it, and receives goal-oriented information about their actions. Throughout my teaching

career I learnt and experienced that feedback is an incredibly helpful tool and it should be highly personalized and relevant to the subject area being assessed. The teacher should carefully observe and comment on what is being observed and/or assessed, based on a clear statement of goals, helping students learn from their mistakes in a better and more effective way in order to achieve goals faster or even surpass them.

We should keep in mind that too much feedback is counterproductive, though. It is far better to concentrate on one or two key elements of performance than to create a buzz of information, making the point of progress and improvement blurry. Feedback should be concise and focused on those areas of strength and growth that will have the greatest impact on the student's learning. It should not be given on every single aspect of student work but be prioritized and thus more digestible for students to internalize and then implement in order to improve. A teacher makes a decision about what areas to focus on.

When the feedback is specific, the student immediately knows how to take action and what to work on. Therefore, the teacher comments should clearly describe the student's successes and shortcomings, and have a direct reference to student's work in order to show the student their next steps. As such they motivate and engage students to strive for more and to be more successful in reaching their goals. At the same time the students are enabled to self-assess their own work, start asking questions about how to improve, dig deeper into the

learning process and adapt their learning strategies and techniques. Thus, they get a new and better understanding of how to develop their work.

The key parts of feedback are being concrete, specific and useful. Feedback should definitely not be a judgement or criticism but an observation, offering neutral, goal-oriented facts. It is connected to specific and measurable learning goals, standards and objectives. A teacher should link their comments to the expectations laid out in the assignment prompt and rubric, using similar language where possible. The teacher then helps the students understand where they are in relation to the stated goals, being specific and accurate at the same time. Let the feedback feel like a precious resource rather than unwanted criticism.

In most cases, the sooner the students get feedback, the better. It is far more important than editing, evaluation or grading for it gives descriptive information to the students about their performance in order to reach the goals. It helps the students to assess their performance and to find the ways for improvement and growth which then lead to success. They can identify areas where they are strong and areas that need improvement and correcting. A great problem in education, however, is untimely feedback. Vital feedback on key performance often comes days, weeks, after the performance. Just think of writing and handing in papers or getting back the results of some standardized tests.

Needless to say, the value of formative assessment is of vital importance for it not only precedes summative assessment, but it also gives the performer opportunities (if results are less than optimal) to reshape/rethink/reevaluate their performance to better achieve the desired goal. The assignments and tasks the students are given are then seen as a guiding point and an opportunity to learn and grow. As I have seen in my classes, I can guarantee that feedback truly is one of the most powerful drivers of student achievement and progress and it works wonders if done correctly.

Therefore it could easily be understood that the more feedback a student can receive in real time, the better their ultimate performance will be. The feedback should be both, timely and ongoing. It thus gives the students the ability to adjust in light of feedback. And it is the ability to quickly adapt one's performance that is a mark of all great achievers and problem solvers. Everyone fails every now and then, the mystery is how to learn from these mistakes and progress from them. Student engagement, motivation and performance rise accordingly.

Feedback is essential for both parties involved, i.e. for the students as well as for the teachers. It shows the students where they are now, where they go next and how to get there. It keeps the students on track to achieve their goals successfully and effectively. We could use other ways of giving feedback, e.g. peer review, keeping in mind that the class should not respond with immature criticism or unhelpful praise or judgement. These strategies should be learnt and practised

from the beginning, making feedback accurate, trustworthy and stable, at the same time having the power to transform the way students learn. This is a long-term process and should be given its time.

Consistency is another important aspect of feedback. It should be used professionally by using highly descriptive rubrics supported by anchor products and performances. Furthermore, if we want to promote student-to-student feedback (as suggested above) and make it be more helpful and accurate, students have to be trained to be consistent in the same way we train teachers. Set against an encouraging tone and positive learning atmosphere the results will follow. Students will feel valued, heard, respected, powerful and important and will as such be able to achieve more and to reach their goals and be successful in a shorter period of time, being able to handle stress more efficiently too.

Students should always be evaluated objectively based on how well they are able to respond to the objectives of the assignment and craft their work in accordance with the goals. It will lead to a measurable improvement in their performance. After receiving effective feedback, the students then take some action – either in revising their work or in using their skills towards a similar task after they receive feedback on an assignment. In order to see the results faster, clear language should be used and not too technical. Straightforward messages will go a long way and ensure students to take the steps needed to improve.

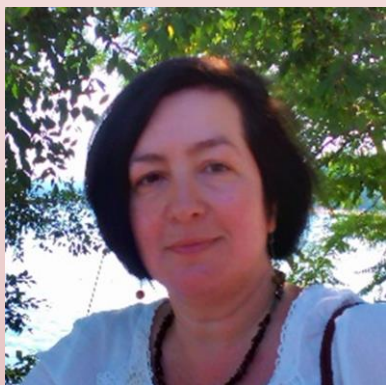
A student-centered and personalized approach will give results in making the students more engaged, making them think critically, use teamwork approach and communicate effectively by using knowledge and information to solve complex problems instead of giving in or giving up. These strategies will help students to overcome the feeling of discomfort when dealing with (too much) hard work and difficult challenges and show them that critical thinking is the way to go. Teachers should not be afraid to encourage their students and show a genuine interest in them, providing effective feedback at the same time.

A teacher should simply let the students know they believe in them and support them no matter what. A good teacher sees the potential in each and every one of the students and believes in their potential, keeping in mind that we are not looking for perfection but for progress. This is what counts most and is of great importance. It is the effort the students put into their work that is a key ingredient to their success. A teacher should guide them and be there for constant support, guidance and a source of inspiration. It is a well-known fact that everyone will achieve their goal but at different time and pace.

Making the students feel important and a big part of the learning process counts as well. The teacher should always do their best to be honest and clear in their feedback. Effective feedback not only tells the learner what they did correctly but also where they may have missed the mark and what specifically they need to do next. It tells them where they are and what they can do to improve their

performance and gain new experiences by doing so. By giving feedback the students are shown that the teacher is an effective listener who appreciates what the students say and do. It keeps the learners assigned to their goals, it helps them to create new strategies and to feel appreciated and valued throughout the process.

Feedback is something that every student can benefit from, whether it is offered verbally, digitally, or through the traditional written annotations on an assignment. The variety of feedback styles makes it easy to incorporate the feedback-model of student performance and assessment into the contemporary classroom, making it a part of everyday school situation. It helps the students to improve and it empowers them to take action and ownership of their work and improve their performance. It is among the most powerful tools teachers can use to help students work towards their goals, reaching them, and ultimately even exceeding expectations in any given task in or out of the classroom.



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SOuL camp, Sremski Karlovci, Serbia, 7-14 July, 2019

Impressions, notes, reflections

Aglika Dobрева

As a lucky prize winner of SOL (Sharing one language) at the 28th BETA –IATEFL conference in Plovdiv, 2019, I had the opportunity to visit a SOL camp with Mark Andrews and Frank Prescott in Sremski Karlovci, Serbia, 7-14 July,

2019. The SOuL camp has been a unique experience, different from everything a traditional teacher training course, limited between the four walls of a classroom, can offer. What makes SOL unique and turns SOL into a SOuL camp (a nice and meaningful play of words as the camp has a refreshing effect on one’s overall well-being) is its location, aim and approach.

The venue has been unique with its geographical location, historical heritage and educational traditions. Sremski Karlovci is situated on the Danube near Novi Sad. It is part of Vojvodina region, a very multicultural area. We were accommodated in Radulovacki Eco Centre, whose renovation was sponsored by Radulovacki, a leading figure in the medical science in the USA. Sremski Karlovci is also the place where the oldest Grammar school in Serbia was founded. All these contribute to the particular colour, multilingual character and diversity of the region, making it a perfect place for teacher training courses, focusing on intercultural communication skills.

The course aimed at stimulating 30 teachers from 13 countries to reflect on their professional identity, future path of development and role as English language teachers. We were challenged to think about our responsibility as language teachers, who should also be concerned with teaching the values of tolerance, internationalism, environmentalism and learning about other people and other cultures.

An outstanding feature of the course was the fact that the activities were predominantly outdoor and carried out in a very relaxed way. We were put in the shoes of the students who experienced activities that one can easily apply to teaching. Group work was an important part of the schedule, which included exploring the local environment, structured discussions and presentations. Morning yoga classes, which were optional, contributed to the friendly, relaxed atmosphere of the camp.

The course focused on themes such as Intercultural learning, CLIL, Diversity, Critical media skills, working on and with the local, creating a peaceful world, with a very good balance between the activities.

Day 1

On the first day we (teachers from 13 countries) were welcomed by “Gibanica” meeting. Gibanica – a traditional Serbian dish (a version of Bulgarian “banitsa”), was not only food for our stomachs. It also gave us food for thought. We were challenged by Mark Andrews to discuss the ingredients of the dish, sharing our similarities, finding out that we have similar dishes, similar ingredients and also some specific recipes. An activity of that type can be tried with students of different levels, stimulating them to think and express themselves in English, summarize and give presentations. As we were discussing the ingredients and recipes, we started getting to know each other and sharing our experience. Later, we were given the opportunity to discover the Radulovacki Eco center (the place where we were staying and where we had some of our sessions) on our own and with the help of Sanja and Budja (local representatives of the SOuL team). We also worked in groups on the task of establishing ground rules of the camp. By the end of the day Mark and Frank e-mailed us back the ground rules as a feedback. Another task we were assigned was getting to know each other’s names within 24 hours.

Day 2

On the second day we explored Novi Sad in groups, getting to know about the history of this multi-lingual region with 6 official languages. We visited The Parliament of Vojvodina, the Holocaust memorial, Ex-Yugoslavia museum, accompanied by our wonderful guide and English language teacher Vladica. Meanwhile, Sanja gave us QR-code tasks (wonderful activities that we can use with our students) which stimulate exploring and developing linguistic skills. The tasks involved finding a particular place in the city and learning facts related to its history by communicating with the locals. At dinner time we tasted our internationalism by sharing dishes we had brought from our countries and we found out that we had already learned the names of all the participants in the course (30 people)!

Tasting our internationalism



Day 3

We experienced an amazing journey on the Danube to The Monkey island, where we had some green activities with Sanja, discussions with Mark and Frank about what we can do with our students outdoors – card making, observing the environment, mindfulness experience (chill-out quiet time listening to the environment), communication games; we had the opportunity to choose books from Mark's improvised suitcase library, so that we can discuss them later. The lunch provided by Marco, Zoran and Anna (the local family responsible for our catering) was fish from the Danube (local food caught by Zoran) and it was great.

Day 4

We had the chance to visit the Municipality of Sremski Karlovci and meet the Mayor of SK. We were free to ask him questions – an interview-based outdoor activity that can be applied in our teaching. We were also assigned the task of interviewing three random people of different ages from the town on their experience of living in Sremski Karlovci. Then we summarized our notes and presented them in groups. The discussion was quite fascinating. In the afternoon Milica Vojvodic demonstrated to us reading activities on Roald Dahl that we can benefit from. We discussed green environmental issues, while doing a test, provided and shared by Budja – a local Eco center activist.

Day 5

We were taken to our second visit to the island by the ferry. This was a different experience in comparison with our first visit. We started our day on the island by a silent exercise without phones and communication. This was followed by discussions in 2 groups with Mark and Frank, who stimulated us to reflect on the use and role of phones at school and our lives as a whole. We had free beach and book time, followed by reflection and sharing our views on teaching and communication. We also exchanged books, brought in advance by each participant, discussing why we had chosen that particular book and giving some hints on how we could apply it to our teaching.

Later, Frank presented to us activities, related to David Bowie's musical heritage and some more critical thinking exercises related to music.

A reflective discussion on the Monkey island



Day 6

We visited a view-point in Sremski Karlovci, where we had some activities with Sanja, focused on reading notes and a quiz on facts about the place and a local poet and writer – Dushko Markovic, whose statue is on the top of the hill in SK. We visited the oldest Grammar school in Serbia in Sremski Karlovci (f. 1791), which impressed us with its architecture, history and traditions. It is still one of the most prestigious secondary schools in Serbia, specialized in teaching languages and philology. Vladica, our guide, who used to be an English language teacher in the same school, shared her experience and views on education and upbringing in the very classroom where she used to teach. Mark drew a wonderful diagram on the board, based on her talk, making us reflect on the importance of both teaching and upbringing. Later on we reflected on our impressions from the school, making our posters – a wonderful activity we can do with our students, too. In the evening Mark shared some activities aimed at development of critical thinking skills, pointing out the division between information, knowledge, wisdom and the ability of making difference between them. We discussed the THINK principle that has to be applied in researching information: The information must be True, Helpful, Inspiring, Necessary, Kind.

Day 7

We focused on the subject of teaching with cultural, linguistic, pedagogical aims, getting students to notice the world around them and care about it. A very useful activity related to the above subject were our visits to two museums in SK: the

museum of bee-keeping and the museum of matches. We discussed and reflected on a questionnaire that teachers may create after a visit to a similar place. In the evening we gave poster presentations in groups, re-examining the ground rules established at the very beginning of the course. We also created posters, showcasing our 10 highlights of the course. We all enjoyed sharing and videotaping our reflections – another hint for an activity to be used in the classroom.

Presentation of certificates



Day 8

We were sad to say good-bye in the morning and leave but promised to keep in touch, hoping to see each other again!

Final notes: Our communication continues today as we exchange useful ideas about teaching and networking, hoping to see each other in future events such as conferences, meetings, future SOL camps etc. On the SOuL- camp we learned a lot from and about learning outside the classroom which is beneficial and crucial to developing students' independent learning and thinking. As SOuL-mates we all agree that the SOuL camp SK, Serbia, 2019 has been an amazing and memorable experience.

Now that I have my batteries recharged by the SOuL camp, I believe that what I actively learned will have a significant impact on my future work and role as an educator starting from the next academic year!

My warm thanks go to Mark Andrews, Frank Prescott and also the local SOuL team: Sanja Conjagic, Vladica Rakic and each and everyone I met on the camp!

I would also like to thank BETA for giving me the chance of being part of this memorable experience and assisting me with my travel to the SOuL camp, SK, Serbia, 2019!

Forthcoming Events in the World of ELT

IATEFL monthly webinars

For further information, click [here](#).

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BETA Partners' Forthcoming Events

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

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: betaiatefl.publish@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: betaiatefl.publish@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 and a photo should be included.
- Author names should not appear in the file of the article itself.
- New paragraphs – to be indicated with one separate line.
- Referencing should strictly follow the MLA Style (8ed.).
- Italicize the titles of sources that are independent (they are published on their own and considered containers, e.g. books, anthologies, etc.), but use quotation marks for the titles of sources that are contained in larger works (e.g., short stories, articles, poems).
 - *The Awakening* (book)
 - *The Metamorphosis* (novella)
 - “Literary History and Sociology” (journal article)

- *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Web site)
- “Free Will” (article on a Web site)
- For quotations use double quotation marks, cf. examples below.
- In-text citations must include exact page numbers. Follow this example, According to Naomi Baron, reading is “just half of literacy. The other half is writing” (194). One might even suggest that reading is never complete without writing.

or

Reading is “just half of literacy. The other half is writing” (Baron 194). One might even suggest that reading is never complete without writing.

- The same reference must appear in the Works Cited list at the end of the paper, e.g.

Works Cited

Baron, Naomi S. “Redefining Reading: The Impact of Digital Communication Media.” *PMLA*, vol. 128, no. 1, Jan. 2013, pp. 193-200.

- 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 discard any material submitted, but they reserve the right to return papers for further editing when they do not follow MLA Style 8th ed. or common rules for academic integrity. The editors can make editorial changes.
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Established 1991 in Sofia, BETA seeks to build a network of ELT professionals on a national and regional (Southeast Europe) level and establish the association as a recognized mediator between educators and state bodies, public and other organizations.

BETA members are English teaching professionals from all educational sectors in Bulgaria – primary, secondary and tertiary, both state and private. BETA activities include organizing annual conferences, regional seminars and workshops; information dissemination; networking with other teachers' associations and NGOs in Bulgaria and abroad; exchange of representatives with teachers' associations from abroad.

We are on the web:

<http://www.beta-iatefl.org/>

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