Editorial

We can teach Netiquette

47th Annual International IATEFL Conference Report

Regional events

Exploring Dobry

Forthcoming Events

Links
Contents

Spring has come again 3

We can teach Netiquette: an American educator’s perspective on teaching digital skills 4

Is there anybody going to listen to my story 10

IATEFL Liverpool: one month later 13

My dream come true! 16

eTwinning in Favour of English Language teaching 21


24th May – the Day of Bulgarian Education and Culture and Slavonic Literature Day 38

SEETA News 39

Call for contributors 40
Now when the weather is turning warm and the temperatures are beginning to rise quickly, I would like to remind you of our annual conference. As in the past, we promise you a jovial and lively event, with a lot of challenging topics and participants, a raffle of prizes and a rich choice of plenary speakers. The dates are 21-23 June and the venue is the Department for Information, Qualification and Lifelong Learning in Varna. Put a note on your diaries and don’t miss the event!

Looking back at the recent events in the world of ELT, we will offer you a brief report from our representative at the 47th IATEFL conference held in Liverpool. We also have a number of interesting and stimulating materials on initiatives held from colleagues.

Have a nice time reading this issue of the e-Newsletter!

The Editor
We Can Teach Netiquette: An American Educator’s Perspective on Teaching Digital Skills

Erinn Struss

I’ve been racking my brain trying to think of something that I could write for this newsletter. Sometimes I feel that there are already too many words out there. Enough people supply their opinions, so why add to the white noise, especially now that everyone can blog, Twitter and/or Facebook their smallest whim? In fact, we often witness much more than we want to online. Via social media I can see that my former colleague had a bad break-up with his girlfriend, I can see that a distant relative likes to party, and I can see that that some of my students are up at all hours of the night. Social media tantalizes us with opportunities to opine ad nauseam.

Does this atmosphere of over-sharing mean that we slightly more mature generations should disregard what youth post as “Oh, they put everything they think online,” or that we should separate ourselves from social media all together? No, I don’t think so, at least not for me. It is imperative that I ride the social media wave and connect with folks in the way that they are most comfortable. I believe that this also holds true for our students. If they are particularly keen about a certain social network, it is not such a bad idea to capitalize on that interest for the students’ academic and professional benefit. As Mills (2011) noted “Social networking tools have been praised for their educational value and potential and are heralded for their capacity to encourage students motivation and engagement” (p. 2). The use of social media, such as Facebook or blogs, in academic classrooms and in the
instruction of English is growing (Benson, Haney, Ore, Persell, Schulte, Steele, & Winfield, 2002; Mazer, Murphy, & Simmonds, 2007; Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Reinhardt & Zander, 2011). Despite this increase in computer mediated communication and digital technologies in the classroom, I feel that we have been neglecting the pragmatic and social skills that surround the use of these technological tools. Many of the youth I teach are much more adept at using the Internet and digital technologies than me. However, being professional and responsible about what they write digitally is a different matter. While students may be digital natives, they may not be aware of netiquette concerning issues such as the generic conventions of an email, the need to self-edit their online persona, and socially appropriate and inappropriate cellphone use. I think that it is my responsibility as an educator to not only use social media as a language teaching tool but to also address digital etiquette (netiquette) with my students.

We communicate digitally. A recent Pew Research study has shown that globally, about 85% of the population owns a cellphone and 75% of that group regularly sends text messages. According to the Babson Survey Research Group (2012), currently in the US, the average university faculty member receives between 11 and 50 emails daily. As of this time last year, 50% of Americans, 43% of Russians, and 39% of Poles regularly used some form of social media (Pew Research, 2012). According to SocialBakers (2013), a company which provides online market research, more than a third of the Bulgarian population has a Facebook account, the majority of which falls in age groups between 18-34 years of age. In the future more and more communication, especially professional, international communication in English, will be conducted online. This makes it imperative that we, as English instructors, teach digital communication skills.

As part of academic and professional writing, I teach generic conventions such as how to write an email. I supply students with example “poorly constructed” emails that I have received; these emails are missing subject lines, lack greetings, are too long, have many misspellings or no punctuation, are often unsigned, and/or have unnamed attached files (i.e. “file 1.doc”). The students work to find the problems with the emails. Then, I show students a well-structured email. The students list the characteristics of a good email. Later, for homework, the students must write me an email (note they need a meaningful reason to send the email). I also teach pragmatics
such as: the need to reply to emails/online messages, especially from superiors (i.e. instructors or employers), the need to keep emails brief, and the need to sometimes start and/or end with a little personal note, such as “I hope you are well.” Hopefully, by teaching and practicing emails, I am equipping students with practical English communication skills that will be useful in their future.

Along with emails, I have also started trying to teach and hold students responsible for cellphone etiquette. One thing I do in the class is that I try to engage students with text language. Individually or in pairs, students come up with as many different English texting abbreviations as they can in three minutes. We then see which students have the longest lists, and I list the abbreviations on the board. Next, in pairs or groups of three, students silently write “text messages” to each other on scraps of paper (sometimes I supply the topic or a conversation starter; sometimes I let them decide the initial topic). I then use this activity to discuss register. Students need to be made aware that the language that they use in text messages, online chat, and Facebook is not the register appropriate for an email to an instructor or for writing an academic essay. This may sound obvious, but I have received too many homework assignments and essays with “you” spelled as “U” or “going to” as “gonna.” It’s wonderful that students know text lingo; however, they need to be aware that this is just one “register” of English and that they need to choose the appropriate register for their audience and the genre they are writing in. In addition, to learning about register, students also need to know when to put their cellphones away. This is not just a problem with Bulgarian classes; this is an international issue. Answering a cellphone call in the middle of class is not okay. Texting during class is not appropriate. If we let this behavior slide, not only are we allowing students to be distracted in our classes, thus inhibiting their learning process, but we are also teaching youth that these behaviors are socially acceptable. They are not; they are rude. There are many professional situations, from retail positions to academia, where having issues with mobiles use can cost someone respect, a promotion, or even their job. Our youth are not learning how to be responsible with their digital gadgets; it is our job to help teach them. While many people may eventually stumble on the correct social norms, many will not. There is no harm in explicitly telling, modeling, and holding youth responsible for proper digital behaviors. Not fostering this growth will inhibit
their future professional and social lives.

Lastly, I have grown increasingly aware of the need to explicitly discuss appropriate and inappropriate forms of social media sharing with students. Before I was more inclined to let youth just figure this out on their own. However, as I increasingly use social media with my classes and as I observe the things that many of my students post online, I have rather abruptly awaken to the need to address responsible sharing and online bullying. From what I have observed, students need to be aware that everything that they post online is public. Students should be reminded to use filters and circles, but they should also know that these aren’t fool proof. They need to know that posts concerning sex, drugs, alcohol, violence, and hate/anger are inappropriate can be held against them by their peers, their future employers, academically, or even by law enforcement. For example, in the US, individuals making threatening comments on Facebook (both made in jest and real) have been arrested by the police (Calhon, 2010; CBS Chicago, 2012). According to an article in The Washington Post, in some communities in the US, during job interviews candidates may be asked if they have social networking pages and might be prompted to show them to their potential employers on the spot (Shapira, 2008). In short, we should all think before we share, and “if in doubt, leave it out.” It is useful to discuss with students the idea that “updating while impaired” due to inebriation, late night mood swings, or fall-outs with friends or loved ones can lead to later embarrassment. Students can also have discussions about how to be effectively heard/read online. For example, unless the authors are celebrities such as Carles Puyol or Victoria Beckham, overzealous updating (i.e. tweeting or posting on Facebook every few hours) is annoying. Similarly, being in a constant state of online-update-crisis is the equivalent to crying wolf. Posting too much and/or complaining all the time will mean that people stop reading what you post. Most of our students are incredibly conscious about their physical appearance in public; they need to know that their online identity is also a public manifestation of their selves.

I can understand skepticism concerning our responsibility to deal with these issues. Some teachers might say that we have enough trouble preparing students for standardized tests and academic preparedness as it is. I understand these issues. My point is that the future our students are headed for, academically and professionally, is digital or some variation thereof.
As educators we need to prepare them for this future. Just like any other form of communication (i.e. stories, essays, letters) or social behavior, the norms need to taught, modeled, and practiced in the class.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to my friend, Beth Wadell, for editorial advice!

REFERENCES


When I came back home from the 47th Annual International IATEFL Conference in Liverpool, I was still under the impression of this well-organized and professionally inspirational event. I had a plan to prepare a report on it as soon as possible but where to start from when writing about a conference which gathered together 2,633 delegates and which contained about 550 sessions over four days?

For me the conference started on 8 April with the Associates Day, which gave me the chance to meet the other IATEFL Associate representatives, to share ideas and to discuss possibilities for future collaboration and ways for the future developments of IATEFL associates activities. In the evening there was a Welcome Reception (supported by the City of Liverpool) at which the Lord Mayor of the city gave a warm welcome to the delegates.
On the next day (9 April) the conference was officially opened by IATEFL President Eric Baber who introduced the forthcoming changes in the IATEFL Committee and gave the flow to David Crystal and his plenary session *Beatles, blends and blogs*. You might wonder what the link between the Beatles, blends and blogs is. The answer is quite simple – it’s the blends that pop lyrics and blogs contain; blends that are a result of “one’s thought [which] is going ahead at a 1,000 miles per hour and one’s grammar [which]is trying to keep up” (David Crystal)

Then came Jim Scrivener’s *How to ‘demand high’*, followed by Jeremy Harmer’s *Does music practice tell us anything about practicing language?*. Exhibition. Lunch. And then back to the halls for more presentations. Coffee break. Luke Prodromou and his approach to dealing with difficult learners. And after that Penny Ur and her talk *Technology in ELT: to be used cautiously critically and selectively*. Another cup of coffee to recharge my batteries and prepare for the evening events.

Needless to say the evening events were as interesting as the talks and workshops during the day. Unfortunately, as one can’t attend more than one (due to time and space constraints) I had to choose carefully. And to tell you the truth, I’d made an excellent choice. The first evening it was the “Extensive Reading Foundation Reception and Awards Ceremony” which was hosted by Jeremy Harmer. A brilliantly organized evening which not only gave the audience a chance to listen to classical music and get acquainted with the authors of the books awarded. It also

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1. Interview with David Crystal - [http://iatefl.britishcouncil.org/2013/sessions/2013-04-09/interview-david-crystal](http://iatefl.britishcouncil.org/2013/sessions/2013-04-09/interview-david-crystal)
provided an opportunity to reassure oneself that a woman is esteemed accomplished not only when she possesses thorough knowledge of modern languages, but also when “in the improvement of her mind” she uses “extensive reading” (Pride and Prejudice, Ch. 8).

And it was already Wednesday. Deniz Kurtoglu Eken’s plenary. Then Adrian Underhill’s session that I could not attend as it was full. Exhibition. Lunch. The speaker’s quiet room. And my presentation – Teacher training essentials: how to manage children effectively. It was attended by a dozen of cooperative English language teachers who provided a variety of ideas on how to help teacher trainees to apply the presented practical strategies and techniques for managing classes of young learners in a positive and motivating way. And then another evening of fun and entertainment – “The IATEFL Open Mic Night”. After seeing the musical talent of Adrian Underhill, Chaz Pugilese, Nick Peachey, Jeremy Harmer and many others, I could definitely say that English and music practice go hand in hand!

Thursday. The last day of the conference for me. More talks and workshops. Talking to the person on the left, to the person on the right, working in groups ... laughing ... and a little bit tired of all the information received over the last three days. And then it was Zarina Markova’s presentation Multiple intelligences reconsidered. A lovely talk intertwining theoretical implication of Gardner’s theory and useful examples of a one-year study carried by her in two Bulgarian primary schools.

Friday. A bit of rain. Choosing to go back from the wrong railway station. London. A huge crowd in the underground. A line closed because of an accident. Finding an alternative route to the airport. And finally on the plane! On board with a huge crowd of Romanian teenagers overexcited of their trip to the UK ... Home, sweet home!

Now when I think back of the conference I can say that it was a memorable experience. Thank you BETA and British Council Bulgaria for making it part of my personal and professional life! And a piece of advice to ELT colleagues – if I can add a line to what the Beatles sing “Live and let die”, but attend an IATEFL conference! It’s worth every single minute!
More than a month has passed since the 47th Annual International IATEFL Conference and Exhibition in Liverpool. Quite naturally, it has been blogged about extensively in the ELT world and I am fully aware that one more attempt at writing a post-conference report could be superfluous. It would be difficult to say something new about the impressive selection of presentations, about the professional organization, about the rich book exhibition. Neither would I be able to express in words the uniqueness of feeling part of the multitude of cultures, languages, attitudes you inevitably submerge yourself in at such an event. Instead, I am going to touch upon the sessions which are still imprinted in my memory, one month after the conference.

To start with, Technology in ELT: to be used cautiously, critically and selectively, a talk by Penny Ur. She looked at the use of computerized tools in foreign language learning in the light of recent research findings and discussed procedures for the implementation of technology-based activities in the learning process. Penny’s ideas were not new, perhaps, but her focus on the ‘cautious, critical and selective’ role of the language teacher was in tune with my own attitude when it comes to technology (and not only!) – what is important is not what you use or do, but why and how you do it.
Does music practice tell us anything about practising language by Jeremy Harmer, examined recent research into musical success and challenged the myth of ‘Practice makes perfect’ (A version of the talk can be seen here http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsWdz0dixgQ). The bottom line in his presentation was, quite naturally, effective practice was not a matter of time, but a matter of concentration. Jeremy Harmer is extremely good at addressing issues connected with music and language learning and this talk was not an exception, but there was another explanation it resonated with me. While the inevitable implications for foreign language learning were being made, I could not help thinking about the write-each-new-word-twenty-times homework, still in vogue in lots of our schools.

Another 20-minute talk, which was focused on the essential factors in early language learning and was part of the YLT Forum on *Principles, parameters and practicalities of early years language education*. In it Sophie Ioannou-Georgiou described a large-scale, national project in Cyprus and discussed issues such as teacher training, stakeholder attitudes and educational materials which their Ministry of Education and Culture addressed in order to set a strong foundation for an early English language learning programme.

A talk-workshop by Brian Tomlison, *Let the teacher speak*, in which he warned against the dangers of reducing TTT (Teacher Talking Time) and suggested minimizing Teacher Teaching Time instead. He presented ways in which learners can benefit from teacher talk: making use of teacher performance, responsive teaching, teacher chat and teacher intermingling.

Two workshops on using language creatively, both informative and enjoyable: *Poetry Moments – ten mini adventures into language, voice and culture*, where Judy Blake explored the teaching resources available at the Poetry Archive website (http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/home.do) and demonstrated a few activities starting with a poem; and *Using sound as a creative stimulus for language learning*, a workshop by Luke Vyner, with wonderful practical ideas of how to use the evocative potential of soundscapes (layers of sound) in the language classroom.

Last but not least, another workshop, *Teacher training essentials: how to manage children successfully*, by my colleague and official BETA representative Tsvetelina Harakchiyska, who presented technology-based techniques for managing young
learners in a positive, motivating way. A lively, stimulating session, with lots of teacher-friendly ideas and a very friendly atmosphere. Congratulations, Tsveti!

Two evening events: the *Extensive Reading Foundation Reception and Award Ceremony*, hosted by Jeremy Harmer, who read captivating extracts from the awarded graded readers; and the *IATEFL Open Mic Night*, which proved to be a wonderful way to relax with the universal language of music.

With such a wealth of presentations and events, situations in which I had to make choices were inevitable. Fortunately, sessions such as the signature events are still available at Liverpool Online http://iatefl.britishcouncil.org/2013/sessions/index. Unfortunately, others are not. Which brings me to the conclusion that I still have to work on my prediction skills.

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I would like to thank BETA for the grant of 200 BGN towards attending IATEFL Liverpool.

*In front of the John Lennon Peace Monument*
Ayshe Alimustafa is a senior teacher of English at the Vasil Levski Primary School in Yurukovo (in the Blagoevgrad Region). She has been involved in a number of international school projects under the Comenius programme and under the programmes of the Academy of Central European Schools (ACES). She has recently completed the "Creative Activities and Motivating Materials for the Secondary Classroom" teacher training course and she is sharing our experience from it.

My dream come true!

"A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality"

(John Lennon)

The idea arose during one of my many participation in organized the program "Lifelong Learning" by HRDC Information Days.

I have witnessed presentations of good teaching experience from my colleagues who had already attended such a course. Here I will mention, with gratitude, the name of Mrs. Milena Karaangova who can encourage and give the exact advice to everyone. She showed me the way how every teacher can succeed in his desire to grow and improve and be useful to his own, as well as to the school, where he works, even it is small like ours. I started developing projects "Comenius" to other European organizations, conducted a training seminar on eTwining on school grounds with HRDC. Meanwhile I looked for competitions and projects in which I could include my school and students and at the same time I was making tentative attempts to join the individual qualifications. It was important for me that I received support from my colleague - Tsvetelena Taralova from School No 88 in Sofia, who had experience in similar activities both the UK and the USA. We met at an eco-camp in Koprivshtitsa where we won our contest "Generations, hand in hand." My efforts were not in vain – in September 2012 I was very pleasantly surprised by the HRDC’s notification letter through which they greeted me.
and informed me that I would be able to join the course of the International Study Program.

The long awaited day came on 5th March 2013. I found myself at "Victoria Station" in London from where I had to take a train to Maid Stone – the place of our training. My excitement and that of Elena and of Gergana (the other participants from Bulgaria) was mingled with admiration of what we saw and with some inner fear. Everyone was asking herself: Will I be able to manage with all the tasks?, What will I learn?, etc.

To our greatest joy our expectations were satisfied. The program of the course was well structured and perfectly matched the description of the "Creative Activities and Motivating Materials for the Secondary Classroom" course.

Our training began with a lecture for the education system in the UK, which introduced us to the curriculum, organization and types of schools we would visit.

From the very first day we "faced" extremely polite and very emotional Englishmen, using words of politeness all the time: Pardon, Sorry, Excuse me and Thank you!

The local coordinator – Ms. Rita Dalton greeted us and introduced the activities for the next two weeks. We could see what the role of the teacher is in the educational process, its duties and responsibilities; as well we were able to see exactly how this system works.

Our visit to a private school gave us the opportunity to peep into every corner of the school, which was not only the desired area by students, but in my eyes – it was a real home for the students.

The lessons in a foreign language, English literature, music, fine arts and information technology were very informal. We could see the use of innovative methods and forms of work such as the use of ICT, group methods, teamwork, creative thinking techniques, brainstorming, discussion and creative writing, painting model and many more techniques that led to achieving new knowledge.

Also very important for me was to figure out the ways and criteria for evaluation of students. The public school differed in several aspects from the private school, but the organization, procedures and responsibilities could be seen at every level.

During our stay in the school we had several meetings with the governing bodies, with colleagues, and shared educational experiences.
The facilities and opportunities, provided for both – students and teachers, were more than perfect.

The workshops were very well-structured and all teachers had the opportunity to work individually, in a team, and in a group.

The materials used during the course included videos, presentations, texts and more interesting – language models. One of the training days was provided for advanced language practice in English. It was then when we were introduced to a variety of contemporary linguistic models.

Apart from the training sessions, our program included educational trips to London, Canterbury, Tunbridge Wells, Rye and Kent Villages during which we familiarized with historical and cultural sites and places of interest. For me it was like going back in time. Innovations were not able to spoil the atmosphere, steeped in the grandeur of kings and aristocracy. And on our walk on the streets of Canterbury seem I had the feeling that we could meet Oliver Twist or some representative of the Tudors. But the feeling to suddenly see yourself near to Tower Bridge, to be able to go to Big Ben and to the majestic London Eye by boat were inevitably worth the experience.

After I returned home from the UK, I promptly drafted a program for input and best practices to deliver to the school staff and ELT colleagues from the region. Through a multimedia presentation I presented to my colleagues the specific features of the British education system, I made a comparison between private and public schools, aspects of daily life and cultural practices in the UK. I presented the authentic materials I brought from the course to my colleagues in English. I plan to share some of them with the Regional Inspectorate of Education in Blagoevgrad so that a wide range of ELT professionals will be able to apply them in their educational contexts.

Very interesting to me was how to use the acquired knowledge with my students. I began to use activities that require teamwork, work on specific topics; I also use some new methods and approaches to enhance students’ motivation for learning as well as activities to expand their knowledge of other cultures and communities. To develop their language competence and communication skills I use the interesting ideas that were presented during the workshops and which were skillfully developed by our competent tutors. I prepared a presentation to show the students some of the cultural and historical sites I visited. I am also going to do a video lesson in which I will apply some of the methods and techniques I’ve learned.
and share it with colleagues through Facebook.

I do not know the exact number of participants in individual training activities under the Comenius programme, but I am sure that they all share my view about it. It gives an opportunity to expand the worldview of each teacher, to achieve professional goals, to check his / her own knowledge and to get to know other European practices.

My participation in the course affected me in several ways. It:

- Improved my English language competence;
- provided a wide range of methods and techniques to apply in my work;
- encouraged me and showed me how to use ICT in English classes;
- enriched my knowledge of the UK;
- motivated me to participate in similar activities, and I think it will affect my career development;
- gave me a chance to make new contacts with colleagues from other European countries that can develop into "Comenius" and eTwinning partnerships.
- allowed me to appreciate the diversity of languages, nationalities, cultures and religions brought by the participants.

I am convinced that my experience and emotions will influence those ELT professionals who are still hesitant to engage in similar types of activities and training.

I believe that you will confirm that HRDC provides equal access and opportunity for all, and we just have to make an effort to earn them. Thank you for fulfilling my dream!

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Some moments from the International Study Programme Course

The Advanced English Course

The lecture on the British educational system

Homewood School – Comment and Sharing of Experience

Some of the amazing Kent villages
eTwinning in Favour of English Language Teaching

Tsvetelena Taralova

Tsvetelena Taralova has been a secondary school teacher and Comenius project school coordinator for 8 years. In 2004 and 2007 she completed teacher training courses in Dublin and London, and in 2011 she participated in the Teaching Excellence and Achievement program in the USA. She is interested in ICT teaching and have coordinated 5 eTwinning projects. Also, she has authored several online articles on implementing computers in ELT. At present she works as the Head of the Foreign language department at school No 88 in Sofia. E-mail: ts_taralova@abv.bg

The eTwinning Professional Development Conference, part of The Lifelong Learning Program of the European Union, entitled Good Pedagogical Practices for Development of Key Competences was organised by The Human Resource Development Centre (HRDC), Bulgaria. It was held at the Sheraton Hotel – Sofia from 25th to 28th April 2013.

eTwinning is an initiative of the European Commission to encourage school partnerships in Europe using many forms of communication technology. It is a platform and an interactive site. What is more, it provides free support for the teacher at all levels.

Some months ago the eTwinning National Support Service team in Bulgaria invited me to run a workshop at the event and present good teaching practices in ELT. The aim of the session was to demonstrate how eTwinning projects can be stepping stones for further teacher's development. The focus was to present ideas that work well in the classroom and can be used for:

For the full presentation, please visit: https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B_pletB_SijUczM4SUlRV2NUVDA/edit?usp=sharing

Meeting Ms Aishe Bangiova at the conference
• students’ motivation and improvement of their life skills;
• understanding other cultures;
• teaching English though technology;
• dealing with multiple Intelligences in the classroom,
• step by step professional development with eTwinning;
• implementation of eTwinning projects into the curriculum;
• using eTwinning as part of the USPEH project, School for self-improvement and European perspectives financed by the European Union.

I could attend two more sessions at the conference. In the first, Mr Yassen Spasov presented contemporary online tools for successful partnership projects, which can be used in ELT, such as:
• file sharing with Google Drive (I use it myself) and Dropbox;
• image sharing with Flicker and Picasa;
• video sharing with YouTube and Vimeo;
• online presentation with SlideRocket and Prezi;
• wordclouds with Wordle and WordItOut;
• other with ABCya! and Kaywa QR Code.
In the second Ms Eleonora Chepisheva demonstrated the new interactive site http://uche.se with useful lessons for many school subjects at primary, secondary and high school levels.

Finally, I would like to thank Ms Milena Karaangova - head of Information Unit at HRDC and Mr Yassen Spasov - eTwining National Support Service Bulgaria for the opportunity to be part of this creative and hardworking European team.
Exploring *Dobry*: A Prize-Winning American Children’s Novel about a Teenage Artist Growing Up in a Village on the Yantra a Century Ago

Bill Templer

Bill Templer is a Chicago-born educator with research interests in English as a lingua franca, critical pedagogy, Extensive Reading methodologies. He has taught in the U.S., Ireland, Germany, Israel/Palestine, Bulgaria (including VTU, 1991-1993, Shumen Univ., 1992-2002), Iran, Nepal, Thailand, Laos and Malaysia. Bill is on the staff of the IATEFL SIG Global Issues (http://goo.gl/sWZMs). He is chief translator at the Simon Dubnow Institute for Jewish History and Culture, Univ. of Leipzig (www.dubnow.de), and is regional senior editor (Eastern Europe) at the *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* (www.jceps.com). Bill is based as an independent researcher in Shumen, Bulgaria. Email: bill_templer@yahoo.com

Introducing *Dobry*

As I have recently suggested (Templer, 2013a), it is important to inventively ‘indigenize’ the English syllabus in Bulgarian schools where possible, using more materials specifically related to Bulgaria. Learners from the earliest levels need materials dealing with their own culture, reflecting Bulgarian lived realities past and present, and aspects of Bulgarian history, folk life and folklore traditions, holidays in the rhythms of the natural year, politics, attitudes toward ethnic minorities here and much more.
It is also important to include more fiction for children and young adults. Kaplan (2005: 12) notes: “the trope that all young adult literature has in common is the search for identity.” Young people’s fiction offers simpler authentic language, and generally focuses on themes like the construction of selfhood and finding oneself, young love, relations with family and neighbors, teachers at school, the dreams and frustrations of becoming an adult (Keong, 2006). Bulgarian students today in particular – the often bewildered and alienated “children of the transition,” growing up in the turmoil over the past 23 years – ponder many questions in their own lives about their identity, their personal future and that of this beleaguered country. Lee (2012) develops some similar analysis looking at children’s literature as a tool for self-reflection, and Marshall (2011) explores some American children’s books that deal with equality and economic and social justice.

I wish here to briefly introduce such a text for experimentation in EFL classes in Bulgaria from lower-intermediate level and beyond, a book still virtually unknown among English teachers here. Dobry (New York: Viking, 1934, pp. 176) is an extraordinary prize-winning American children’s novel about a young teen, a farm boy growing up in a village on the Yantra near Turnovo, with dreams of becoming a painter and sculptor (http://goo.gl/AvyC6). It is the first novel in American young people’s fiction set in Bulgaria (and perhaps juvenile fiction in English anywhere). Dobry was co-written by Monica Shannon (ca. 1890-1965), a well-known children’s writer in California, and the Lyaskovets-born émigré artist Atanas Kachamakov (1898-1982), perhaps the most renowned Bulgarian sculptor in the U.S. from 1924 until the 1970s. In earlier years, Atanas and his artist-wife Alexandra Katchamakoff (so the U.S. spelling of their name) founded the Palm Springs Art School and Atanas worked on Hollywood film sets as a sculptor and set designer. One of his many woodcuts (“The Lovers”) can be seen here: (http://goo.gl/lCqQ5). Atanas died in Lyaskovets after his return to Bulgaria in 1979 (http://goo.gl/sq1qo).

I will briefly suggest a few ways for creatively utilizing this highly poetic novel in the Bulgarian EFL classroom. A conference paper in Turnovo (Templer, 2013b) develops the analysis at greater length.
The novel is richly illustrated by Kachamakov, and was awarded the prestigious Newbery Medal for the “most distinguished contribution to American literature for children” in 1935 (http://goo.gl/Eacs3), a very unique distinction. It deals with the life, dreams and aspirations of Dobry at age 13 and then again when he reaches 18, as he grows up and matures to a young adult in a village on the Yantra. He is a typical farming boy with an extraordinary love for nature, and early on discovers his budding talent in drawing and sculpting. Against his mother Roda’s wishes, he dreams of becoming an artist, and is encouraged in this by his very wise mentor, his grandfather, who plays a central role in the tale. His grandfather is a source of many traditional stories, such as the legend of the ispolini giants (http://goo.gl/gbgvR), and numerous gems of village wisdom.

The story recounts his daily round on his mother’s wheat farm and remarkable process of self-discovery, Dobry’s burgeoning sense of wonder and aesthetic sensibility, with strikingly detailed descriptions of the Bulgarian village folk life world, agricultural work and rural customs a century ago.

Shannon is also known for her California Fairy Tales (1926) and More Tales from California (1935), with beautiful descriptions of nature. Dobry was reprinted 15 times (!) down to 1967, and many used copies are available via abebooks.com. The novel was recently rediscovered in Pernik and translated into Bulgarian (http://goo.gl/VNYrS), although as yet still not published. Here a good overview: (http://goo.gl/Eacs3).

In large part, the story is based on Kachamakov’s own experiences growing up in Lyaskovets (10 km from Veliko Turnovo) precisely a century ago (http://goo.gl/6Xdvr), where his father Simo had the only farmstead directly inside the town (Katchamakoff, 1965: 55), a semi-autobiographical novel grounded on narratives...
the sculptor Atanas shared with his friend Monica Shannon (Nikolova, 2011) – in a certain Bulgarian sense, “a village portrait of the artist as a young man.” As a child, Monica developed a special interest in and love for Bulgaria on her father’s cattle ranch in Bitterroot Valley in southwestern Montana. She notes: “Bulgarian immigrants worked on the ranch and used to come singing across the fields at sunset time bringing us buttermilk” (Kunitz & Haycraft, 1951: 272). A short biography of Shannon is here: http://goo.gl/HDKol.

It is surprising that Dobry is still largely unknown among teachers of English in Bulgaria. The novel should appeal to Bulgarian learners at intermediate level and can be experimentally incorporated into English teaching syllabi (level B1 and above) and university courses in translation, American literature and the history and pedagogy of children’s literature, along with encouraging a range of research on student response to this very Bulgarian tale. The novel can also be viewed as part of what Ludmilla Kostova has termed “tales of the periphery” (1997), one example of the historically conditioned “imaging” of Bulgarian village folk life in the Western narratives of the East European Other, in this case young people’s fiction – a special juvenile genre in Anglo-American literature and its “poetics of space” where Bulgaria has rarely been portrayed (on such literary “imaging” of Europe’s East, see also Crudu & Kostova, forthcoming; Korte et al., 2010). I know of only one other children’s story published in the U.S. and set in Bulgaria, My Name was Hussein (2004 http://goo.gl/WAKck), by Rom linguist Hristo Kyuchukov. It is also semi-autobiographical, about a Rom Muslim boy growing up in eastern Bulgaria in the turbulent 1980s. Hristo’s tale could also be used in the EFL classroom here, focusing thematically on the “Revival Process” (1984-85), the enforced “name-changing” for Bulgarian Muslims and the serious repercussions.


Atanas made in later years for Dobry. Obtainable from the Foundation, this book should be used together with the novel for added artistic material, detailing the round of village life, the production of wheat and the baking of bread, along with an introduction and commentary in Bulgarian. It has served as a guidebook for several Kachamakov exhibitions in Bulgaria, recently in Samokov in May 2012.
Numerous reviews of *Dobry* by U.S. are available here [http://goo.gl/qX2Qi](http://goo.gl/qX2Qi). Below I sketch four key focal points for how teaching the novel. There are many more questions students can explore. Empirical research on student response to this very Bulgarian narrative could be quite fascinating. Try to get your own copy of *Dobry*, introduce to students, other teachers, and see how they respond. Perhaps you could collaborate on some classroom reader response research with me or other teachers.

**Teaching Dobry: four pedagogical focal points**

**Indigenizing the syllabus**

Thesis one: it is important to inventively ‘naturalize’ the English syllabus in Bulgarian schools where possible, using more materials specifically related to Bulgaria. Learners from the earliest levels need materials dealing with their own culture, reflecting Bulgarian lived realities past and present, and aspects of Bulgarian past and folk life and folklore traditions, holidays in the rhythms of the natural year. The novel *Dobry* connects with village worlds the students will in part know, and now in serious collapse and depopulation. Recent figures show village population here has now dropped to under 2 million, its lowest relative level in Bulgarian history.

Significantly and worth student discussion, the villagers rarely deal with money anywhere in the novel. This as a life world based on self-sufficiency, sustainability, barter, very strong community ties and a “moral economy’ of shared non-mechanized manual labor using buffalo on the land. People engage in red pepper stringing communally (34-35), shared labor harvesting wheat, bring wheat to the mill town for grinding (53-55), baking huge quantities of the basic staple bread (20, 74), simple pleasures & much more.

Along with many folk customs and powerful traditions described in the novel, such as New Year’s “surva, surva” (151), toward the novel’s end (166-169), Dobry dives into the Yantra to retrieve the golden cross on Ivanovden, January 7th, the Feast of John the Baptist, a popular custom still practiced down to today [http://goo.gl/uwLvq](http://goo.gl/uwLvq), though more commonly on Epiphany (Yordanovden) January 6th [http://goo.gl/o5D5r](http://goo.gl/o5D5r). Dobry plans this and is determined to retrieve the cross so he can gain some coins as a reward from the neighbors and thus find cash to
begin to study art in Sofia. That night all the villagers celebrate his dive, dancing the *rachanitza*, and praising his courage (167-69). In a unique anthropological field study, Creed (2011) raises key questions regarding the renewed post-socialist attachment to archaic Bulgarian village traditions.

Importantly, the novel contains a tale narrated by Dobry’s grandfather (pp. 60-66), the “Story of Hadutzi-Dare,” which is an adaptation in English (perhaps the first in this form) of revolutionary and poet Nikola Kozlev’s (1824-1902) famous poem “Черен арап и хайдут Сидер” (1868), about a brave haiduk in battle with the supernaturally powerful “Black Arab” terrorizing the countryside and Bulgarian villagers under Ottoman rule ([http://goo.gl/bNtob](http://goo.gl/bNtob)). Kozlev was born in Lyaskovets, taught there in the 1850s and again in the late ‘70s, and was one of the revolutionaries active around Veliko Turnovo directly allied with Vasil Levski from 1869. Kozlev died in Lyaskovets in 1902, and an elementary school named after him was opened in 1904 and still exists at Ulitsa Nikola Kozlev 76. In any case, as a boy Atanas certainly knew the work of Lyaskovets’ most famous revolutionary, still alive when he was born.

Students can compare this English version told as an oral folk tale with Kozlev’s original ([http://goo.gl/gwbl3](http://goo.gl/gwbl3)). In the novel’s final scene, Dobry is determined to be strong and fearless like Hadutzi-Dare, echoing his grandfather’s tale: “Mountains cannot say No to me. Rivers stop to let me pass, valleys are my servants” (175). Grandfather tells a number of other short folktales interspersed in the novel, some of which students will recognize, such as the Bulgarian tale of the creation of man, after God had experimented with giants and dwarfs (pp. 24-26), a tale based on Bulgarian legends of the “*ispolini*” ([http://goo.gl/gbgvR](http://goo.gl/gbgvR)), another about the “two animals Noah forgot” (157-162). Neda, Dobry’s young sweetheart, says his granddad "is as full of stories as a pine tree is full of cones" (104).

**Honing the social and multicultural imagination**

The novel is well suited to explore multicultural elements and memes such as “encounter with the Other,” a recurrent theme in *Dobry*. *Dobry* can be used to hone fundamental respect for the diversity of human beings and the natural world in a very Balkan frame. The “imaging of the Roma” in the novel is quite extraordinary. Children’s fiction is well suited to explore multicultural elements and memes such as “encounter with the Other” (Sivapalan, 2006), a recurrent theme in *Dobry*. Intriguing
is the major role that itinerant Roma play in the village’s life and their festivities, and the huge respect the villagers (and Dobry) have for the Roma, especially as copper artisans and mechkari, coming with a large ‘healing bear’ to massage the backs of the village men, a highpoint in the fall and spring (Fig. 5). The Roma also aid the villagers in special rituals to bring the rain for the wheat (Fig. 2). Dobry respects Bekir, the itinerant Rom copper pot artisan; when he comes, he orders his helpers “Dobry and Neda about as if he were the Prince of Copperland” (50). One of his key adult models as an artist and artisan is Maestro Kolu, an itinerant Macedonian who crafts the jamal tile stoves common in the village, and still found around the Turnovo oblast (see http://goo.gl/p7BhZ).

Dobry’s closest friend his age is Asan, the Muslim village shepherd and flute player, and Dobry later replaces Asan to do the shepherd’s job and be more free up in the hills over the river. It is a strong friendship across ethnic boundaries that are apparently not even felt in the powerful solidarity and community among neighbors in the village. Semo the schoolteacher is also a kind of ‘outsider’ in the village, “a young man from Sofia” (39): how is he “different,” and what perspectives does he bring to bear? What does Dobry learn from him about the world outside, especially in the capital Sofia?

Roma songs are popular in the village, the lyrics of two are given in full in the novel, and Dobry likes to sing a number of them, especially one called “Na lay,” about enjoying life and living each moment with intensity. The expression “na lay” is often used by characters in the novel, an interjection meaning “enjoy the present moment” as they use it. Roma linguists I have consulted are not familiar with this song and interjection, which needs research. Perhaps some students or teachers near Turnovo know such a song. After the spring arrival of the Roma with their massaging bear and the singing of a Gypsy song “Poor Borianna” (also not known to Romanes scholars I have contacted), Dobry and his girlfriend Neda find the bear to feed him home-baked bread. The scene ends as Dobry turns toward the bear:

_He must be a very happy bear—always outdoors with gypsies, going somewhere.” The old woman smiled again and nodded her head. “Listen!” she said. The fiddles are beginning to play, ‘Na lay.’ Dancing will start before long.” Every gypsy, every peasant in the village square took up the song; their world rocked with it. Stars pointing from the autumn sky might have been silver trumpets playing ‘Na lay’ from above: “only now this moment lives” 95._
The novel can serve as a springboard to discuss with students the situation of Roma in rural central Bulgaria as “imaged” here ca. 1900, contrasted with today. What are popular attitudes toward Roma today as students and their friends and families view this, and the whole question of the past and current “encounter with the Other” in Bulgarian society?. One might also compare stories by Elin Pelin (1965) where Roma are often portrayed. They can also discuss how they view their fellow ethnic Turkish Bulgarians and how they perceive the centuries of oppressive Turkish rule, as mentioned in Dobry (39) and foregrounded in the story of “Hadutzi-Dare” (60-66).

Nurturing a sense of wonder

Over 176 pages, Dobry describes in lyrical detail how the protagonist’s imagination develops as he encounters the phenomena of nature around him, schooling what becomes his young artist’s eye. Author and environmental activist Rachel Carson, in her remarkable last book The Sense of Wonder (1965), writes:

*If I had influence with a good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantment of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength (54).*

She continues: “If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder without any such gift from the fairies, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in.” Dobry’s granddad is just such an adult. In a core existential-phenomenological sense, I would argue that the novel Dobry is about the nurturing of that sense of
wonder in its main character, described in almost phenomenological detail & depth. The novel traces the development in the teen Dobry of what existential phenomenologist Max van Manen (2007) calls a “phenomenology of practice” that “grasps the world pathically.” The novel is also in many ways a chronicle of the development of a boy’s “ecological literacy,” a major focus today in environmentally sensitive pedagogies (see also 2.4 below). A sense of wonder is the driving armature of the ecological and phenomenological sensibility and “pathic knowing” we should be nurturing in students, across the curriculum, within the context of “place-based education” (Ormond, 2013).

Rachel Carson reminds us (1965/1998: 76): “Some of nature’s most exquisite handiwork is one a miniature scale, as anyone knows who has applied a magnifying glass to a snowflake” The first scene in *Dobry* is about the young boy learning to see, guided by his grandpa, that every snowflake is different, a pithy lesson in the diversity of phenomena. This sense of nature is highlighted at the novel’s beginning:

*Dobry* asked him, “And why aren’t the snowflakes alike, Grandfather? Different, each one different?” ”The grandfather said, “Everything is different, each leaf if you really look. There is no leaf exactly like that one in the whole world. Every stone is different. No other stone exactly like it. That is it, Dobry. God loves variety.” [...] “God makes better icons than those in church. He makes a beautiful thing and nothing else in the whole world is exactly like it. That is it, Dobry. [...] No two things are exactly alike. In odd days like these [...] people study how to be all alike instead of how to be as different as they really are” (7).

That is the very beginning of Dobry’s aesthetic education, as is his love for Maestro Kolu’s masterpiece *jamal* in the family home. Yet Dobry also develops a pan-cosmic consciousness: “Everything is one,” he thought. All the same thing—earth, everything – One. And I’m a part of it all” (175). Carson speaks (92) about watching “bird migrants,” listening to their voices in wonder. The mass migration of storks, signaling the coming of winter and return of spring, is a major motif in the novel *Dobry*, introduced in a striking scene (29-30), also with an illustration by Kachamakov (see Fig. 3), and forming the final scene, as Dobry waits in anticipation for the belated spring arrival of the storks:

*He lay there until day turned, drawing up strength from the earth. A whirring, rattling noise startled him. Dobry jumped up, threw his cap to the sky. All the village storks—the mayor’s stork, the blacksmith’s storks, the coppersmith’s storks that belonged in Neda’s courtyard, his own storks, circled the forest sky and headed down for the village (175).*
One of Dobry’s first drawings is of a stork, which his grandpa praises: “Ho! It makes me want to fly. It makes me want to grow wings, lift them up, go away whenever I want to go” (74). The artistic highpoint of Dobry’s development is when he sculptures the Nativity in snow and ice at Christmas time in his courtyard, next to the towering poplar tree his now deceased father planted the day Dobry was born, a singular work of winter art admired by all the astounded villagers (145-148). Carson closes her book: “The lasting pleasures of contact with the natural world are not reserved for scientists but are available to anyone who will place himself under the influence of earth, sea and sky and their amazing life” (106).

**Contrasting then and now in a critical light**

The highly idyllic picture of Bulgarian farm life and community a century ago can be compared and contrasted in many ways with Bulgarian students’ far more complicated and stressful living present, their perceptions of Bulgarian history, society, the nature of village life and much more.

One focus can be on farming and the villages, which many students may know from their own families, grandparents, observations wherever they live. Dobry’s village is a highly productive agrarian world. A recent article (MacDowall, 2013) notes that

*Bulgaria’s cattle herd has halved since the fall of communism, from 632,359 in 1989 to 314,900 last year [...] The drop is a symptom of the decline in agriculture and the depopulation of parts of the countryside as the economy has gone through a troubled transition. [...] One result of the break-up of communist-era collective farms in the 1990s is the current fragmented state of landholdings. [...] many small farmers continue to struggle – and low levels of absorption of that EU cash continue to hamper recovery.*

What are student perceptions, how could this be improved? They can read the article and discuss against the backdrop of Dobry and their own experience in this country. Students will be well aware of the unprecedented depopulation in all villages and many cities across Bulgaria ([http://goo.gl/wOdjQ](http://goo.gl/wOdjQ)), and the exodus of many of the young.
‘Back to the future’: life in a ‘power-downed world’?

Another related more profound focus is how lives have changed under the impact of industrialism, and how different life was a century ago across most of largely agricultural Bulgaria. Perhaps we are now heading for a “post-carbon future” without cheap energy that will change life for much of humankind, and in another 50 years, some experts think, we may be living more like the villagers in Dobry, moving forward to a rediscovered locally centered more sustainable and “ecological,” self-sufficient, low-energy and more radically democratic economy (see http://www.postcarbon.org).

The Transition Towns movement (http://www.transitionnetwork.org) is about taking innovative steps to create a more locally-based life style, reducing dependence on oil, expanding local agriculture, revitalizing of local community, and much more. To counter the commodification of our lives, where nearly everything -- whether it is a material good or an activity -- is turned by industrial capitalism into a commodity to be bought and sold (Leys & Harriss-White, 2012), very different from the life world in Dobry, where there are almost no “commodities,” Watch this video “What is Transition all about?” (http://bit.ly/HNBaaK). One speaker says: “We’re gonna have to change just about every aspect of life, just about every system that we depend on for our lives. For everything from food to clothing to transport, just about everything.” See this more detailed fascinating video with Rob Hopkins, a key activist in Transition Towns based in Totnes/Devon in the UK (http://goo.gl/xermt), talking about “creating a road map of how it should be” in a very different kind of future economy. Show and discuss these videos with your students, also projected against the backdrop of the idyllic village life world in Dobry. High-energy industrial capitalism today is in deep trouble not only in Bulgaria but across the planet. As Hopkins ends his wide-ranging interview about a future “power-downed world,” he quotes Arundhati Roy: “Another world is not only possible, she’s on her way. On a quiet day I can hear her breathing.”

In a similar but more radical ecosocialist vein, Climate Space (2013) has recently called for supporting “a just transition for workers and communities away from the extreme energy economy and into resilient local economies based on social, economic and environmental justice.” Students can also read and discuss the views of Climate Space against the phenomenal and social world of Dobry. In some ways Transition Towns and ecosocialism are about an oxymoron in human progress: a
radically inventive “back to the future” if we are to survive in a more sustainable & simpler economy and radical democracy.

In sum

This remarkable novel, beautiful in style and compelling in its descriptions, generates much to appreciate and discuss. Students can develop a kind of existential reader-response approach, perhaps along phenomenological lines (Howard, 2010), relating the book to their own identity, their own family and locality. Does the book contain what may be stereotypes of the ‘romanticized’ imaging of a friendly and happy Bulgarian village anno 1900 – with no poverty, no hunger, no Bulgarian yad, no theft, no xenophobia against Roma? Of course, it is young people’s fiction, projecting specific values. Perhaps in the earlier attraction of the novel for American readers there is a certain appeal smacking of ‘Orientalism’ or ‘Balkanism’ (Todorova, 1997) and the stereotyped exotic of an old-style Bulgarian village.

Do the students have a special person as mentor in their life? How do they experience nature? How do they see the great changes in Bulgaria over the past century, including the socialist period? What do your students want to do with their own lives, here or perhaps as emigrants abroad? What do they admire in Dobry’s character and that of his grandfather? How else does the text speak to them personally? How, as mentioned, do they see the Roma, so central to Dobry, and the way Roma are imaged in the story, in close friendly interaction with the villagers? What do students here think that younger Americans and others reading this novel can learn about Bulgaria a century ago that is still real & relevant today? Creed (2011) thinks there is much valuable today in archaic still vital Bulgarian traditions, such as masquerade rituals (kukeri / survakari). How do learners see the work of artist Atanas Kachamakov, probably little known to them (or indeed most Bulgarians)?

References


/NB: all URLs here accessed 30 April 2013/
24th MAY – The day of the Bulgarian Education and Culture and Slavonic Literature Day

Dear colleagues,

The bright holiday not only combines tradition and modernity, but it also makes us strong believers in the future of the Bulgarian people, as it gives us the opportunity to reconsider our responsibility as educators, as people who spread knowledge and awaken national pride!
Dear Moodlers,

♠ Shall we go to the theatre? How about Lisbon with Joao Carlos Alves and his students, who are preparing for a theatre festival. Join Joao on his SEETA blog 'Drama Projects for students' and follow his theatre journey, 20-24 May 2013.

♠ So now you’re thinking of setting a school performance with your students: Read the SEETA article 'Educational Theatre' by Metaxeni Symeonidou and find out how you'll go about it!

♠ Our online course for May is 'e-portfolios for learner development' with Sirin Soyoz. This course is an overview of e-portfolio development. You'll get the chance to construct your own portfolio and discuss issues with Sirin in 2 live webinars during the course. Don't miss this amazing course on SEETA 27 May- 9 June.

♣ Natasa Bozic Grojic will be chatting with the SEETA Webchat team on 31st May on Self-reflection through blogging. Join the SEETA Webchat area and the community forum in the Teacher’s Lounge.

♠ A new feature starts this month: Young Learners - Tips and tricks. Steliyana Dulkova will share her magic tricks from her super magic bag! Join us and share the fun!

♣ 25 May is the International Missing Children's Day. The voluntary organisation 'The Smile of the Child' will be running an online discussion forum for educators 'Missing Children: Don't You Forget Me' 25-31 May. Join our forum and find out how we can together combat the danger of missing children. Together we can bring them home.

See you on line!

Anna Parisi
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:

- **10 August 2013** for the August - September 2013 Issue on the topic: “Learner Autonomy”.

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
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