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Dear colleagues,

Welcome to the November – December issue of the BETA-IATEFL e-Newsletter. It brings you a selection of articles on the use of ICT that will inspire you to try some of the tools.

We also offer you a review of the book “English in Deprived Circumstances” which will give you answers to the following questions: Can learners of English choose their own materials to learn from? Should they do so? You will also be able to get an insight into some of the key issues discussed: autonomy and authenticity in language learning, emergent features of learner-chosen texts, assessment of acquisition etc.

You will be able to read a report from the BETA-IATEFL representative – Zarina Markova who attended the 12th National ATECR Conference in Hradec Kralove.

Finally, the Editorial team would like to thank our contributors without whose help and valuable materials this issue of the e-Newsletter wouldn’t have been the same!

Yours,

BETA-IATEFL e-Newsletter Editorial Team
Applying Wiki Social Software to Motivate the Students and Increase the Quality of Training in Doing English Grammar Tests

Temenuzhka Dobreva

Temenuzhka Dobreva is a senior teacher of English at the “Vasil Levski” Secondary Comprehensive School in Troyan. She has an MA degree in Russian philology (1985) and in English philology in 2006 awarded by the Veliko Turnovo University. She has been working as a teacher for 27 years. She has received the 3rd Professional Qualification Degree and has started the procedure for obtaining the 2nd Professional Qualification Degree.

Her free time is devoted to gardening and photography.

Mastering the English language is an ongoing process that requires extensive work. The teacher needs to find new ways to achieve the required quality of education. One of those ways is to use ICT in teaching English. The two main objectives of the English teaching is communicative and intercultural competence. Complying with these goals, the teacher should use active teaching methods to integrate information and communication technologies to implement them.

This study is addressed to possibilities for applying wiki social software in doing grammar tests for classwork and for setting homework to students.

Why Wiki?

Wiki is online software for creating simple websites that support co-writing. Wikipedia is the best known and the largest free encyclopedia in history, which is accessible on the network. Wiki can be considered
a combination of a website and a word document. Wiki is one of many Web 2.0 components that can be used to enhance learning. Wiki is a web tool for communication and collaboration, which can be used to engage students in learning. Web 2.0 has the potential to complement, enhance and add new dimensions of collaboration in the classroom. The goal of the wiki is to create a multi-user repository of knowledge.

In terms of pedagogical benefit, wiki allows for communication and knowledge construction outside the classroom. Students become involved in the project, not just as passive recipients of knowledge. Wiki allows each student to create or edit pages. Wiki allows students to participate in the spatial and temporal distribution of tasks outside the classroom or in class. Students build a sense of team spirit, of cooperation in achieving a common goal. Transparency leads to greater responsibility for accuracy of language and literacy. One of the biggest benefits of using a wiki is to allow students to become more independent in their learning.

PB works (formerly PBwiki) is a collaborative editing system created by David Weekly. The company’s original name stems from their belief that “making a wiki is as easy as making a peanut butter sandwich”.

In the classroom, library or university PBworks promotes students learning. Even young students can build web pages, embed images and video and send documents. It provides access to information sources, lists and links to good articles; it has the resources stored for the future use. It owns and share information between students, faculty and stuff. It encourages the development and sharing resources among schools. PBwiki makes distance learning more interactive and supports research teams, improves coordination.

Duffy and Bruns (2006) list several possibilities of using wiki in education.

Students can use a wiki for study and research, which currently serves as a wiki for documenting their work. Students can add their thoughts, summaries of books read, share explanatory notes and bibliography.

Wiki can be used as a tool for presentation and students can look and comment directly. Wiki is a tool for group authorship. Group members often collaborate so
that everyone is equally represented and they produce a document that is published on the main page of the wiki.

Wiki facilitates the teachers:

- To organize training courses and send information about the course: the course program, sources, external links, project requirements, planning and project management, project information, feedback learners, frequently asked questions (FAQ);
- To organize interactive activities for the students; to control the wiki discussions among the students;
- To write a collaborative research project to which everyone has access at anytime and anywhere;
- to build collective knowledge base of the material during the school year;
- to build a repository of collective information gathering expertise in the subject area that can be improved over time by all the interested members;
- to create a different kind of web resource in which the teacher and the research group can have equal roles of active contributors and editors.

When I started working with wiki in my English classes with the students from the 7th grade, I hoped that this will intrigue, entertain and make the students more active. To receive, do and send the grammar test by the internet was very engaging, interesting and enjoyable for them. Working with social software in classes is very useful, motivating and stimulating the students.

The most widely used method of checking students’ knowledge – tests are also changing. In essence, they are indistinguishable from traditional tests. But when they are presented to the students to do them in a new way through the use of a computer plus entry into a social network, it can only stimulate the students to be active and to do otherwise boring lessons for new knowledge in grammar, interesting and exciting.

Doing grammar tests in a foreign language using a computer has many advantages:

Students show greater interest and greater autonomy; they are motivated to do this educational activity; teaching is easier; there are opportunities for presenting and displaying the new curriculum; the time for the students to obtain understanding and more information becomes shorter; computing creates a positive emotional
attitude in students; it is cheaper; the teacher is able to find a suitable means of individual and differentiated work.

When the needs of the students are placed in the center of the computer-based language learning, these make them active participants in the learning process and increase their motivation to work.

Preparation for creating accounts is performed. The students are invited to the teacher’s workspace by an e-mail and they are given their private passwords.

The users are given roles Writer, entitling them to work in this wiki. Any changes that are made by the teacher on the wiki or by the students themselves, participants receive a message on their mails. They can go into the wiki directly from their letters. The home page of the wiki acts as a portal that contains links to other pages on the wiki, to external websites and any material posted by the teacher.

Assignments link from the home page leads to a page with the students assignments. These are different kinds of tests made as a Word document; online tests, previously checked by the teacher; e-tests made with Hot Potatoes free lessons construction software to build a teaching website which includes crosswords, gap-fills, cloze tests, matching and multiple choices.

In the class folder, each student has his/her own place, where he/she finds Word tests. They has to be downloaded, filled in and sent back for check and evaluation. The student can work on the test in his/her convenience by stamping a deadline for its implementation. On the wiki page it is explained how students should proceed. Actually they liked Hot Potatoes tests most. Their knowledge in information technology to work with such documents comes to help them. We often use e-mail exchange to obtain feedback and evaluation of incentive and encouraging comments on the performance of the task. Correspondence is conducted entirely in the language taught, which inspires the students outside the classroom.

The group observed increased levels of intrinsic motivation for computer work and entry into social networking in English language classes. Students eagerly await the day when they have English in the computer lab. This new work expands their horizon, thinking, helping to raise awareness of the need to learn a foreign language. The benefits of interdisciplinary connections and the integration of ICT in the learning process are proved.
The results strongly confirm the delight of students to work with computers in English language classes and complete satisfaction of lasting new knowledge obtained in the subject using wiki. Pupils are adamant that computing helps in learning and are willing to use computers in other lessons, too.

The change of the students’ grades at the end of the school year reflects the positive impact of innovation in English classes during the second term. The students are more interested in the subject, they demonstrate independence and responsibility in carrying out the tasks, the new information is adopted easily and there is motivation for learning activity. Self-esteem of the students increases. Homework becomes more pleasant and desirable. The quality of the learning process increases noticeably. Students are motivated to participate actively in the learning process which is interesting for them and a desirable platform for intellectual and cultural power.

Wiki can be used successfully in foreign language classes not only for doing grammar tests but for developing the four language skills of reading, listening, writing and speaking. Nevertheless PBwiki is simple to operate and it contains documents of different kind, links to good webpages, embedded videos, films, useful historical and cultural information and authentic sources.

Other results from the experiment:

For 76, 92% of the students’ motivation level is higher than 50%. Pleasure and satisfaction from the work during the second term in the English classes are higher than 60% for 94, 61% of the students.

The proposed system for social wiki software helps to organize teacher training for advanced level students in the requirements and can be used not only in foreign language classes, but also in other areas of mandatory training.

Integrating ICT in the subjects of mandatory training is not only desirable, but necessary if teachers want to achieve increased quality of education in the contemporary Bulgarian school.

Creating a class wiki can serve successfully as a class portfolio – a concept, which is exploited much lately.

Interdisciplinary connections of the English subject and the Information Technology subject elevate the work of teachers and students in foreign language classes to new
creative levels. Preconditions for improvement in terms of the latest technology are created. And because teaching is a great creative process, any teacher, trained to use continuously updated and improved technology, can transform his/her classes and make them nice and welcomed by his/ her students.

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Easy Does It: VOA Special English – A Multimedia Online Power Tool

Bill Templer

Bill Templer is a Chicago-born educator with research interests in English as a lingua franca, critical pedagogy, socialist/Marxist transformative policy for education, and Extensive Reading methodologies. He serves on the staff of the IATEFL SIG Global Issues: http://gisig.iatefl.org/contact.htm

Bill has taught in the U.S., Ireland, Germany, Israel/Palestine, Austria, Bulgaria, Iran, Nepal, Thailand, Laos and Malaysia. He is Editor (Eastern Europe) at the Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies (http://www.jceps.com), chief translator for the Simon Dubnow Institute for Jewish History and Culture, University of Leipzig (http://www.dubnow.de), and is currently based as an independent researcher in Shumen, Bulgaria. E-mail: bill_templer@yahoo.com

There is a cost-free multimedia power tool for reading and listening few teachers or English language learners (ELLS) in Bulgaria and the region seem to be aware of: VOA Special English (SE) – a huge online archive of ‘simpler’ high-quality texts at 1,500 headwords (lower B1 level) <http://www.voaspecialenglish.com>. It is the largest single ‘easier’ American English resource online, all written/spoken by experienced journalists working with the Voice of America. The SE archive contains some 7,000 texts, growing at two texts per day. All texts are short, ca. 400-1,300 words; most with MP3 for listening + download. Along with 100s of videos, many with captions.

This ‘graded level’ site is superb for encouraging Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) in Krashen’s (1997; 2004a) sense, both outside the classroom in autonomous study and to supplement the in-class syllabus. It is “comprehensible input” B1-level par excellence. As Special English Chief Shelley Gollust has commented: “It’s almost like Hemingway. You can write something easy and direct, and it’s more powerful that way” (quoted in Goodman, 2007).

ELLS can click on any word and find the definition in the Merriam-Webster Learner’s Dictionary. SE can be integrated into classroom work in many imaginative ways.
 Learners can post their own stories about themselves: <http://goo.gl/iZvB5>, and respond to feature articles on article forums <http://goo.gl/t1W8T>. A special section, ‘The Classroom,’ provides a broad range of activities, including interactive online tools <http://goo.gl/1WqRA>, games here: <http://goo.gl/cgNbK>. SE is used as a teaching tool in Thailand <http://goo.gl/b8Nai>, and is quite popular in China and Vietnam. Moreover, teachers can do empirical action research on how their students respond, work with & learn from Special English texts, including case studies (Stake, 2006) -- concrete classroom research of high priority (Templer, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2011, 2012). One example is recent research from China on using SE even with advanced learners <http://goo.gl/aANuC>.

Special English news and features are also available on shortwave radio, so students with a good radio can access SE without a computer <http://goo.gl/OEZ5O>. It has 30 minutes of new programming every day, online plus shortwave, including 10 minutes of the latest news, and two feature programs on 14 ‘Special English Shows’ <http://goo.gl/sTU4P>. Spoken at a rate of 90 words per minute (25% slower than ‘normal’), this is about 2,700 words input for listening per day = 18,500 words per week = 962,000 words a year. Imagine your students developing a web-based input of readily comprehensible English approaching 1 million words a year. Arguably, this would work wonders for many average non-privileged learners across the region.

**SOME KEY ASPECTS OF SE**

- SE is based on a 1,500-word core ‘high-frequency’ vocabulary, plus 3-4% of more specialized vocabulary, depending on the subject.

- It recycles high-frequency vocabulary and syntax, important for all learners, with repetition and recycling of basic lexis and structures.

- SE averages 13 words per sentence. Its grammar, though natural, is simpler – generally one proposition (idea) per sentence.

- Every day, broadcasts has 10 minutes of World News, plus two feature articles, grouped under 14 ‘topic areas’ or ‘SE shows,’ including agriculture, science, entertainment, development, health, education, exploration, ‘people in America,’ short fiction, ‘words and their stories.’ Listen here: <http://goo.gl/sTU4P>. 
• This builds a wide window onto intercultural awareness. Articles have high interest value, and often deal with current topics of global significance. The genre is multimodal, combining text, image and sound (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001), where text on-screen can reinforce aural input and vice versa.

• All this material is archived online since 2000. There are some 720 ‘SE Show’ articles per year, and nearly 7,000 articles in the SE archive at this point, well over 3.5 million words, adding 14 articles per week.

• It is an excellent ‘narrow reading’ resource in Krashen’s sense (2004b), where students can self-select readings to focus on a topic of interest. On narrow reading/listening, see also Harumi & Ssali (2009). The archive can be easily searched for any topic.

• Music in particular is one focus most ELLs have a strong attraction for. Here an SE feature article on Michael Jackson: <http://goo.gl/h8x23>, another on Billie Holiday <http://goo.gl/HpSuk> and another on the blues <http://goo.gl/BuVRG>, this on rock n’ roll <http://goo.gl/hkrG7>. ‘Music’ searched on the SE archive yields 4,178 matches.


• The online archive has over 100 American stories in simpler English, graded at 1,500 headwords. Here Jack London’s “To Build a Fire” <http://bit.ly/HYdiCX>. You can introduce ELLs to simpler versions of classic stories; they can discuss in groups, perform as drama, draw collaborative comics about. An introduction to American fiction.

• With texts on a broad range of topics, SE is a kind of ‘English for Academic Purposes Lite.’ Such an EAP Lite/ESP Lite needs experimentation & research, such as preparation for tests like IELTS and building proficiency in general academic English (Syahro, 2009).

• Intriguingly, Reilly (2012, p. 9) stresses the idea of including materials on social issues in the reading of ‘Generation Y’ students of today, texts about climate change, poverty, women’s issues, politics – since “Gen Y seeks a
purpose and a passion.” SE has many such texts, multimodal, and this can be experimented with in line with Reilly’s suggestions for ‘Gen Y’ pedagogies.

**TOWARD A TARGET “PLATEAU LEVEL”**

Special English, which can be used as an EAP Lite and many other text genres, and most certainly for the needs of everyday communication, can be mastered far more easily than climbing the virtual “Everest” of standard “complete” English. This requires massive recycling and over-learning of basic lexis and syntax at this level, promoting a kind of “plain talk fluency” and greater learner confidence (Templer, 2009). This can be done utilizing the SE model, even for speaking and writing, a reasonable target “plateau level” for the multitude of learners today. The lower-intermediate level of SE texts is a workable target level – enough for most ELLs -- from which some can & will move on to autonomous, self-directed learning. Krashen (1997) has emphasized that the prime goal in EFL pedagogy is “to develop intermediates, students who can continue to improve on their own” (pp. 50-51). As Michael West observed (1955, p. 70): “At 1,700 words one can tell any strong plot, keeping much of the original style. A vocabulary of 2,000 words is good enough for anything, and more than one needs for most things.” Eldridge & Neufeld (2009), based on extensive research with learners in Northern Cyprus, posit the critical lexical threshold at 1,650 word families.

**IMPROVING WEAK PERFORMANCE, LOW MOTIVATION**

A significant proportion of ELLs, especially those “in difficult circumstances” (Maley, 2001) – non-privileged, with few books at home, low-income background, low motivation -- often fail to move beyond a mid-elementary/false beginner level. Data from the EU suggests that over 50 percent of the population in a number of EU countries can barely communicate in English, despite years of study in school (Lehner, 2009). An EFL teacher from Serbia notes:

I’ve mentioned several times how bad language education (in primary and high schools, but often the faculties too) in Serbia is, how after 10 years of second language study the vast majority of students, after finishing high-school, gets no further than a set of several basic sentences and a mediocre vocabulary which they can’t put to any real use <http://goo.gl/B3Wxi>.

This is a pedagogical reality which most teachers at the grassroots in Bulgaria are well aware of. There are a multitude of learners who have had 1,100+ hours of EFL instruction, yet remain poor in reading and production skills. Moreover, they do not read much in any language, and may be weak in general literacy.
Using texts written in SE and aiming at this realistic “plateau level” -- where students even after leaving school can continue to read and listen, and develop *active* skills speaking and writing along the lines of SE - may help to counter this lack of motivation and performance that frustrates and defeats so many ELLs. SE could be taught as a target goal for acquirers to “overlearn” lexis and syntax, gaining ever greater familiarity and competence at this crucial plateau level. It is also easier for teachers to fully master and teach.

**COUNTERING THE “MATTHEW EFFECT” IN EFL**

On an analogous note of “social class in class,” Lamb (2011) discusses the impact in provincial Sumatra in Indonesia of a “Matthew Effect” in which the social, economic, and cultural capital provided by home background and early education experiences enables some learners to benefit more from English language education at school as well as to “exploit opportunities to learn the language outside school” (p. 201), leading to a “massive competitive gain” in English proficiency over children from more modest socioeconomic backgrounds. In turn, this can generate a widening economic and cultural class divide over the long term. As it says in Matthew 13:12: “Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.” Rigney (2012) argues that the Matthew Effect -- advantage begetting further advantage -- is evident in schooling across the planet. Here in Bulgaria and the region, a Matthew Effect is self-evident in most local schools. Working systematically with SE may be one pathway to countering this effect and creating greater learning equity, restoring learner confidence and self-esteem. Only experimentation and research will tell. But it is a direction worth pursuing.

**MEANING IN THE SERVICE OF POWER?**

Generally, SE materials do not offer a critical view of many aspects of American life and society. The Voice of America is under the U.S. Dept. of State. In the past, SE served aims bound up with the Cold War. Yet today the site is not a crude propaganda tool (Templer, 2008b; 2009). Of course, it is tilted toward a certain ‘bourgeois’ view of the current world system and selective imaging of America and the West, but so are all the corporate mainstream media in the U.S. with their manipulation strategies. Certainly, SE needs to be read critically, and students can be taught through critical discourse analysis to do that.
Yet its relative balance and approach in feature stories can appeal to a broad segment of ELLs. Some SE stories highlight ‘progressive’ Americans. For example, a biography featured the radical feminist and political radical Margaret Sanger <http://goo.gl/jyGOh>. A biography of leftwing singer Woody Guthrie highlighted his social activism <http://goo.gl/2wtLw> in the U.S. A feature on the African-American poet Gwendolyn Brooks <http://goo.gl/X4JOP> stressed her work as a lyrical chronicler of African-American working class life in her native Chicago. Singer Paul Robeson, one of the most radical African-American artists and activists of his era, was also featured <http://goo.gl/kRDP9>.

**ONE ANALOGUE: THE TIMES IN_plain English**

The *New York Times* has launched a new online paper, *The Times in Plain English* <http://bit.ly/HELhAb>. It is simpler English, although somewhat above the 1,500 headword level, with short articles rewritten from the *NY Times, Wall Street Journal* and other U.S. papers, downshifted to a lower-intermediate B1 level. This can be used like VOA Special English for cost-free recreational reading at easier levels. Most articles deal with current issues, and ELLs can also find the original article and compare.

**A MORE ‘CRITICAL’ VERSION OF EASIER ENGLISH?**

PEOPLE’S LIBRARY OF COMPREHENSIBLE INPUT

One larger project we would like to see launched is to encourage a new series of books written in SE on a range of topics, including anthologies of texts for academic and scientific subjects, to augment comprehensible input at this level. The large array of books written in BASIC ENGLISH (Templer, 2008b, 2009; 2012) during the 1930s & ‘40s on topics in science, architecture, philosophy and many other fields by associates of Charles K. Ogden and Ivor Richards are a paradigm for a kind of “people’s library” in easier English, best kept outside the profit-oriented agendas of corporate publishers. They could be made available under a CC copyright <http://creativecommons.org>. For BASIC ENGLISH, see a multitude of excellent books at <http://goo.gl/42DC7> and <http://goo.gl/OJ5UY>.

POSSIBLE SE RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES: SOME SUGGESTIONS

SE remains a kind of “Cinderella” in ELT research. Over a decade go, Lewis (1999, p. 1) noted: “Voice of America’s Special English program is arguably the most unique and successful program in the history of international broadcasting by the United States, and yet hardly anyone in this country ever has heard of it.” In part, this is because SE was, since its inception in 1959 until the late 1990s, available only on shortwave outside the U.S., and written texts were rare. All that has changed over the past cybernetic decade. Partially, sparse research may be due to another factor: Special English was seen as a tool in the Cold War for the first three decades of its existence (Templer, 2008a). All that too is transformed. Moreover, in the past 18 months, the SE site has been significantly upgraded & diversified. Teachers can do action research -- and case studies in particular (Stake, 2006) -- on a broad range of questions (below just a few), and disseminate their findings among colleagues, at conferences and in print:

- Can SE be used as a versatile, effective platform for EAP Lite/ESP Lite in a variety of fields and subjects? In many countries, CLIL is proving far too demanding for average non-privileged learners <http://goo.gl/iioqC>. The Matthew Effect probably shapes success with CLIL everywhere. Experimentation with a more ‘downsized’ mode of academic English is clearly needed for most ordinary ELLs.
- Can students develop a daily habit of working with SE in the 30-minute broadcast?

- Can SE be used even with more advanced ELLs to improve their production, as researched in China <http://goo.gl/aANuC>, and as a source of ‘easier’ recreational self-selected reading, where advanced students read for pleasure?

- Can it become for many more ordinary learners an actual productive level for a plainer, simpler spoken and written English, and for reading extensively at that “plateau” level as the prime aim of an EFL syllabus, not climbing the “Everest” of standard English?

- Do ordinary learners at A2/B1 levels become more motivated to read in English when working with SE? Case studies needed.

- Do students like reading a text with an MP3 audio option, and retain lexis and structures better through this combination?

- Can SE texts on American life and society – a kind of “American mosaic” -- provide a useful introduction to the U.S? Can they be worked into study projects, cross-curricular projects? How?

- Can SE be used to enhance Free Voluntary Surfing (FVS) on the Internet, exploring questions raised in Krashen (2007, pp. 6-7)?

- How do students respond to SE videos and other aspects of the Web-based site?

- Exploratory research in SE Asia indicates that reading skills for IELTS exam preparation can be significantly enhanced working with SE texts (Syahro, 2009), and listening skills improved (Sikkhagit, 2007). More research needed.

- How does SE listening comprehension compare with listening on a comparable Web-based medium like Jeff McQuillan’s <http://www.eslpod.com>, with its more difficult lexis and spoken discourse styles, even in podcasts there spoken at a slower tempo?

- Is SE especially effective for approaches in Extensive Listening (Waring, 2003) and Extensive Reading <http://www.robwaring.org/er>?

Experimentation and research on this Web-based tool are much needed. Privileged ELLs can climb to whatever levels of upscale proficiency they aspire to. The imperative challenge for us as a profession is how to better address the authentic literacy needs of the majority, with advocacy for an international people’s lingua franca, in solidarity with them and in the name of educational equity. Special English can be part of that.

REFERENCES


(N.B.: all URLs above accessed 25 October 2012)
Can English language learners (ELLs) choose their own materials to learn from? Should they do so? This fascinating empirical study from Andhra Pradesh state in southern India suggests that student-selected texts at their own level for Free Voluntary Reading as ‘classroom material’ constitute a highly effective method. In this case, the study experimented with learners in more disadvantaged circumstances, and teenage children who themselves are already working many hours a day outside school, and a group of adult ELLs. It is a narrative that explores how ordinary learners learn when they themselves take charge of what they read, listen to or write.

A leading scholar in EFL pedagogy in India, based at the English and Foreign Languages University in Hyderabad, Prof. Amritavalli makes a strong case for learner autonomy for reading and listening in selecting texts in a learner-centered constructivist framework: “This study arose from the belief that successful second language learning can result when the power to choose learning materials is vested in the learners themselves [...] Each learner undertakes an exploration of the language in accordance with her current ability” (pp. ix, 17). She laments that

“in no time in the learner’s experience of a language curriculum is the learner expected to take charge of her language input; e.g. to find anything for herself to read and understand, to write, or to listen to. Language learning at school is restricted to reacting to prescribed material rather than being proactive in finding potential language resources” (ibid.).
That is especially true for reading within the classroom, over and beyond Extensive Reading/Listening for pleasure (Templer, 2012a). She seeks to challenge this lack of learner autonomy constructively, within a mode of empirical action research.

Prof. Amritavalli builds on a notion of ‘authenticity’ of language texts geared to what is ‘real and appropriate’ for learners, chosen by them as they perceive their needs, as based on Widdowson (1979). The study reports on longitudinal data gathered among 15 working-class ELLs, and cross-sectional data working with a group on non-Indian adult ELLs from 10 countries. Prof. Amritavalli’s methodology centered on the use of her own class diary, highly detailed, and case study of several young learners. The book is replete with reproduced examples of texts chosen by her students. She builds in particular on ideas of Krashen, Vygotsky, N.S. Prabhu (1987), and some of the notions of learner-centered ‘deschooling’ developed by Ivan Illich. Illich’s (1971) work on learner autonomy and disestablishing traditional forms of schooling is worth serious discussion in Bulgaria.

The special value of the present study, still little known outside India, is that it is based on fine-textured empirical research on ELL autonomy within a social constructivist framework, especially with less privileged learners, I would argue that (a) the entire question of ‘learners in deprived circumstances’ (however ‘deprived’ is defined, socio-economically, culturally or otherwise) needs to be focused on far more in Bulgarian EFL; (b) the field of EFL pedagogy here in the region is probably too BANA-centric, dominated by pedagogy stemming from Britain, Australasia and North America, and needs in that sense to be decolonized and ‘indigenized,’ localized; and (c) social-constructivist approaches need to be experimented with far more in Bulgarian EFL classrooms, especially with average learners.

In all of this, it is important to bridge the pretty wide gap between ‘academic knowledge’ of researchers, often university-based, and what we can call ‘grassroots knowledge’ of teachers in the field, many teaching in under-equipped schools outside bigger towns. That is a gap in Bulgaria, in India, in many corners. Bulgarian teachers can learn a lot from their colleagues in South Asia, China, Africa and elsewhere in the Global South. The present book is a good starting point, and raises important questions about how teachers teach and learners learn.

Working with learners coming from ‘deprived circumstances’ is a focus that tends to be marginalized in BG, despite the fact that many Bulgarian ELLs are from families with a modest income, and in quite a few schools, urban and rural, stem from
minority ethnic social strata where Bulgarian is not the home language (Templer, 2012b). A recent report by the NGO *Zaedno v Chas* revealed that some 40% of Bulgarian 16-year-olds can be classified as functionally illiterate, and the data suggest “that Bulgarian schools cannot compensate for the negative effects of family environment, of poverty and of low social status, thus ranking Bulgaria at the level of countries such as Peru and Uruguay, not as a European one.” *Zaedno v Chas* also noted that “in the last 10 years, the difference between the best-prepared students from the largest cities and/or from families with good income and the worst-prepared disadvantaged students and those from the villages is growing” (Novinite, 2012a). The Adult Education Survey 2012 in Bulgaria noted: “More than half of the population aged 25 - 64 years (51.1%) declared they had not read a book at all during the last 12 months. [...] Only 8.8% of the people with low education have read a book” (Novinite 2012b). The survey also stressed that completing secondary education correlated strongly with the highest level of education achieved by one’s parents. This is ‘social class in the classroom’ (Finn, 2009, pp. 53-94), and Amritavalli addresses that dimension directly, especially in chap. 3, “What is authentic for deprived learners?” (pp. 28-48).

For example, she describes how a group of disadvantaged learners (whose English was a lot below the standard expected of them) were instructed to simply find something that they could read from a textbook. “Every student managed to find something, even if it was only a couple of sentences. Most astonishingly, what we were left with at the end of such sessions of finding readable texts, was a ‘book within the textbook’ that the children could read on their own” (Amritavalli, 2012, p. 3). That ‘book within the textbook’ or ‘hidden textbook’ was made up of short texts of all kinds picked out by learners from their textbook, often with pictures. All were short texts that could be read in 10-15 minutes, ranging between 50-150 words, and short sentences. Many contained illustrations, conversations, passages from newspapers, poems. She notes: “In short, every piece of text that looked short enough to be read by a learner, had short paragraphs, involved turn-taking and dialogue, short lines (as in poems), and most importantly, was a short text, was chosen.” Brevity was a central criterion for the learners. A detailed processual description of this work with self-selected texts is given by the author in the section “The discovery of a hidden textbook” (pp. 35-48).

Intriguing is the section “The teacher learns: A new approach to the choice of materials” (pp. 62-67), where Prof. Amritavalli describes how she learned through
experimentation to better distinguish between ‘genuine’ texts and pedagogically ‘authentic’ texts actually geared to student ability level and “likely to engage the learner cognitively” (p. 63), a distinction that echoes Widdowson (1979, p. 165). Many texts her students chose in addition to excerpts from their textbook came from the Indian daily newspaper The Hindu. In Bulgaria, online papers such as the Sofia Weekly and Sofia Morning News could be a similar source, as could likewise the huge archive of VOA Special English (<learningenglish.voanews.com>) and excellent texts from BBC Learning English (<goo.gl/07OR>), and other sources. In India and Bulgaria, utilizing the huge repository of potential texts and images in cyberspace is essential in seeking to engage students as autonomous readers. Teachers today in BG are dealing everywhere with a ‘Generation Y’ or NetGen of ‘screenagers’ who are ‘digital natives’ and may often “feel disengaged in the classroom,” distrustful of “traditional often boring lockstep learning” (Templer 2012a: 1; Reilly, 2012). NetGen kids & teens have their

- ‘e-life’ /browsing on Internet, using online social media/
- ‘g-life’ /computer games/
- ‘m-life’ /music, pop + chalga/
- ‘p-life,’ /cell phones + SMS/
- ‘c-life’ /comics/
- ‘f-life’ /films/

But for most younger Bulgarians, their ‘b-life’ /self-selected reading of books/ is quite limited in any language. So self-selected reading online is one avenue to pursue inventively (Krashen, 2007).

Dr. Amritavalli’s fifth chapter (pp. 68-75) describes intensive work with a group of adult professionals, ELLs from a range of countries, including Cuba, Laos, Syria and Vietnam. At one point, she offered them a pile of old issues of Reader’s Digest, and told them to select what they wanted to read. She notes that “there was a quantum leap in the amount of material processed by the learner when the choice of reading material was vested in them.” There was also a change in class atmosphere, and by week 6, “an almost carnival spirit characterized the group’s reading” (p. 69). Here again, she provides detailed case studies of several students in the class, with
examples of what they chose to read and why, and the range of abilities they revealed.

Prof. Amritavalli builds centrally on social constructivism in her pedagogy of ELL autonomy. Social constructivism (Reyes & Vallone, 2008, pp. 31-38, 167-172; Crawford & Reyes, 2011; Reich, 1998) in the ESL classroom at all levels is a good armature for including and energizing student-centered text selection and much independent reading for pleasure.

“Constructivists view learning not as a process of filling passive minds with information, but as a process of cognitive change — a literal rewiring of the brain — as children engage the world, building and rebuilding their understanding of it. Early childhood educator Beverly Falk said it best: ‘Learning is something that a learner does, not something that is done to the learner.’ Thus constructivism values questioning, reasoning, analysis, reflection, problem-solving, cooperation, and creativity among the intellectual assets that children will need in school and in life beyond school” (Crawford & Reyes, 2012, p. 32).

Interactive constructivist learning is also ‘situated learning’ in social and collaborative contexts of interaction. Social constructivism encourages students to construct meanings for themselves, to ‘learn by doing,’ through working together, and also much individualized work, since every student has a different ‘zone of proximal development’ in Vygotsky’s conception. Constructivist educators try to create an open and stimulating environment that is conducive to learning, with a lot of simpler ‘sheltered reading,’ and careful scaffolding for individual comprehension - - in this case centered on reading. in EFL grounded on readily ‘comprehensible input’ in Krashen’s classic ‘i + 1’ sense, as Amritavalli (p. 6) stresses (see also Krashen, 2004; 2011; 2012).

Based on her research, she stresses the need for more investigation of ‘reading cultures’ among pupils in India, imperatives also applicable in Bulgaria today:

“As this small pool of learner-chosen materials began to accumulate, there emerged also the need for a full-fledged, systematic investigation into ‘children’s
reading choices’ in our country. [...] We need to know what, if anything, our children are reading out of school, and in which language. We need to know if the school systems are producing independent readers and whether any non-prescribed reading material is available for them in schools. We need to know whether social stratifications are reflected in reading abilities and availability of reading choices, so that we can find ways of improving our delivery of reading instruction” (p. 9).

In regard to whether learner autonomy in reading choices is workable with younger ELLs, she emphasizes: “our experience has been that any learner at any level can take charge of finding what she wants to read, listen to, or even write” (ibid.). One of her final recommendations is for a “systematic survey of children’s reading for pleasure [...] if possible in a multilingual framework” (p. 80). A survey questionnaire ‘Exploring your own reading history’ that you might want to use with your own students can be found in Templer (2012a, p. 11).

The book can be readily ordered from Cambridge UP India <goo.gl/hPXiJ> and elsewhere in India and the UK (<goo.gl/o1Uqy>) at a quite reasonable purchase price. Its Table of Contents is here <goo.gl/C8A06>. It was put online open-access last year (<goo.gl/hPXiJ>), but has since been locked up by Cambridge UP and is accessible online only through them. Fortunately, the author’s most recent article (2012) on ‘helping children become readers’ is open-access for all to read in a new journal from India, Language and Language Teaching, and is quite relevant to the recent ‘Reading Encouragement Conference’ held in Balchik (Taralova, 2012), and the 27 Sept. 2012 conference at the Shumen regional library that highlighted ‘stimulating reading among younger children’ <goo.gl/YxYOA>. It also jibes with the work of the Bulgarian Reading Association (<www.bulra.org>), which English teachers here should be supporting.

The second issue of LLT <goo.gl/INwOY> has useful articles on drama for ELLs, using cartoons in the classroom, bias in ELT textbooks, and Stephen Krashen’s latest brief piece: “A Short Paper Proposing that We Need to Write Short Papers.”

REFERENCES


IN November:

- the SEETA Open Forum deals with one of the most important e-issues: **E-safety**.

**Carol Raibow** will be running a 2-week course on SEETA, 19-30 November on **E-safety: understanding issues and teaching resources**.

- Our blogger for November is **Bohdana Navratilova**, who will be sharing with us **The Ups and Downs of her working week**. Follow Bohdana's diary of a working week at SSGS Prerov, that's the Secondary School of Gastronomy and Services. Delicious!

- Would you like some tips on **how to engage students in pairwork**? Read the SEETA article for November by **Roger House**.

And our on-going forums:

- **What I wanna know is ...** hosted by **Philip Kerr**. Post your questions to the forum!

- **SEETA Projects Corner** hosted by **Catalina Ecaterina Baltateanu**. Post your ideas for joint projects.

- **The ELT Recipe Book** hosted by **Sandra Vida**. Share your teaching ideas that work or ask for teaching tips.

By Anna Parisi
Hosted Discussion

19-30 November 2012

Carol Rainbow

E-safety: understanding issues and teaching resources

Using the web gives access to the world’s biggest library with videos, sounds, images, photographs, academic papers and books being uploaded daily. It offers the opportunity to communicate globally, easily and cheaply. Access to the internet is becoming ubiquitous due to the massive uptake of smart phones, tablets, games machines, netbooks and various other mobile devices. Many of us are always connected and the numbers will continue to rise for the foreseeable future. E-safety is something that we all need to know about and understand.

SEETA’s regular monthly guest blog

26-30 November 2012

Bohdana Navratilova

The Ups and Downs of My Working Week

and much more on http://www.seeta.eu
The 8th International and 12th National ATECR conference took place in the picturesque historic town of Hradec Kralove, in North-Eastern Bohemia. It was housed in a convenient place in the centre of the town - the new building of the Pedagogical Faculty, University of Hradec Kralove, which seemed to accommodate everybody: conference participants, presenters and organizers, exhibitors and potential customers while offering enough space for coffee breaks and the reception. Everything seemed to work smoothly thanks to the energetic team of student assistants, many of whom are would-be teachers of English initiating themselves into the wider ELT community.

There were over fifty talks and workshops on various aspects of English language teaching and learning, with learning technologies slightly predominating. As the conference title suggests, they were focused on new approaches to the same old areas of interest: teaching the language skills, culture, literature and intercultural competence, test preparation, using coursebooks, differentiated instruction. A recurrent motif of the sessions was the reappraisal – of teaching practices, materials, attitudes, involvement. The presenters were from different backgrounds: teachers, teacher trainers, materials writers. My first impression was that too much weight was given to presentations on behalf of publishers. However, this

You will be able to read a report from the BETA-IATEFL representative – Zarina Markova who attended the 12th National ATECR Conference in Hradec Kralove, 14-15 September 2012.

The topic of her presentation was ‘Adventures in the wonderland of children’s creativity’.

Zarina has been involved in ELT for 18 years and in pre-service and in-service teacher training for 12 years. She is interested in individual differences research and its implications for foreign language teaching.
seemed to be in tune with the conference participants’ desire to follow the latest trends in English language teaching and publishing.

The conference was both informative and enjoyable. It proved to be an exciting blend of professional discussions and informal talks, cross-cultural communication and entertainment. To me the highlights were the Thursday dinner, a delightful opportunity to get to know Olga, Pavla and Mihal from the ATECR committee and Asuman, Daria, Molly and Snezana from the partners’ associations, and Friday morning, when Jiří Heger took us on an unforgettable tour round Hradec Kralove.

Many thanks to all the organizers for an inspiring event. Many thanks to BETA for choosing me as their official representative for the 8th International and 12th National ATECR conference.

With Asuman Eray (Turkey), Daria Paro (HUPE Croatia), Molly McCord (MITESOL Michigan, USA) and Snezana Filipovic (ELTA Serbia) in the centre of Hradec Kralove.
Invitation to European project *Music and Languages*

**FolkDC**

r.e. Language project for young language learners

Music has been shown to have a very positive impact on language learning and the EU Comenius, FolkDC project utilizes this perfectly.

**Resource for Teachers**

The project has prepared an autonomous teacher kit that can be used to motivate and engage early language learners. The kit is available on the project website at: [http://folkdc.eu/resources/](http://folkdc.eu/resources/)

The kit consists of:

- Full teacher guides explaining how to use the project
- European folk songs in 10 languages (20 songs in all)
- The transcribed lyrics and recordings of the songs
- A set of activities around the songs that focus on:
  - Languages
  - Music
  - Culture
Self –assessment form (please ensure to complete)

The teacher kit has been piloted in schools across Europe with excellent results.

The purpose of the project is to motivate young learners to appreciate European languages and culture, to enjoy singing and how interesting learning can be.

Live Concert

At the end of the project simultaneous live concerts will be held in 5 European countries (UK, Turkey, Finland, Romania, and Spain) that will be linked on the Internet on 23 April 2013. Your school can book a place to watch the concert online or even attend in person. Please write to me for more details.

If you have any questions or need help using the teacher kit please also write to me.

Joel Josephson

Folk DC dissemination partner.

joel.josephson@joel-josephson.org
OPENNESS AND CONNECTEDNESS:
EXPLORING THE LANDSCAPE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
TEACHING IN THE MODERN WORLD

22nd BETA-IATEFL Annual International
Conference
21st-23rd June 2013, Varna, Bulgaria

FIRST CALL

DEAR COLLEAGUE,

The Bulgarian English Teachers’ Association (BETA-IATEFL) and the University of Shumen are pleased to invite you to the 22nd BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference, which will take place at the Department for Information, Qualification and Lifelong Learning from 21st to 23rd June 2013 in Varna, a beautiful city on the Black Sea coast.

The main aim of this year's conference is to promote the spirit of openness and connectedness among ELT professionals and to invite you to explore the landscape of language teaching and learning in both traditional and new areas of interest. We would like to offer you the opportunity to share your experience, expertise and insights into the fascinating world of language teaching and research. Areas of interest include, but are not limited to Teaching Young Learners and Teenagers; Teaching ESP; Teacher Education and Development; Bilingual Education; Literature, Media & Cultural Studies in ELT; Global Issues; Content and Language Integrated Learning; Blended Learning; Applied linguistics; Research; Testing, Evaluation and Assessment.

As usual, internationally prominent professionals in the field of ELT are invited as keynote speakers and workshop leaders. A book exhibition of major ELT publishers and service providers will accompany the conference.

SPEAKER PROPOSAL DEADLINE – 15th March 2013. For speaker proposal forms, fees and accommodation check http://www.beta-iatefl.org. For further queries, contact beta.iateflbg@gmail.com or zhivka_ilieva@yahoo.com

We very much look forward to seeing you in Varna.

Best regards,
The Conference Organizing Team
2013 SPELLING BEE COMPETITION

Start of the registration: 5 November 2012

Attention, spelling wizards! The registration for the third annual Bulgarian National English Spelling Bee to be held in the spring of 2013 has now begun.

A Spelling Bee is a competition in which contestants “spell” or pronounce English words letter by letter. Preparation and participation in the competition stimulates students’ interest in the English language while helping them to improve their pronunciation and vocabulary and gives teachers an innovative approach for the teaching of English vocabulary and grammar in secondary education. If you are a student from fourth to seventh grade between the ages of 9 and 14 years, check out the Spelling Bee Bulgaria website at www.spellingbee-bg.com for details on how to join the competition.

For more information, please visit: http://www.spelling-bg.com

or phone: 02 / 423 73 93 or 0884109088.

Call for contributions

Dear Colleagues,

We would love to receive your contributions or suggestions for the next issues of the E-Newsletter of the Bulgarian English Teachers’ Association (ISSN 1314-6874). Please send us your contributions before:

- **26 December 2012** for the January – February 2013 Issue on the topic area: “Teaching Young Learners”

If you would like to submit materials on a different topic, please do! They will be considered for publication even if they do not correspond to the general topic of the issue.

Please, send your articles, notice of events, news, reviews, and other ELT-related material to the following e-mail address: beta.iateflbg@gmail.com
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

Thank you for reading and supporting BETA-IATEFL by being a member!