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Editors’ Corner

Dear Reader

Welcome to the summer edition of the BETA-IATEFL E-Newsletter. In this issue we wrap up the school year 2014-2015 with a blend of articles and updates on recent developments and activities in the professional lives of English language teachers in Bulgaria and beyond.

First, in her paper, Saints and Sinners, Almina Shashko argues that teachers and students alike should not fall victims to perfection but need to embrace mistakes and imprefections as opportunities to learn and improve.

On a different note, Bill Templer draws attention on the Lives of Teachers as a Focus for Research and Sharing in Bulgarian ELT. He sees value in research initiatives which incorporate (self-)narrative inquiry in order to reveal the important relationship between “what educators do and who they are.”

Next, Albena Stefanova reports on a major event in the lives of many dedicated teachers of English in Bulgaria – the 24th BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference. Valentina Raynova, Nadezhda Tsoneva, Violeta Karastateva, and Iliyana Beikova, recepients of RELO Budapest and BETA-IATEFL grants, share their perceptions of the event and how some of the ideas discussed there can be relevant to their own teaching contexts.
In this issue, you will also find Zarina Markova’s report and personal reflections on the 13th ELTA Serbia Conference. In a similar vein, Zhivka Ilieva, Petranka Ruseva, and Ilhan Ibryam write about their participation in the Learnathon – a project conducted by IATEFL-Hungary, in cooperation with the Regional English Language Office (RELO) for Central and Southeastern Europe.

They are followed by Tanya Bikova’s interview with Virginia Evans, an ELT author and a plenary speaker at BETA-IATEFL 2015, who reveals that a vision and mission, and people who support us, is what we need “to make the impossible possible.”

And, finally, special thanks to Dr Laxman Gnawali from Kathmandu University, Nepal and NELTA, for giving us the permission to reproduce his poem, *The Pygmalions*, in our Poetry Corner.

We hope you will add the BETA-IATEFL E-Newsletter collection to your summer reading list, as a resource and inspiration for the school year ahead and in your lives as language educators.

Sylvia Velikova
Issue Editor
Teachers are not born. Before becoming teachers, teachers were students. They went through the same educational process as their friends; they sat on the same chairs and at the same desks; they took many exams. And guess what? They were not perfect. They gossiped about their teachers; they hated doing homework; they could not sleep before taking exams and sometimes even got bad grades. They did the same things that students do today.

My students are always really surprised when I tell them that I have always been bad at math and did not like studying it and that I had bad grades in math (sorry, math teachers). They are even more surprised when I tell them that my mom is a math teacher (sorry, mum). And when I ask them why they are so surprised they say that none of the teachers admit their weak sides. Their teachers pretend to be saints. That makes me think: why would they do that? Why would they hide the truth from their students and why am I the one being honest?

Almina Shashko

Almina Shashko is a Macedonian language and an English language teacher. She currently works as a Macedonian language teacher at Ibrahim Temo High School in Struga, Republic of Macedonia.

E-mail: almina_shashko@yahoo.com
Some of the reasons I can come up with are the following ones: teachers are afraid that their students will not respect them and that they are maybe too arrogant to admit their past. The main reason is that it will make them human and it will make them vulnerable. Some of the teachers do not want their students to see them as human beings, which, in my opinion, is really wrong. By revealing the human and imperfect side of yourself, you show them the hidden truth. And the truth is that anyone can become a teacher some day if they work hard. By showing them your flaws you motivate them to continue fighting. You make them think, “If she could do it, I could do it too.” Is not that the whole purpose of teaching? Is not the whole purpose of teaching to motivate our students and help them become better human beings and succeed in life? Believe it or not, even English teachers faced many challenges while studying English. Some of your teachers did not like writing essays, some of them had troubles with the present perfect, some of them did not even like their own English teacher.

All of that is normal. It is normal not to be perfect. Why? Because by not being the best, you learn new things and focus on the things that are important to you. It is normal to be a sinner. That is why, I am honest with my students. Because I would rather be an honest sinner than a fake saint!
Lives of Teachers as a Focus for Research and Sharing in Bulgarian ELT

Bill Templer

What is missing [...] are the voices of the teachers themselves. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990: 2)

All human beings have a story, even many stories, to tell about the life they are living. Everything that happens, happens in story form. (Atkinson, 1998: 22)

This article proceeds from a core thesis: there is clear need to explore the crucial links between what educators do and who they are – that is, between their work and their identities – and to do so through narrative inquiry, tapping teachers’ voices: “what matters is that teachers’ voices are heard comparatively and contextually” (Hargreaves, 1996: 17), including the voices of marginalised and disaffected teachers. Jalongo and Isenberg (1995) remind us that...
[it] is through careful examination of real-life classroom experiences – both lived one’s self and borrowed from other teachers – that teachers explore the complexities of what it means to teach. It is in the narrative mode that teachers consider daily dilemmas, examine their motives and misgivings, savor their successes, and anguish over their failures [...] The good teacher’s life is not an orderly professional pathway; rather, it is a personal journey shaped by context and choice, perspective and values. Narrative is uniquely well suited to that personal/professional odyssey (p. xvii).

**Menu**

The present article contains the following sections:

- A research agenda centering on the teacher’s voice
- A working catalogue of questions
- LOT inquiry: where to begin?
- Teachers as workers
- Exploring gendered terrain
- Countering teacher burnout and rustout
- Longitudinal studies
- Conclusion
- References
A research agenda centering on the teacher’s voice

My suggestion is that here in Bulgaria and the broader SEETA region, we need qualitative concrete exploration of the Lives of Teachers (LOT), anchored in extended “self-narratives” based on in-depth semi-structured interviews, teachers’ diaries, autobiographical sketches, and other data (Templer, 2009). Such LOT inquiry moves toward a kind of “ethnography of being a teacher”, a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of their real lives, work, and subjectivities – seen through detailed self-narratives collected from teachers as they speak about their own development, their everyday experience at work, their dreams, values, aspirations, frustrations, disappointments, conflicts, collaborations; their problems in making ends meet, teaching as a livelihood, combining work with a family and its duties, problems with superiors on the job (Ellis, 2015). The doors and windows are open to talking about anything related to work and to self, within what Barkhuizen (2013: 4-5) terms “narrative knowledging.” These voices need to be heard, listened to and acted upon. Problems in the profession and on the job should not be articulated in a whisper or submerged in what Wrigley (2006: 181) calls “the disciplinary regime: silence and inertia.” The aim of such empirical narrative inquiry and more open dialogue is to build toward a better understanding of teachers’ actual life worlds and the problems education workers face, as workers and human beings. As Hayes emphasises (2013: 62), narrative inquiry, as part of life-history research, “offers unique opportunities to understand local social practices of language teaching” and is “transformative research contributing to social justice within local communities of practice as well as the wider TESOL profession,” making more visible conditions especially for the disadvantaged in EFL teaching and learning. He underscores the potential of the teachers’ self-narratives to impact on
colleagues and others, stimulating educators to rethink and transform their own practices. Part of this is entwined with empathy. Empathy involves better learning to stand in another’s shoes and get closer to what it is like to be in their situation. It can be deepened and sharpened by listening to – and responding to – other teachers’ candid narratives. This is at the very core of what Edge (2002) sketches in his framework and practical exercises for cooperative development, including reflection on the role of empathy (pp. 28-30). To foreground teacher narratives is one step forward in generating a profession of greater equity and mutual aid. A “TEFL of inclusion” seeks to build bridges of awareness and empathy between us all. Johnston (1997) stresses:

In fact, little is known about the lives of teachers who work in this field. It is time to gather empirical data about the working lives of actual teachers and to make these lives the focus of research [...] Do the findings reflect the lives and the conditions (discursive and sociopolitical) of EFL/ESL teachers elsewhere? [...] The field must surely benefit from a deepened understanding of teachers’ lives set in the rich context in which they are lived (pp. 682, 707).

This is especially pertinent today, as across the globe ever more workers, including teachers, find themselves without job security. The International Labour Organisation has just released a report covering some 180 countries and 84 per cent of the global work force, indicating that only one in four workers has a stable job, with a huge rise in part-time work (http://goo.gl/Wud0ul).

The Lives of Teachers SIG in the American Educational Research Association states that its purpose is:
To promote the interchange of ideas and scholarly activities focused on inquiry into the lives of teachers. Teachers shall be defined as those working with students in classroom and tutorial settings, from pre-school through university. Research shall be viewed as inclusive of methods appropriate to the question of study and topics such as teacher narrative, biography, research on teacher development, including career trajectories, teacher characteristics, beliefs, and attitudes, and teaching as a profession; accounts of teachers lives in different times and in different countries; and portrayal of teachers in written literature, film and television. (http://goo.gl/Wm0zhi)

The Teachers’ Work and Lives SIG in the Australian Association for Research in Education has a largely similar focus (http://goo.gl/JNDgvp). Here in the region, we need qualitative concrete exploration of LOT. This should also include some sustained, institutionally anchored project for collecting “oral narratives” of teachers talking about their job situation, how they became who they are professionally, how this is integrated with their private lives. Such interviews can be recorded on video or electronically and stored in what could be an “oral life-history archive” of EFL teachers in Bulgaria. I think there should be an LOT SIG in IATEFL, and perhaps a special focus platform on this inside SEETA. No EFL association anywhere to my knowledge has such a special-interest focus group. In IATEFL, GISIG and TDSIG both sometimes deal with these questions but not in a specific focus on LOT.

Qualitative research of this kind offers ample flexibility in how you begin to explore teachers’ voices and life worlds for the first time. Wengraf (2001: 121), in eliciting a life history narrative rich with detail, starts by telling the respondent: “I want you...
to tell me your life story, all the events and experiences which were important for you, up to now. Start wherever you like. Please take the time you need. I’ll listen first, I won’t interrupt, I’ll just take some notes for after you’ve finished telling me about your experiences”. A new site, Teachers Stories in EFL, is now up and running: https://goo.gl/LcLTjx You yourself can contribute there, even with a pseudonym. Let us share our real-life experiences as teachers.

A Working Catalogue of Questions

Here a broad-ranging catalogue of questions for in-depth LOT analysis: you can select a set of focal points from the following questions, meant as guideposts for potential exploration. Each question focus can elicit lengthy, often surprisingly textured, self-narratives from some respondents, and function as a heuristic for further idea generation, and story generation. Below is a compendium of a whole range of possible questions from which to craft an interview, or just a probing, more personal discussion among several teachers. All these questions are ones teachers can ask themselves. Add questions or angles to explore of your own:

• Why did you become a teacher of English? What was your motivation on deciding to become a teacher? What was the process. Think back to your own primary and secondary schooling, some stories to tell. Or influences among family and friends.
• How did you learn English and when? Who were your teachers?
• Did you have a role model, a person who influenced you to become a teacher?
• Recall a teacher of whom you have strong memories. Discuss with another teacher. Then reverse roles (Edge, 1993).
• Tell something about your specific family background, growing up, and the role of reading in your life as a kid. How many languages did you speak in the family?
• Did a trip abroad become a catalyzing experience, central to your own personal *Bildungsroman* in choosing to become a teacher of EFL (Barhuizen, 2013: 191-92)?
• Have Erasmus / other such “European” projects shaped your own professional development as a teacher? How?
• Do you experience a clash between family responsibilities, taking care of your children, for example, and the world of work, your job and its commitments and time pressure? Be specific.
• How much have you learned from other teachers on the job? Give some stories.
• Teachers work in an envelope of “privatism”, isolated from other teachers. Do you? In what ways? Be specific. How much do you collaborate with other teachers, team teach, or invite teachers to observe your own classes and comment on them.
• Have you ever faced being sacked? Have you ever gone out on strike, such as in the mass teachers’ strike in Bulgaria in the fall of 2007 (http://goo.gl/4G3BrK)? What did you learn from that action as a teacher or student? Is a teachers’ strike possible today where you work? The massive teachers’ strike 19 May 2015 in France also involved questions of language teaching, work load (http://goo.gl/GBGWYE), as did a recent strike at a private school in London (http://goo.gl/jXgoYA). Teachers in Seattle are striking to improve school funding, with the slogan “No more legislators lies, time to fund small class size” (http://goo.gl/o7isc9). Students in Newark/NJ are protesting with teachers against new ‘reforms’ (http://goo.gl/pkC6re). How do you see such actions?
• *Time* is always a scarce commodity for teachers. In what senses are you under time stress? Discuss what is called the “hidden work of teachers – not just marking
and meetings but increasing administration, counselling and work associated with educational reforms” (Tattam, 1998: 6). How has this affected you concretely?

- Is everything learned during a teacher preparation program lost or changed when beginning teachers face the reality of classroom life – in the process of becoming socialised to the profession and school culture?
- Did the effects of your pre-teaching training “wash out” quickly once you started to work? What did your study / preparation as a teacher not prepare you for?
- Career trajectory: what phases can you see in your own development? How have you changed your approach, outlook over the years? Are you in the midst of changing now?
- What kind of a teacher are you? How would you characterise that? For example, student-centred? If so, how? How has that developed over time?
- Do you attempt to create a “constructivist” classroom and syllabus (Marlowe & Page, 1998), or experiment with what Wrigley (2007: 17-19) terms “open architectures of learning”? How? What are the obstacles, what is the student and colleague response?
- What do you do in your teaching that is especially “creative” in classroom work as you see it? What are the barriers to this in your teaching situation?
- What kind of tensions have you had with other colleagues? Tell some concrete tales.
- If you teach in a state school, you may have visits from an inspector. How do you see that? In the UK, OfSTED is the government office that supervises teachers’ work in the state schools. Many teachers do not like an OfSTED visit; they live in terror of it. Read Ellis (2015) who is highly critical of the “inspector” system in the UK. Does it sound similar to Bulgaria? Watch this on “teacher observation,” an animated critical video: https://goo.gl/hFkm2O How true does it ring?
- What would you like to change (or what have you changed) in your own teaching?
• What really needs to be transformed in your broader work environment to improve it?
• In what sense do you see teaching as a lifetime “vocation”, not just a job?
• Have you ever reached a point where you just wanted to quit? Threat of “burn-out”?
• Have you begun to experience any “rustout”, or a loss of interest, enthusiasm?
• How do you cope with bullying and more generally with disciplinary problems? Has your approach changed over time? Were you yourself subjected to “caning” as a pupil?
• Wrigley (2006: 181) sees teachers as working within “the disciplinary regime: silence and inertia”, where student voices are silenced and they are stymied as active agents. Would you agree or disagree, and why? Frame an experienced-based narrative.
• Describe one of your worst days as a teacher. And one of your best days.
• Describe an incident that left you quite depressed as a teacher, or truly elated.
• Tell something about your most outstanding students. About a “problem student” or two.
• What do you find hardest, most stressful about being a teacher here and now?

What would you like to transform / experiment with in the way you assess students?
What has given you the strongest sense of achievement/accomplishment in your work?
• How do you reach out to parents? Describe some aspects of parent-teacher relations as you have experienced them, positively and negatively.
• How much individual autonomy do you have on the job? In what way is your work regulated by prescribed syllabuses?
• Have you dealt with managing curricular reform, restructuring? How have you managed?
• What is your biggest hassle at work at the moment? What was your biggest single challenge when you began to teach?
• Tell something about the physical state of the schools you have worked at, abundance of or lack of facilities. Any stories about unusual deterrent problems, including class size?
• Beyond teaching the language, how do you want to influence your students critically? Morally? Those of us in the Global Issues SIG in IATEFL focus in part on this.
• Do you or your fellow teachers need to have a “parallel extra job” to make ends meet?
• Do you or your friends give private lessons (‘moonlighting’) in order to supplement your income? Can you survive on your monthly salary? Nadezhda (see film below) cannot.

Here a cost of living comparison 2015, Sofia and Munich: [http://goo.gl/icHWfm](http://goo.gl/icHWfm)

• How do you get along with your school director? Provide some examples (anonymously).
• Do you belong to a teachers’ union? How do you see such membership? What has the teachers’ union done for you? One alternative model is the Scottish Education Workers’ Network ([https://goo.gl/5oxdER](https://goo.gl/5oxdER)). Is such a grassroots local union initiative possible in your country? Could an experiment be launched?
• Do you belong to an EFL teachers’ association, in Bulgaria to BETA? If not, why not? How has membership in the association helped your development as a teacher?

• Do you teach kids from low-income working-class or ethnic minority backgrounds? If so, how has this shaped your teaching?

• Do you recall instances where students have suffered from labelling, stereotyping, or even prejudice from their teachers, or their peers? In what ways?

• If you taught or were educated in schools in socialist Bulgaria, how did things differ then? What were the plus points, minus points, in a quite different system of education? I have heard numerous quite detailed narratives about the differences, then and now.

Of course, some LOT narratives can be kept anonymous if the narrator so wishes. Teachers are sometimes reluctant to say what they really think. A collection of anonymous stories of “abuse, exploitation and suffering” in academia can be found here: http://goo.gl/R7y6Bc. For some teachers beginning to pursue LOT as self-reflection, introspection and making “sense of self,” an educator’s diary is one way to begin or “collaborative diary keeping” which entails sharing entries with several colleagues (Brock et al., 1993). Published research can keep all such interviews anonymous if deemed necessary. One striking UK example of self-revelation is the recent article by “Anonymous” in The Guardian: “Why I love teaching – and why I had to leave the profession” (http://goo.gl/qYar8S). The writer chose to conceal her personal identity in this case. It is fascinating to explore the range (329 [!]) of readers’ comments there underneath.
LOT Inquiry: Where to Begin?

There is a substantial base of literature, mainly from the UK and North America, though relatively little work centres on the specific field of EFL teaching. Barkhuizen (2013) is a good introduction to the narrative perspective and its workings in EFL. There are chapters there looking at novice teachers’ practicum blogs, narrative inquiry in EFL teacher education in several countries (not in the South Eastern Europe), “narratives as practices – negotiating identities through story telling” about oneself, “from transcript to playscript: dramatizing narrative research,” and narrative writing as a method for looking at SLA connected with a learner’s study/travel abroad. In my own case, a summer abroad in Germany at the age of 15 was a life-changing catalyst for my later becoming a teacher of German, against my parents’ wishes.

A graphic online site is the Life Story Commons at the University of Southern Maine (http://goo.gl/a0XBmz), with an archive and other materials; it is a well-grounded place to begin a journey in discovering life history as a lens. Atkinson (1998) provides a widely cited, compact and highly readable introduction to life story interviewing, usefully supplemented by Seidman (2006). Goodson and Sikes (2001) is a good guidebook to life history research in the educational sciences. The authors provide clear, personally grounded, practical hands-on advice on how to do such
research. Another introduction replete with narratives is Jalongo and Isenberg (1995). Templer (2009) is a general introduction and overview, expanding on a number of the points mentioned here, inside a subfield known in Polish education studies as “pedeutology.” This article is a revised version of that online paper, and Templer (2008).

For ESL, Lemberger’s (1997) in-depth narrative-based investigation of eight bilingual teachers in the United States is a paradigm study. A stimulating collection from around the world is edited by Day et al. (2000); Goodson (1992) is a valuable overview summing up a first-rate collective volume. Pioneering in the field was Huberman’s (1993) classic in-depth study done in Geneva, involving 160 teachers. Muchmore (2004) offers a unique case study of Anna, a teacher of English. Such in-depth case studies of a single teacher are also a major desideratum in narrative research, as a hypothesis-generating heuristic, and would be a valuable addition to our understanding of teachers’ real concrete lives in Bulgaria and elsewhere in the region.

Hayes (2005) remains a key study focused on South Asian teachers, grounded on much experience by the author in the Sri Lankan context. He looks at why Sri Lankan teachers enter the profession, the conflict between teaching as a “job” and as a “vocation”, interviewees’ role models, perception of their training, their lived “career paths” and the place of English in Sri Lankan society over time, not least its ideological import. This aspect is important for beginning to get a “bottom-up” view of English as a global language and lingua franca from ordinary local teachers’ perspectives, moored on local realities and within local “lived experience.” Hayes stresses that LOT offers teachers “opportunities to validate and endorse their own lives through sharing them with others” (p. 191). Hayes (2013) builds on this, also
describing his research on teachers’ narratives in Thailand. Bill Johnston’s (1997) work on Polish EFL teachers and Hardy’s (2007) path-breaking brief study on Slovenia, including comparison with teachers in Poland, has extended that “social geography of teachers’ voices” into East-Central Europe.

As mentioned above, a particular fascinating and little-examined dimension of inquiry in Bulgaria is narratives exploring growing up under socialism and the education system then, and what teachers over the age of 40 experience now (often a striking contrast). What was it like to be studying English at a language high school in the 1960s to 80s, for example? Older teachers (and adults who are not teachers) will remember, often in great detail. The classic film Вчера / in English: YESTERDAY (1988) presents a certain picture of such youth and an image of their teachers (https://goo.gl/s71YgY), beginning with a class studying Shakespeare’s Macbeth. Students could also engage in some interviewing of their teachers, or perhaps their parents and other family members on memories of their schooling (especially in the socialist era). Very few Bulgarian young “millennials” (Gen Y, born after 1990) know anything about what classrooms and teachers were actually like in the socialist schools (and youth movements).

**Teachers as Workers**

Урок / THE LESSON (2014) is a multiple prize-winning and extraordinary if depressing new film from Bulgaria. It centres on the life of Nadezhda, a primary school English teacher here & now in a small Bulgarian town and the sudden economic nightmare she finds herself in. The DVD of Урок (with English subtitles) will be out in September 2015. A brief review and the trailer are available here: http://eyeonfilms.org/film/the-lesson/. Урок is very much about teachers as
workers and what the 25-year “transition” has wrought in Bulgaria, in the microcosm of a small-town English teacher’s nightmare – in her classroom, her home life and the society beyond. Of course, Nadezhda’s life is a fiction. But what stark authentic light does it shine on teachers’ problems in their work and their private lives in Bulgaria today?

Speaking of teachers as workers, the problems encountered specifically on the job, there is a new group online, Teachers as Workers, centering on the field of EFL teachers worldwide. You could join the list and discussion: https://goo.gl/H12UJ9

It is not yet a formal SIG under IATEFL’s umbrella – TaW may become one, or develop as a kind of independent SIG online across the planet (many already involved), with advocacy to protect teachers’ rights and exchange ideas about work situations, pluses and minuses, and the huge differences in income across the globe and inside Europe. Another nice TaWsIG site is: https://goo.gl/WHxZ1p. A revealing article on income can be found here: http://goo.gl/8BQgSv. As noted, the Scottish Education Workers’ Network is also worth exploring: https://goo.gl/5oxdER. The theme of no job security for teachers, many with PhDs, is presented here: https://goo.gl/DQOXm6. In Ontario, part-time teachers are trying to improve their lot and their lives, energising “pushback” in solidarity: http://goo.gl/y91h86. The ILO sees burgeoning global “precarity”: “Globally, over 60 per cent of all workers lacked any kind of employment contract. And even among workers who earn salaries, only 42 percent had permanent contracts” (http://goo.gl/Wud0ul). See also the tagesschau report on ILO in Germany: http://goo.gl/B7SNq3. All this is imbricated in the mosaic of class, power and social structure, which goes beyond the main focus of the present article. The 2016 conference “How Class Works” stateside will deal with such dimensions (goo.gl/ZZXUVn).
Exploring Gendered Terrain

An obvious reality for primary and secondary school teaching is that the preponderant majority of teachers in many fields are women, often of childbearing age, so that LOT also becomes part of women’s narrative and gender studies and tales ever more of precarity in Bulgaria. As Williams (2000: 7) notes: “As long as domesticity governs the organization of family work and market work, people’s aspirations for family life will remain pitted against their aspirations for autonomy, self-sufficiency, and (if they are lucky) self-fulfilment through productive work.” Teachers’ narratives frequently probe the lived conflict-ridden experience of being simultaneously a mother and a teacher. Weiler and Middleton (1999) is an exemplary study of women teachers through narrative inquiry, as is Lieblich and Josselson (1994). Nias and Aspinwall (1995) look at extended female teachers’ careers through life-history narrative.

Countering Teacher Burnout and Rustout

How and why teachers keep going and how they cope with the daily challenges, why they remain in the classroom, is explored through extended narrative in Nieto (2003) who examined the challenges a group of urban teachers face in the U.S.
Stress in teaching is the focus of Travers and Cooper (1996), based on open interviews and respondent surveys. Read this on stress: http://goo.gl/8aFgqq

Kottler and Zehm (2000: 97-118) offer advice on “avoiding burnout and rustout,” grounded partially on case studies. “Rustout” (the gradual withering of enthusiasm) is an important focus for exploration in LOT and has probably been little researched within EFL in Bulgaria and the broader SEETA region.

Longitudinal Studies

Levin (2003) represents a kind of breakthrough in the study of teacher development: a longitudinal study of the professional lives of four elementary teachers over a 15-year period. Such longitudinal studies are badly needed everywhere. Her paper (2001) provides a briefer overview, centring on an update of one case study, and can also be accessed online. Robert Bullough, Jr. (1989) conducted an in-depth, longitudinal case study of one teacher’s development during her first year in the classroom, along with a follow-up book co-authored with his subject that looks at her life and career as a teacher across eight years (Bullough & Baughman, 1997). This is a fascinating case-study investigation of teacher development, and a model for inquiry elsewhere. Nias (1989) details a longitudinal
study of British primary school teachers, looking at how their conceptions of their careers change over time, and how they define their sense of self as teachers. Her data is based on interviews with 99 beginning teachers, and follow-up interviews with 51 of them a decade later. What about in BG?

Ireland -- Postcards from the periphery  
http://goo.gl/dbwkUs  (T.C.D. = Trinity College, Dublin)

**Conclusion**

The challenges for a narrative-based multifaceted initiative of empirical inquiry on teachers’ work and lives here in Bulgaria and the region are huge. There is clear need to better explore the vital links between what educators do and who they are, or between their worlds of work and their personal lives and identities, a dynamic framework of collaborative empathetic transformative encounter (Edge, 2002). If we emphasise the “role of teacher educators and teachers as intellectuals instead of mechanics or technicians,” and the core vision that teachers are necessary for developing “a critical, active, interrogating, citizenry – thoughtful, questioning, perceptive as well as skilled” (Hill & Boxley, 2007: 54), we need well-grounded, narratively rich inquiry to ensure that teachers’ voices are listened to and, within a pedagogy of solidarity, equity and democratic empowerment, given the response, empathy and dignity they deserve. Teacher Solidarity is an informative global community worth exploring: https://goo.gl/5oxdER, Education in Crisis is another
useful site: http://goo.gl/5Iq6Gt

Undergraduate and postgraduate research on this complex—in the form of journal entries, leading to smaller articles and perhaps some thesis-length investigations—needs encouragement, as does use of LOT in pre-service and in-service training, conference workshopping. School directors can also promote LOT research or data gathering within the frame of professional teacher development. Professional societies can begin to collect teacher narratives in a written or electronic archived form. In a video interview on November 2014, linguist Claire Kramsch says some intriguing very personal things about herself and how she became a teacher of German in France: https://goo.gl/5a8w9f. Dr Laxman Gnawali from NELTA in Nepal talks about his life as a teacher: http://goo.gl/2kUucO, plus other teachers’ lives interviews at the site. It is easy to join the RESIG discussion group online, much idea exchange about classroom inquiry, research about one’s own pedagogy (a clear LOT focus): https://goo.gl/sfw6eg.

Newsletters can spur teachers to begin to meet to exchange and compare their stories. The pages of BETA E-Newsletter already have modest beginnings in that direction, in some mini-interviews with teachers, for example (Thomas & Apostolova, 2014; Lamb & Boyadzhieva, 2014; Ilieva, 2014; Kerr, 2015). One intriguing option is to begin to build up a narrative archive, and to include videos and recordings, tapping into what is called “oral history” (https://goo.gl/kONMWt), reflected through a prism a bit like oral historian Studs Terkel’s books Hard Times (1970), Working (1974), The Great Divide (1988) or Race (1993) as a paradigm but focusing on TEFL teachers’ narratives. Imagine an “oral life-history archive” of TEFL in Bulgaria. Ideas can also be gained from the U.S. site Storycorps, which focuses on recording the life stories of ordinary people, and also teachers
LOT concretises strategies and genres for “inventing new ways of talking to one another, ways that bridge the categories that so often divide us” (Green, 1999: 27) – across this region and the wider TESOL profession. As Hayes (2005; 2013) stresses, LOT provides teachers a chance to “validate” and “self-empower” their own lives by sharing them in depth with others.

References


24th BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference and Pre-Conference Event 6th-7th June 2015 Sofia, Bulgaria

Albena Stefanova

Our 24th conference was hosted by the University of National and World Economy in Sofia. The delegates had the opportunity to meet and discuss challenges or practices in the modern facilities of the university surrounded by a magnificent park on the outskirts of the beautiful Vitosha Mountain. English teachers and lecturers as well as educational experts from Bulgaria, Greece, Poland, Serbia, Macedonia, the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom, the USA and Hungary took part in the event.

Albena Stefanova holds a Master’s degree in English Philology from Sofia University. She has been a lecturer at Sofia University, the Police Academy at the Ministry of Interior, Higher Islamic Institute, and New Bulgarian University. Currently, she is a senior lecturer at the University of National and World Economy, where she teaches English to students of economics and political studies. Her major interests are in ESP and translation. E-mail: albena_stefanova@abv.bg
At the opening ceremony the conference participants were greeted by Professor Simeonov, first Vice Rector; Professor Genov, Dean of Faculty of International Economy and Policy; Professor Kozhuharova, Chair of the Department of Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics; George Chinnery from the Regional English Language Office at the US Embassy in Budapest. There were greetings on behalf of Professor Tanev, Minister of Education and Science of Bulgaria as well as on behalf of Professor Belova, Dean of Faculty of Law and History at the South-West University in Blagoevgrad.

The pre-conference event included the plenary of Professor Maggie Sokolik from Berkeley University, USA, the interesting presentations on teaching foreign languages for specific purposes of Associate Professor Lesnevska and Senior Lecturers Ria Altimirska, Mina Hubenova, Sylvia Vasileva and Galina Koteva as well as of Mrs Emilia Nesheva from the Bulgarian Ministry of Defense who focused on the preparation of the Bulgarian military officers for NATO missions and cooperation activities. Our respected colleagues discussed various aspects of our professional work involving the teaching of Bulgarian, Russian, German and English languages. All participants appreciated the round table on the challenges that the teaching of foreign languages presents nowadays. It was moderated by Associate Professor Perianova and was found really fruitful by the teachers who took an active part and shared personal observations and solutions.

The conference days offered a host of plenaries, presentations and workshops and an exhibition of educational materials. The plenary and featured sessions were delivered by internationally famous
experts and inspiring speakers including Terry Lamb (University of Sheffield, UK); Lilia Savova (Indiana University of Pennsylvania); Virginia Evans (Express Publishing); Paul Davis (Pilgrims, UK); Desmond Thomas (University of Essex, UK); Anna Parisi (SEETA Community); Zarina Markova (South West University, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria); Maggie Sokolik, University of California, Berkeley, USA; Christopher Holmes, British Council, UK.

The conference was attended by lecturers from Sofia University; the Medical University in Varna; University of Veliko Turnovo; New Bulgarian University; South West University; University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy; Shumen University; the Medical University in Sofia; Todor Kableshkov University of Transport; the Military Academy; and the University of National and World Economy.

We must mention the participation of delegates and presenters from various language centres and organizations: El Centre Sofia, I and I Language Centre, FACT World, Dolphin Educational School, Rodina Language School in Stara Zagora, Excellence Language Centre, BBIE, ABC Language Centre, Pirdop and Emily Kids. Although the numbers of teachers attending our conferences is not as big as we would like it to, this year there
were teachers from Silistra, Polski Trambesh, Burgas, Razlog, the village of Bania, Pavlikeni, Montana, Ruse, Dulovo, Pirdop, Pleven, Botevgrad and Petrich.

On Saturday afternoon, BETA-IATEFL hosted a round-table meeting which aimed at bringing together representatives of different language associations in Bulgaria to discuss prospects for developing a multilingual network of language teacher associations in Bulgaria. The event was chaired by Professor Terry Lamb, FIPLV President, and moderated by Sylvia Velikova on behalf of BETA-IATEFL.

Of course, after attending so many seminars, one needs to unwind. Saturday evening was the evening of the Welcome reception and the raffle. The participants could make friends, taste delicious Bulgarian dishes and quality wine and dance.

The Sunday schedule included presentations and workshops in the morning and a trip to Boyana Church in the afternoon. We started with promotional presentations and at the end of the morning session we organised a raffle, presented the certificates of attendance and closed the conference. A lot of participants had to leave and did not have the
time to join us for the trip, but those who visited the famous medieval church with unique frescoes from different times were amazed by the beauty of this UNESCO site and by the picturesque vicinity.

On Sunday evening, we felt exhausted but satisfied because all participants had shared their great impressions from the event and had been happy to feel part of BETA and the world of teaching and learning.


We started a wonderful initiative with RELO Budapest: they provided travel grants to teachers from remote places of the country, thus giving them the opportunity for career development and professional contacts. BETA-IATEFL also supported these colleagues by covering their conference attendance fees.

Our next conference will be a jubilee conference and we look forward to seeing more colleagues and friends there and to enlarging our teachers’ net involving more student teachers and teachers from primary and secondary schools!
I have been teaching English for more than 35 years now. I started attending conferences on teaching foreign languages back in the early 80s of the 20th century. I also attended the first and second IATEFL Bulgaria conferences and I have attended nearly 20 of the conferences held so far. I was particularly interested in this conference for two reasons. First, it was the fact that the pre-conference event was devoted to teaching English for specific purposes (ESP). This is the area of English that fascinates me most lately. And second, I was attracted by the focus of the conference itself – Celebrating variety: making the most of your teaching and learning context.

The pre-conference event was opened on 5th June 2015 with a plenary presentation delivered by Maggie Sokolik, University of Berkeley, USA: Teaching Audience Awareness to Academic Writers. I found this presentation very informative, useful and thought-provoking. What I think was particularly memorable was the student’s animated video Maggie Sokolik shared at the end of her presentation that demonstrated in a very authentic way her student’s productive skills: speaking and writing. I think this is a type of product that we could aim at with our students at university level here in Bulgaria.

Then I was able to attend a talk given by a teacher of Bulgarian as a foreign language, Ria Altemirska who shared language and cultural problems that she encounters in the process of teaching Bulgarian to international students. The author analyzed the challenges of teaching collocations and colligations in Bulgarian.
as a foreign language and raised our awareness of the importance of register while teaching any language as a means of communication. She gave some funny examples of communication breakdown, misconceptions and misunderstandings that drew upon her own teaching experience.

The next seminar I attended was a very well-organized and informative talk on Designing an effective ESP course: some reflexions, delivered by Galina Koteva. She displayed an in-depth approach to the Methodology of Teaching English for specific purposes and course design.

The pre-conference event was concluded by a roundtable discussion, skilfully moderated by Irina Perianova. The multilingual and multicultural group of ESP teachers discussed the major challenges in the process of teaching ESP in various contexts and outlined the main issues such as trying to meet students’ immediate needs and expectations by focusing on techniques that stimulate their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The role of different types of discourse was specially highlighted as well as the ever growing importance of the use of technology in the ESP classroom.

On the whole, I found the pre-conference event invigorating and inspiring. It was a wonderful prelude to the following two days of the BETA-IATEFL Conference itself when we had to choose between 6 or 7 concurrent presentations at any time of the conference.

Thank you for a very well-organized conference, which was rich in diverse theoretical input and practical outcomes. This conference was truly, A Celebration of Variety!
Nadezhda Tsoneva and Violeta Karastateva from the Technical University in Varna, wrote:

At the end of an extremely busy and exhausting academic year we have found ourselves among colleagues and friends at the most long-awaited annual professional forum.

The conference was well organized and well attended as it was designed as work-and-learn events, combining presentations with working sessions. As a result we left armed with new ideas, handouts and materials we could put into play. We found a lot of ideas that were particularly interesting to us for our further teaching practice.

We had the privilege of listening to the interesting plenary presentations which dealt with up-to-date ELT issues. Terry Lamb, Anne Wiseman, Maggie Sokolik, Virginia Evans were the speakers who provoked the strongest reactions on our part. Virginia Evans discussed the idea that our students sooner or later face the need to do some form of public speaking. Most interesting to us was how students can be engaged with developing their presentation skills which later become an inseparable part of their professional careers. Anne Wiseman’s presentation complemented Terry Lamb’s talk on multilingualism. They both raised the issue of the importance of language policy, social cohesion, positive attitudes to multicultural differences. At the pre-conference event, Maggie Sokolik gave a brilliant overview of the importance of register in academic writing and the reasons behind students’ inability to express their ideas according to audience needs. The latter issue complies with the EAP courses we conduct with technical PhD students.

Since the focus of our day-to-day work is ESP, the two presentations we found most relevant to our teaching context and valuable for our future research were:
Designing an Effective ESP Course: Some Reflexions – Galina Koteva and Teaching ESP through Specialised Texts – Albena Stefanova. Richard Cherry’s workshop on Skills for Reading was another pleasant surprise for us. He suggested some ideas of how to exploit reading texts, raising learners’ awareness of word-formation patterns, syntax and contextual meaning. We are eager to apply his approach and handouts in our lessons with Maritime students at the beginning of the new academic year. We strongly believe that our learners would like this different type of exercise because it will give them a new perspective to the specialised vocabulary they are already familiar with. Furthermore, the reading text exercise could be extended into communicative activities which the ESP books available usually lack.

Chris Rose, NILE, UK and Paul Davis, Pilgrims Teacher Training, UK gave us a taste of practical activities typical of professional development teacher training courses.

All in all, it was a great time and the rooms were filled with engaged listeners. The whole organization of the conference was perfect, the social part was excellent as well. We would especially like to thank RELO for the support they had offered us to take part in this event. We look forward to the next conference as these annual gatherings of teachers, teacher trainers and publishers are stimulating for sharing, creativity, research and innovation.

Iliyana Beikova, English teacher at Tsanko Tserkovski Secondary School in Polski Trambesh, wrote:

Dear colleagues,

First of all, I would like to express how happy I am that I was able to participate in the 24-th BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference. I had the opportunity to attend a variety of inspiring talks that encouraged me in my English language
teaching and gave me different ideas for improving the learning process at all levels: from goal setting to material selection and assessment.

I think the event was very well organized, which made our stay in Sofia quite enjoyable.

I believe the seminars, sessions, talks, workshops that were part of the programme of the conference will have a lasting effect on the way we teach and practice English in the classroom.

One of the most impressive workshops I visited was led by Ioanna Georgakopoulou and Valia Gkotsi from Greece and was called Using Drama Techniques to Engage Your Classroom. Since some of my students are in 3rd, 4th and 5th grade it was very useful for me to see some practical techniques which could help to engage students’ attention, make our lessons more lively and improve students’ speaking abilities. Some of the activities presented can be used on their own or in combination with other activities that suit the learning process. The benefits of drama, theatre and games were demonstrated through activities adapted to the classroom context, such as the games: “Walk with me…”, “Sign with your body”, “Unfolding story”, “Counting”, etc. I am convinced that drama techniques can be used to create an environment of trust and cooperation, to build strong relations among students. We also had a chance to observe specific interactive situations with “Shared context” in which student pairs speak in an unknown, made-up language in turns and then translate it. Particular emphasis was placed on the semantic features of the language and how they affect understanding. Learning about the characteristics of the drama process and the ways to put into practice enables us to improve students’ overall fluency and face-to-face conversation. Drama can be an appropriate tool for creating the kinds of speaking and listening situations needed for achieving good results in the classroom.
The next interesting session I attended was Tips and Resources on Using Video in the Classroom, presented by Yordan Stoyanov from Macmillan Education, Bulgaria. We were introduced to some new tools and resources, esp. online resources that help teachers to facilitate the students’ language learning process. Such tools can be designed specifically to help learners to work together on a project, such as a wiki, or they can be more general tools that learners use to send questions to the teacher or among each other. Examples include social networking sites like Facebook and Google, as well as social bookmarking tools which help share links to interesting sites for learning. During this session it was claimed that students can learn with the aid of technology and can develop learner autonomy. We saw that using video also makes it easier for students to extend their learning activities beyond the classroom. By means of communication and various websites students can achieve a language level that even exceeds what is required by the school curriculum.

I was intrigued by the opinion of Lilia Savova from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA on the new trends in emphasizing communicative language teaching and authenticity. According to her, recognizing the role of spoken grammar in the language learning process is more important than ever before. She emphasised that the artificial conversations used in most foreign language textbooks should be replaced with more authentic ones.

Another interesting tendency presented at the conference by a number of authors was the use of new methods of assessment. In my personal opinion, it is obvious that they are gaining popularity because of the lack of concentration and attention focus among the students, which is caused by the fact that we live in a new social environment. The students find it more and more difficult to engage in consecutive tasks. At the same time the more theoretical, academic approach is gradually being replaced by more entertaining methods of teaching which by themselves are also
effective but should be used carefully because the individual approach is still not applicable in the Bulgarian educational system. We work with large classes which also include children with special needs. We are also expected to meet state requirements for reaching certain educational levels at each stage of the educational process. Last but not least, the introduction of an innovation on a large scale requires additional financial means which are not available to every school. These are only some of the problems which can be neither overlooked nor disregarded by a person with a strong connection to his or her profession. In the modern world, to which we all belong, the mobility of people and transfer of ideas is far more dynamic than it was centuries ago.

It is my sincere wish that in the future more attention will be paid to the training of professionals in economically less developed countries. My dream is to see the practices in other countries becoming part of our teaching work in Bulgaria. Such questions could surely be addressed at the conference next year.

With best wishes and gratitude for the financial support,

Iliyana Beikova
A TASTE OF 21ST CENTURY TEACHING

Reflections on the 13th ELTA Serbia Conference, 15th – 16th May 2015

Zarina Markova

The 13th ELTA Conference was my first conference in Serbia. Yet, while I was packing my luggage, I felt the excitement you feel when preparing to meet an old friend. I had already met lots of Serbian colleagues either online or face to face at ELT events in Bulgaria and abroad. Besides, visiting Serbia always gives the nice feeling of being both abroad and at home: the similar language, humour, culture still carry the beauty of being surprised by new encounters and new places. So, I left home with high expectations, and was not disappointed.

The conference took place at Singidunum University, a private university named after an ancient Celtic settlement built where present-day Belgrade is. The name is the only association with ancient times, though – the university boasts a modern building in a newly-built area of the Serbian capital. And, from 15th – 16th May 2015, it hosted an event whose theme suggested a strong connection with the future.
The conference attracted about 350 participants predominantly from Serbia, but also from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, FYROM, Hungary, Slovenia, UK and USA. There were eight plenary sessions of different quality, and it was fascinating to observe how Serbian teachers voted for a most / least engaging plenary speaker by either listening attentively or making noise. Additionally, there were more than 50 talks and workshops on a variety of topics: language skills, assessment, learner autonomy, professional development, and, of course, technologies and language learning.

I had the pleasure to revisit a few old passions of mine: the use of sound effects, visuals and mental imagery in ELT. There were several sessions that dealt with these topics, but I managed to take part in two only. The first one was Mike Harrison’s *Sound ideas for the language classroom*. It focused on different uses of sound effects for developing students’ language skills, and also on a few practicalities, which needed a certain degree of technological literacy. The second session was Katarina Ristanovic’s *Using mental images in ELT*. It explored the potential of imagination in technology-free, under-resourced learning environment. The two workshops were interesting to compare – both fostering language development and creative thinking but through very different approaches. Which only confirms the observation that variety can be brought in lots of meaningful ways as long as there is a desire to do so.

Another workshop I enjoyed was Anja Prentic’s *Roma culture in ELT: towards an inclusive classroom*. Anja presented an interesting combination of cross-cultural
research issues on the one hand, and her experiences in multi-cultural classes on the other hand, and all this was sprinkled with a few practical activities on employing cultural diversity for the benefits of ELT. I liked this young resourceful teacher and hope to hear from her again.

A talk I was looking forward to was Mark Andrews’ *Learning how to teach from my two-year-old son*. It looked promising: Mark is an experienced teacher trainer who is lucky enough to observe his son’s linguistic development at an age when he is conversant with language acquisition theories. As I expected, the talk was rich in illustrations, and it was sweet to observe a 2-year-old’s language discoveries videoed by his father. What was missing for me, at an ELT conference, was a broader framework of how these illustrations fit into our current knowledge of language acquisition and what implications they could have for language teaching. It would have made Mark’s talk more explicit and, perhaps, would have saved one or two puzzled expressions in the audience. Still, this session gave me food for thought and stimulated me to think of how it could become more structured and teacher-friendly. Mark will certainly find the answer to this question with time.

The most interesting conference talk for me was *A survey on year-8 students’ English language competences in Serbia*. It was given by Aleksandra Sekulic, who reported on research aiming to determine the English language proficiency levels of Serbian students in their eighth year of education and the consistency between their real levels and the marks received. The preliminary results are highly intriguing. I hope I will be able to read the findings when they are published.

My talk on SEETA small-scale teacher-led research was attended by both experienced and young Serbian teachers and it seemed it attracted their interest. Some of them joined the project during the weeks after the conference. I hope more teachers will do so – summer is the best time to catch up with material and
to make plans for a more effective and rewarding academic year, and the SEETA research project can certainly facilitate such planning.

Although the conference schedule was very busy, the organizers managed to squeeze in a real treat for the representatives of the partner associations – the Saturday sightseeing tour of Belgrade. We were lucky to have Snezana Filipovic as a guide – she showed us tourist attractions, but also locals’ favourites not typically included in guidebooks. For me, the tour continued later with a night walk down to the railway station and one more opportunity to enjoy the city centre – youthful, vibrant, friendly. A kaleidoscope of the qualities which attracted me most during the 13th ELTA Serbia conference and which made my experience so special.

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I would like to thank the conference organizers for their warmth and hospitality and BETA for the opportunity to be its official representative in Belgrade.
Dear Colleagues,

At the Opening Ceremony of the 24th BETA Annual International Conference in Sofia, Sylvia Velikova, teacher educator at the University of Veliko Turnovo and former President of BETA (2010-2014), was awarded the 2014 International Award of the Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes (FIPLV) for “distinguished and outstanding achievement in the field of language learning, language research and language teaching.”

The Certificate of Honour was presented by Professor Terry Lamb, President of FIPLV. Sylva was nominated by BETA Committee for her dedication and distinguished contribution to BETA as President and her active involvement in a variety of roles that impact language teaching and learning in Bulgaria and internationally.

We are proud and happy that Sylvia has been confirmed by FIPLV Executive Committee and World Council as the recipient of the 2014 FIPLV International Award.

On behalf of BETA Committee, I would like to congratulate Sylvia Velikova and wish her all the best in her future endeavors.

Zhivka Ilieva
President of BETA-IATEFL
Bulgarian Participation in Learnathon

Zhivka Ilieva
Petranka Ruseva
Ilhan Ibryam

In February 2014, IATEFL Hungary and RELO Budapest announced a contest of teams for participation in LEARNATHON: social responsibility through English language learning mobile application.

The teams had to consist of three members and one alternative member. We formed a team and applied for participation in the contest. We were all colleagues from Dobrich College, Shumen University: Zhivka Ilieva and Petranka Ruseva (teachers of English), Ilhan Ibryam (IT teacher), and our alternative member who supported us all the time – Tsanimir Baychev (a teacher of music). We chose the name SINEVA for our team since our idea for the application was connected to developing love for nature.

The programme started on 4th May. There were 15 teams from each of the following countries: Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bulgaria. The training took 3 days; we received sessions on best practices, social responsibility,

Zhivka Ilieva is an assistant professor at Dobrich College, Shumen University. She has a PhD in Methodology of English Language Teaching. She is a teacher trainer and as part of her research she has classes at primary schools and at kindergartens. She takes part in conferences dedicated to language teaching and teacher training in Bulgaria and abroad. Scientific interests: language acquisition, teaching English to young learners, teacher training, communicative skills development, teaching English through stories and children’s books, intercultural language teaching, ESP (IT and Farming).

E-mail: zh.ilieva.bg@gmail.com
story-driven scenario and wireframe, graphic design, elevator pitch with the following lecturers: Joy Egbert, Szabo Zsuzsa, Jasmina Sazdovska, Domotor Gulyas, Laszlo Katona, with the teenage consultants Jamie Jessup and Nora Nemeth.

We had intensive training, then a day and a half practice with the tutors, and finally presented our ideas for an application.

Petranka Ruseva is a lecturer at University of Shumen, College – Dobrich. She has been teaching English for more than 15 years. She has some experience as a teacher at primary school level. She is interested in the fields of Linguistics and Methodology. E-mail: ruseva_p@abv.bg

The team of tutors (Joy, Zsuzsa, Domotor, Laszlo) and the organizers (George, Gergo and Nora)

Group work: part of the Bulgarian and the Albanian team
The first evening was an international evening – getting to know each other, presenting traditional food and drink and interesting information about our countries. The second evening was dedicated to games. We were introduced to interesting games by Beatrix Price. Some of the games can be adapted for the language classroom. Ilhan was the best at the history and dates game. We had homework to do and lots of preparation.

There were yoga classes provided but we skipped them in order to enjoy Budapest during the lunch break. Fortunately, our hotel was next to the Opera House and only 5 minutes away from the St Stephen Basilica. We had an evening to enjoy the Buda Castle. It was an amazing night walk.

We named our application ADVENTURE IN NATURE. We intend to develop it further in our future work.
The Serbian team won the first prize, the second prize was won by the Polish team, and the third prize – by the Croatian team.

It was wonderful to meet more than 50 enthusiastic professionals (the teams and the tutors), to exchange experience and ideas! The organizers had decided to accommodate us with roommates from other teams which was great and lead to even closer friendships.

We are grateful for the opportunity to be part of this event!

After the presentations on 8th May

The Bulgarian Team SINEVA at the Closing Ceremony
Tanya Bikova conducted a short interview with Virginia Evans, a plenary speaker at the 24th BETA-IATEFL Conference in Sofia

Virginia Evans is a highly respected EFL author whose books are the first choice for many EFL teachers. She holds a PhD from Moscow University. She is also an honorary lecturer at the University of Wales, Swansea and Moscow University, Russia. Her impressive record has resulted in her membership of Who’s Who Historical Society. Her teaching experience and involvement in the EFL field spans over thirty-five years. Since 1986, Virginia Evans has enjoyed immense success as a prolific author of EFL books with an endless list of successful titles for all levels. She is the person who has been trusted by thousands of teachers and students to teach and learn the English language.

Dr Evans, thank you for agreeing to this interview. I can’t seem to find much information about you on the Internet apart from an endless list of the books you have written, of course. So could you tell us something more about yourself? What made you love the English language in the first place and, later, what led you to the decision to pursue a career in English language teaching?
**Virginia Evans:**

I always believed that languages are the key to human communication. When learning a language, we don’t just learn vocabulary and grammar. We learn about culture; we learn about people and attitudes. As Edmund De Wall said, “With languages, you can move from one social situation to another. With languages you are at home anywhere.”

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**Tanya:**

You are a graduate of the University of Athens, Greece (1972). I hope it is not your first time in Bulgaria, but is it your first time as a speaker at a BETA conference?

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**Virginia Evans:**

I have been to Bulgaria many times and every time I come I love it! Who wouldn’t? Bulgaria, with its beautiful snow-capped mountains, fairytale forests, beautiful sandy beaches and its hospitable and friendly people, is an amazing tourist destination in every season for everyone. However, it is my first BETA conference. I felt really honoured to receive a personal invitation from the association.

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**Tanya:**

You are also the co-founder of Express Publishing, which is now one of the world’s leading publishers of ELT materials, with sales on six continents. It takes someone with a lot of courage and great vision to start a business like this. Were there any doubts and difficult moments at the beginning? Who helped and supported you?

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**Virginia Evans:**

When there is vision and mission you can make the impossible **possible**. There were no doubts at all. My family, my staff, teachers and students all around the world
encouraged and helped me from the very beginning. When you are surrounded by people who believe in you and support you even at the toughest times, everything is possible.

Tanya:
Could you tell us if you keep track of the number of EFL books you have written and what record exactly has resulted in your membership of Who’s Who Historical Society?

Virginia Evans:
Well, I was informed by my team that I have more than 2500 titles published. However, I am not concerned with how many books I write; what interests me is the content, the quality and the innovation of the material.

Tanya:
Dr Evans, you have founded and manage three schools as well, with total enrolment of over 5000 students. Surely your experience must have been of tremendous help when writing ELT materials for all levels but most authors usually stick to very young learners, teenagers or adults only. You, on the other hand, have a full range of levels, in US English as well as UK English, publications for very young learners and children, teenagers – beginners to proficiency level courses and test books for exam preparation and practice tests for up to CPE level; a variety of supplementary material (grammar, skills development, etc); a wide range of readers; CDs, DVDs, videos and innovative, award-winning multimedia materials. How is all this possible? You must be well aware of the learner’s psychology and the methodology of teaching English for all age groups and levels.
How did you achieve it? The work with which age group brings you most satisfaction?

**Virginia Evans:**

I started writing my first book after 20 years of teaching experience; I had taught all levels for many years by that time. Besides my empirical knowledge and my academic qualifications, I had taught and observed lessons in several non-English-speaking countries, which was extremely insightful. I could experience first-hand what difficulties learners face, their needs and how they learn best.

Moreover, I believe that learning is a process. If we want our students to learn English effectively, we should be aware of the students’ needs as well as the teachers’ needs throughout the whole learning process. Each level of learning depends on the previous ones and is also the basis for the next levels. There should be cohesion and continuity.

As far as the richness of the material written is concerned, I have to say the following: I love teaching! To teach is to touch a soul forever; we all believe it in Express. Therefore, I myself and my daughter and co-author Jenny Dooley, together with my loyal and highly educated staff have committed ourselves to always make the impossible possible for the education of the new generations.

**Tanya:**

Which aspects of your work do you enjoy most – being a successful entrepreneur, school manager, author of ELT materials or a teacher/lecturer at the University of Wales, Swansea (UK) and Moscow University, Russia?
Virginia Evans:
Whatever I do for me it all comes down to one thing: Education. It doesn’t matter if I am teaching, writing, giving a lecture, or managing a school. My mission and my goal is the same: to educate the new generations; to help them develop the necessary skills that will, in turn, help them contribute to a better society.

Tanya:
What is your source of inspiration that keeps you going?

Virginia Evans:
Teachers, of course. I travel a lot and meet colleagues from around the world. Their experiences, their concerns and their needs are what keeps me going. They are the reason I never stop seeking new ideas.

Tanya:
All teachers have memorable moments in their careers. Do you mind sharing one of them?

Virginia Evans:
As I’ve previously mentioned, I had been teaching English for 20 years before writing my first book. I was not pleased with the grammar books we had at that time. I was dreaming of a functional and communicative grammar book for all types of learners, not only for the verbal linguistic students but also for those who learn through their senses. I could see from my students that there was a need for something different, more interesting that would help them comprehend and put grammar structures into use. So I started writing my first grammar book, something very different to what already existed in the market. It was in full colour, included sketches and
photos, speaking and writing activities as well as exploring techniques for the inquisitive minds and games for the ones that like playing. By satisfying the various preferences of the brain, we can achieve effective learning. I recall receiving a lot of criticism in the beginning for that book. Comments like: “It is in full colour! Photos, sketches and games in a grammar book? What is this?” That was the Round-up series, which made me a well-known author worldwide. Sales, however, proved the appreciation towards this innovative and effective grammar book.

Tanya:

What project are you working on now and what are your professional plans for the future?

Virginia Evans:

Actually, I am working on many projects at the moment, including several courses with innovative ideas. But my favourite ones are the two non-fiction readers series, Discover Our Amazing World and Explore Our World, and my second book for English literature, Pathways to Literature 2.

Tanya:

Do you have hobbies outside the ELT world? Could you tell us something about them?

Virginia Evans:

I like travelling, swimming and I love watching films. Going to the cinema is my first choice whenever I have free time.
Tanya:
How would you like to close this interview?

Virginia Evans:
I would like to close with a quote by Sydney J. Harris: “The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows.” It is our duty as teachers to help learners discover and explore what is outside the classroom. To help them understand that there are different perspectives and that the world is a place full of opportunities for everyone.

Tanya:
Dr Evans, thank you very much for agreeing to give this interview to our E-Newsletter.
The Pygmaligns

Pygmalign I created *Galatea*
He fell in love with her
He got divine blessings
And
They lived happily ever after.
TOGETHER.

Pygmalign II Created *Eliza Doolittle*
She fell in love with him.
He was made of different clay.
He chose not to live
TOGETHER.

Pygmalign III created *Shakira*
In love, who fell? With Whom?
Both, with each other.
But,
Alas
The creator and the created
Can live
But
NOT TOGETHER.

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Laxman Gnawali, PhD
Kathmandu University, Nepal
Email: lgnawali@kussoed.edu.np
Happening Now!

- **Academic Writing**

  SEETA Closed Course: 22 June–20 July 2015
  * Suzan Oniz
  Tips for teaching, practising and evaluating the academic paragraph
  [Ask your SEETA TA for the enrolment key and enrol HERE](http://www.seeta.eu/)

- **Small-scale teacher-led Research Project**

  Research Topic: The Changing Uses of technology in the EFL classroom!
  [Join the project area here](http://www.seeta.eu/)

- **From Ararat To The Alps**

  SEETA Literature Project
  Let's find out about our neighbours through literature! A unique project for teachers and students in South-East Europe!
  [Find out more here](http://www.seeta.eu/)

- **SEETA BOOKLET**

  Welcome
  What advice would you give to new teachers? Post your article to the forum to be included in the SEETA Booklet for new teachers! [Join us here](http://www.seeta.eu/)

- **SEETA BOOKLET**

  Join us on a collaborative project: a SEETA Booklet on how to become a successful blogger! See the project as it's happening and find out how you can contribute. [JOIN HERE](http://www.seeta.eu/)

- **SEETA Teachers' Lounge**

  On-going community forum
  [Join us here](http://www.seeta.eu/)
Forthcoming Events in the World of ELT

50th Annual International IATEFL Conference
and Exhibition
Birmingham, UK
13th-16th April 2016

Pre-Conference Events and Associates' Day, 12th April 2015

Plenary Speakers

David Crystal  Silvana Richardson  Diane Larsen-Freeman  Scott Thornbury  Jan Blake

Important deadlines

23rd July 2015  Scholarship application deadline
14th Sept 2015  Speaker proposal submission deadline
17th Dec 2015  Speaker payment deadline
14th Jan 2016  Early bird delegate deadline
23rd Mar 2016  Online booking closes

For further information, visit:
http://www.iatefl.org/annual-conference/birmingham-2016
Registration will open in early September.

Rates and deadlines will be available in August.

For further information visit:

Writing for the BETA E-Newsletter

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

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

What exactly do you have to do?

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

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

For further information contact: beta.iateflbg@gmail.com
Notes for Contributors

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

NEWSLETTER TEAM

Editors: Sylvia Velikova, Zarina Markova
Design: Sylvia Velikova

BETA – IATEFL
E-mail: beta.iateflbg@gmail.com
Address: PoBox 1047, Sofia 1000, BULGARIA

ISSN 1314-6874