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Dear Readers,

It is the end of December again – a time when we look back on the past and evaluate experiences, attitudes, beliefs, but also think about the challenges and the promises of a new year. In tune with the December mood, this issue contains reminiscences of 2016, but also articles with an eye on future events in the ELT world.

We start with a must-read article by Jesse Kiendl, whose research on the needs of lower-secondary EL teachers in Bulgaria was completed earlier this year. Jesse reports on the findings and discusses possible ways for addressing the needs identified in his study.

Next comes the newest instalment of Bill Templer’s fascinating explorations into the world of American short fiction – this time Bill turns our attention to two of Jacob Riis’ tales of immigration, and suggests a number of ideas for raising our students’ awareness of global issues, and stimulating their critical thinking, compassion and creativity while developing their language skills.

We continue with Tsvetelena Taralova’s lesson plan. Tsvetie, whose bilingual lesson aims to raise students’ awareness of important aspects of intercultural communication, is the runner-up in the 8th round of BETA Competition in May 2016.
Well-developed intercultural communication skills undoubtedly contribute to the general feeling of satisfaction we often feel after a language teachers’ conference. What else makes a conference unforgettable? You can find a few answers in Reneta Stoimenova’s account of the 9th ELTAM Biannual International Conference in Struga.

Still on the topic of teacher conferences, and teacher development in general, we offer you Tanya Bikova’s interview with Penny Ur, the first one of the fantastic line-up of speakers at the 26th BETA-IATEFL Conference next year. Penny Ur hardly needs any introduction, yet there are gleanings in this interview that are new, and certainly inspiring.

The final article in this issue is Christopher Buxton’s ‘Dimcho Debelyanov and the English poets of the First World War’ – a little gem discovered during my preparations for a session on WW1 poetry as part of the multilingual project Стихи an sich of the Boris Pasternak Museum in Peredelkino, Russia. In 2016, we marked the centenary of Dimcho Debelyanov’s death, and we will continue the WW1 commemorations in 2017 – we hope that this material will stimulate you to explore these topics in your lessons.

The poetry line continues in the poetry corner, where you can enjoy Paul L. Thomas’s uncanny 55 in third person: a space odyssey.

Traditionally, we finish with information about forthcoming ELT events. The preparations for the next BETA Conference and FIPLV East European Regional
Congress, Varna 2017, are underway – keep an eye on the BETA website for regular updates on the event.

Happy reading and a very happy and rewarding 2017!

Zarina Markova, Issue Editor
Results from a Needs Assessment of English Language Education in Bulgaria

In the Fall of 2015 and Winter of 2016 I had the opportunity to conduct research on English language education at the lower-secondary level (прогимназия) in Bulgaria as part of a grant funded by the US embassy in Sofia. With the help of numerous local educators, administrators, and NGOs, I conducted focus groups, a large-scale survey of over 1000 teachers, smaller student surveys, classroom observations, teacher development workshops, as well as interviews with stakeholders at all levels. What follows is a portion of a report of my findings including a discussion of some of the factors I identified as influencing the quality of English language education, potential needs to be addressed, and some possible ideas for addressing these challenges with a focus on professional development. Although this research was focused on lower-secondary school English instruction, I believe that many of the findings are pertinent to, and potentially useful for, Bulgarian teachers of English at all grade levels.

Jesse Kiendl

Jesse Kiendl has spent the last 15 years teaching English and training teachers in the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa. He holds a BA from Columbia University and a MATESOL from the SIT Graduate Institute. He was the recipient of a U.S. Department of State Senior English Language Fellowship in Kyrgyzstan, and has most recently been serving as an English Language Specialist for the Department of State in Indonesia, Bulgaria, and Egypt.

Email: selvaurbana@gmail.com
1. English Teaching and Learning

Types of activities employed in language teaching/language teaching practice

In interviews and focus groups, when asked to enumerate their favorite in-class language learning activities, students cited interactive activities, particularly games and songs, as the most popular. Likewise, in another study of English learning preferences in Bulgaria, children cited playing games, engaging in conversations, and singing songs as the most engaging language learning activities (America for Bulgaria Foundation, 2014). On the other hand, students claimed that teachers do not provide interesting and engaging lessons, which was also noted in observations of classroom practice. This is mirrored in survey findings of teacher’s reported activity use, where games, music, acting, and movement activities lag far behind more controlled activities like grammar exercises, drilling, and fixed dialogs\(^1\).

Former students also noted that English teaching in public schools is more geared towards coverage of linguistic knowledge (especially grammar) than towards practice in using the language; this assertion was echoed in interviews with teacher trainers. In observations of classroom practice there was a noted focus on rote memorization, and a lack of opportunity for consolidating this new learning through language use in the form of communicative practice, interaction, and speaking activities. Again, in the survey, grammar exercises, which are focused on knowledge acquisition, were the most frequently used activity type, with practice-focused activities being used less frequently.

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\(^1\) See Jensen E., 2000 for a discussion on the relationship between movement and student engagement.
Another interesting finding was in the relationship between frequency of activity use, and teacher’s confidence in their own English language abilities. The highest correlation was seen between use of project work and confidence, followed by use of activities involving movement, and the use of games, storytelling, and pairwork activities. These correlations could point to teachers with lower levels of English being less willing to incorporate these more interactive activities, or to their not knowing about these activities through lack of access to (primarily English medium-based) resources and professional development activities.

**Teaching of language skills and competencies**

Teachers ranked speaking as the most important language skill/competency to be taught. In focus groups and informal surveys, students overwhelmingly ranked speaking as the skill they most enjoy practicing in class. Yet, in classroom observations, student focus groups, and interviews with Regional Experts, speaking was noted as the skill least practiced in the classroom. Interestingly,
when asked to rate their confidence in teaching the four skills, grammar, and vocabulary, teachers noted that they were least confident in their abilities to teach speaking.

![Graph showing the importance of skills and competencies.](image)

**Figure 2.** Importance of skills and competencies. A weighted ranking of teacher’s perceptions of the relative importance of the 4 skills, grammar, and vocabulary.

![Graph showing teaching confidence.](image)

**Figure 3.** Teaching confidence. Teachers’ self reported confidence in teaching English language skills and competencies. (4 point scale; 1=not confident, 4=extremely confident).

**Factors adversely affecting teaching**

Respondents cited class size, mixed-ability levels, and discipline as the factors that most adversely affect their teaching. Regarding class size, 50% of respondents also
stated that the optimal size of an English language class would be between 12 and 15 students (with an average of 13.5). Regarding mixed-ability levels, the practice of placing all students from a given grade in the same language level sets up a wide range of ability levels in a single class. Without sufficient training in differentiated instruction and other methodologies for working with mixed abilities, it is challenging for teachers to effectively work with all of the students in a given class—this was mirrored in classroom observations where teachers tended to engage more with higher level students and focused less of their attention on the rest of the class. Although not the only reason for discipline issues, unmet student needs can manifest in behavior issues. Students not having the opportunity to interactively engage with the language in class, whether it be through games, speaking activities, role plays, or other communicative means can lead to restless students, and ensuing discipline issues.
Figure 4. Factors adversely affecting teaching. The degree to which teachers cite different factors as adversely affecting their teaching. (5 point scale; 1=not at all, 5=very much).

Course and lesson planning

Although required to provide yearlong syllabus plans for their classes, it appears that a large portion of teachers are using the syllabi provided by textbook publishers instead of creating their own. Though the textbooks provide a helpful roadmap for learning, they are not good on their own at taking into account student’s needs and interests (like the activity types noted previously) or in planning lessons that will engage the students. A great deal of the focus of the current textbooks is on grammar coverage and vocabulary acquisition without much direct emphasis on the speaking and communicative practice that teachers and students both identify as most useful and engaging. Although teachers could adapt the grammar and vocabulary covered in these textbooks to be used
communicatively, I found little evidence of this in the classes observed, interviews conducted, or survey responses on activity use in class.

![Figure 5. Syllabi planning. How teachers report planning their class syllabi.](image)

**Second jobs**

According to the survey responses, a fairly high percentage of teachers are engaging in additional work (particularly in urban areas). In interviews with teacher trainers and school directors, low salaries were often cited as a major deterrent to entering the teaching profession. University teacher trainers also mentioned that of their graduates that enter the profession, many prefer the private sector due to the higher wages offered. Although the minimum teacher salary has been increased to 600 BGN in the new education law, it is still well below the 2015 country average of 885 BGN (National Statistical Institute, 2015).

In one study of English Studies majors, teaching was cited as the least aspired to profession after graduation (Katsarska & Keskinova, 2011). According to a 2011 European Commission report, nearly 50% of school directors in Bulgaria had experienced difficulty in filling language teaching positions over the previous 5 years.
years (EACEA, 2012). Directors and Regional Experts also cited low wages as a driver of low performance; the rationale here is that teachers utilize time and energy on additional work that would normally be expended on their primary position in the public school.

![Figure 6. Other jobs. Percentage of teachers reporting having jobs in addition to their primary teaching work, by size of municipality (k=1000).]

**2. Professional Development**

**Attitudes towards professional development**

Teachers surveyed hold very positive attitudes towards professional development in general. 95% of respondents reported that they either like professional development or think of it as a reward.
The positive attitude towards professional development can be contrasted with the low number of professional development offerings. Of those surveyed, only 52% reported receiving in-school professional development, and 59% percent through the Ministry of Education/Regional Inspectorate. Instead we see the private sector as the largest provider, with 76% of the respondents having taken part in professional development offered by textbook publishers.
Motivations behind professional development

Teachers want to improve the quality of the teaching they provide. 85% of teachers cited they would engage in professional development to become a better teacher for their students. A further 78% noted that they want new teaching ideas, which not only demonstrates a desire to innovate and progress, but a possible acknowledgement that the tools they are currently using are not sufficient. That 63% said that they would engage in professional development as a means to brush up on their English skills might back up the assertions made by all of the Regional Experts interviewed regarding teachers’ insufficient levels of English. 59% of respondents noted that sharing ideas and learning from colleagues was a reason they would engage in professional development, and this points towards a desire for collaborative learning (discussed more in the collaboration sections below). The top reasons for engaging in additional professional development are similar to the results of another recent in-service teacher survey (Ivanova, 2015). It is also interesting to note that many more teachers cited learning outcomes (development as practitioners) than certification, recognition, or employment as reasons for engaging in professional development.

Figure 9. Teacher’s reported reasons cited for engaging in professional development.
Preferred professional development formats

Teachers are very clear on their preferred formats for obtaining professional development. More experiential formats, like practical workshops, observing skilled teachers, and taking part in demo/simulation lessons are popular, as are discussions with experienced teachers. Less interactive methods like lectures and reading are seen as less useful. This points to teachers wanting more hands-on learning that they can then apply in their classrooms, and coincidentally mirrors students’ preferences for more interactive learning experienced. Teachers do not find being observed to be a useful technique, though this fits with interviewed teachers reporting that the feedback they currently receive is more critical in nature, and is often less focused on helping to develop their teaching skills than on pointing out problems in their class and linguistic missteps. Well-structured constructive feedback would be much like a discussion with an experienced teacher.

Figure 10. Preferred professional development formats. Teacher’s perceptions of the usefulness of different formats/delivery methods for professional development. (4-point scale; 1=not useful, 4=extremely useful)
A significantly larger percentage of teachers perceive the feedback they get from their students to be more useful than what they get from their directors and assistant directors. There was a slight positive correlation between the teacher’s perceptions of the usefulness of being observed/receiving feedback and the usefulness of the feedback that they receive from their directors.

**Areas of need**

When asked to rate the usefulness of a wide variety of potential professional development topics, the top three areas of need identified were Motivating students, Teaching speaking, and Incorporating communicative activities. The Regional Experts interviewed also noted motivating students and oral skills as the areas requiring the most attention, while students cited speaking as the skill area they find most engaging (and likely most motivating). Observations of classroom practice also noted a need for more speaking practice and communicative activities.
Figure 12. Professional development needs. Teacher’s perceptions of the usefulness of different professional development topics (4-point scale; 1=not useful, 4=extremely useful).

In-school collaboration

Aside from formal professional development offerings, teacher collaboration and sharing provide a vehicle for development, with teachers gaining ideas from their peers, pushing each other forward, supporting each other’s efforts, and providing sounding boards for one another. A recent study by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) on high performing school systems across the world noted daily collaborative professional learning as a key factor contributing to high teaching quality in these systems (Jensen, Sonnemann, Roberts-Hull, & Hunter, 2016). According to the findings of the OECD’s 2013 TALIS report, teachers taking part in more frequent collaboration report higher degrees of self-efficacy (also popular as self-confidence) and also report higher levels of job satisfaction (OECD, 2014). Of the teachers surveyed, only 40% claim to collaborate with others.
at least once a week, while more than 30% collaborate with others less than twice a year. Of the teachers surveyed, more than 90% of those that participate in in-school professional development activities also claimed to collaborate with other teachers on a daily basis. This points to an area of untapped professional development opportunity that is ripe for improvement.

Collaboration can develop organically, and can also be fostered within the school through designated arrangements (i.e. joint planning time) or through teacher mentoring schemes. Survey responses showed that teachers rate discussions with an experienced teacher (essentially mentoring) as a preferred form of professional development, and according to OECD TALIS data, 43% of school directors in Bulgaria report having mentoring programs in place. However, only 6% of teachers report that they have a mentor to support them, and just over 10% report being assigned a mentoring role (OECD, TALIS 2013 Database).
Impediments to collaboration

Teachers cite time and scheduling as the factors that most impede collaboration and sharing with colleagues. Scheduling can often be the result of split-shift schools (as was noted in a number of interviews). In the aforementioned NCEE study, it was noted that many high performing schools earmark or mandate specific times in the schedule for teachers to get together and collaborate. In interviews with teachers and comments on the survey, none mentioned such practices in their schools, though a number of them did say that they meet with their colleagues when they can (often outside of school hours) to share and plan together.

Another impediment to collaboration is availability of other teachers with whom to collaborate. Teachers at small schools have fewer opportunities in this regard. As can be seen from the survey responses, 22% of respondents are the only English teachers at their schools, and another 21% have only one other English teacher that they could potentially collaborate with. In interviews, some teachers did note that they do have interdisciplinary collaboration with other subject

Figure 14. Impediments to collaboration. Factors cited by teachers as impeding collaboration and sharing with colleagues.
teachers, but collaboration with other English teachers provides the greatest
opportunity for professional growth.

![Pie chart showing distribution of English teachers per school.](image)

Figure 15. English teachers per school. The reported number of English teachers (ELTs) in the survey respondent’s schools.

**Collaboration outside of work**

Keeping in mind the large percentage of English teachers with few in-school opportunities to share and collaborate, it is important to look at other outlets available for teacher collaboration. Outside of the school, respondents cited trainings as the forum in which they are most likely to share and collaborate with other teachers. Although a fair number of teachers collaborate on Facebook (35%), and through online forums (25%), it is in the face-to-face opportunities provided by trainings (79%) and to a lesser extent conferences (25%) that teachers are most engaging in out-of-school collaboration with their peers.
3. Conclusions and Recommendations

It is clear that teachers and students want to have more communicative classes and learning experiences. It is also clear that there are a number of obstacles in the way of designing and implementing the kinds of classes that are more focused on speaking, interaction, student-centered activities, and communicative outcomes. Although the solutions to some of these challenges are perhaps beyond the reach of teachers and teacher trainers, there are a number of professional development strategies that could be undertaken by educators on the ground to give teachers the tools to grow and create the learning environments they desire. What follows is a summary of the findings of the research, and some possible avenues for engaging in professional development offerings and opportunities. Although the assistance and collaboration of school directors and the Ministry of Education would aid in their implementation, most of
the ideas suggested here could be effected by teachers working together in independent groups or in larger teaching associations like BETA.

**Professional development opportunities**

Not only is there is a clear and demonstrated desire on the part of English teachers to have access to more professional development, but observations and reported levels of teaching confidence demonstrate the need for additional development to improve teaching practices, particularly in providing more effective language skills instruction and more engaging language learning activities for students. Face-to-face interactive professional development opportunities in the form of experiential workshops and demonstrations, observations of experienced teachers, and discussions with other practitioners are the most effective ways to deliver this much needed training.

- Just as students are motivated by their interests, so are teachers. Before providing professional development, it is important to survey teachers to find out their perceived areas of need and provide training accordingly to maximize engagement and perceived relevance. There is also a need to demonstrate not only how to become more effective teachers, but how they can do this without adding too much additional work to their already time-constrained schedules
- Provide designated times for professional development in schools and at local and regional trainings and informal gatherings

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2 Many of these ideas align with recommendations made in previous reports on the Bulgarian education system including: Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science, 2006; European Commission, 2015; ILO, 2005; OECD, 2009; Thomas, Dimitrova, Geshev, & Tashevska, 2002
- Provide time, space, and scheduling for the adoption of professional learning communities that provide opportunities for teachers to share and learn together.
- Provide designated time for teacher-teacher collaboration, but with distinct objectives (these could be as basic as “How are we going to effectively introduce and practice X learning objective next week?”)

**Mentoring**

Teachers express the desire to collaborate with their colleagues, learn from one another, and receive guidance from more experienced professionals. Many English teachers work in schools with few or no other English teachers to collaborate and share with, and fewer more experienced colleagues to learn from. Mentoring systems, particularly for new teachers, could fulfill this need. Most teachers currently report that they are not mentored, and there is no official recognition of a mentor role in the education system.

- Teaching organizations, like BETA, can set up mentoring forums and meet-ups where experienced teachers make themselves available to answer questions, network, and to help newer teachers plan lessons and address teaching challenges.
- 35% of the teachers cited that they used Facebook to collaborate with other teachers. This would provide an easy and strong platform to develop online mentoring networks that are neither reliant on schools, nor require a physical space in which to gather.
Syllabus and lesson design

Teachers could use additional guidance in designing effective syllabi that meet the needs of their students and the requirements of the state curriculum. They demonstrate an overreliance on textbooks both for planning syllabi and in their day-to-day teaching practice, yet effective and engaging teaching rarely relies on the book alone. This follows a general trend of reliance on materials over methods, and a sense that with the right materials, all issues will be solved. The reliance on textbook publisher’s syllabi could come from a lack of training in syllabus planning, or a lack of designated planning time, and the effects of this practice are seen in a dearth of communicative activities and a lack of variety or use of supplementary materials and methods in the classroom.

- Provide syllabus and lesson design workshops (either on a regular basis, or as a more involving process at the beginning of the year) for teachers in rural areas to meet, share, and discuss how to teach and help students achieve the goals set in the state curriculum.
- Offer additional training and assist in the creation of working groups of teachers that teach the same levels (within regions, municipalities, or schools), along with time allocated at the beginning of the school year for these teachers to come together and plan their syllabi.
- Provide hands-on training on textbook adaptation with a focus on ways of creating communicative activities that support or supplement textbook exercises.
Pre-service teacher training

Current graduates of teacher training certification programs are entering the profession feeling underprepared. Teachers need more practical training in how to craft effective and engaging lessons and in how to teach language skills and competencies in a communicative way. There is a need for more training in methodology, and more mentored teaching practice to better prepare these teachers before entering the system.

- Increase the offerings in teaching methodology. Sixty hours is not enough time to cover all of the skills and competencies teachers require.
- Of primary import in expanding methodological training would be an added coverage/practice of teaching the communicative skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), and in providing teachers with practical skills in implementing interactive classroom activities.
- Create separate classes for teaching the four skills, lesson planning and materials preparation, and classroom management.

Although there are many challenges, there is also hope. In conversations with teachers young and old I saw a heartfelt desire to improve English language education in Bulgaria, and to positively contribute to the lives of the students they teach. I believe that with more collaboration and sharing of knowledge and skills in workshops, of experience from mentors, and of awareness from discussions in professional learning communities, that this growth is not only possible, but that it can also make learning more engaging for the youth of Bulgaria, and teaching more enjoyable and rewarding for its teachers.
References


Two Mini-fictions by Jacob A. Riis on Immigrants in Extreme Poverty

Bill Templer

Building on my article on the Christmas story “Kin” (Templer 2016a), I present here two very short stories by Jacob A. Riis, both centered on immigrants in the anguish of extreme poverty and ending in suicide, darker fiction based on fact, in the New York tenements 1880-1910. The article offers ideas for teaching, and also frames the stories in the context of immigration and its problems a century ago – and a very current issue in many countries today. Inside the Global Issues SIG in IATEFL, all of us are concerned with bringing current issues into the EFL classroom for reading and discussion, under the motto CARE GLOBAL TEACH.

Bill Templer is a Chicago-born educator, a trained Germanist and translator, with research interests in English as a Lingua Franca, Extensive Reading, Critical Pedagogy, Jewish History and Minority Studies. He has taught in the U.S. (Georgia Tech; Ohio U), Ireland (Trinity College Dublin), Germany (U Saarland), Israel/Palestine, Austria, Bulgaria (VTU and Shumen U), Iran (U Kerman), Nepal (Tribhuvan U), Thailand (Rajamangala U ), Laos and Malaysia (U of Malaya). Bill is active on the GISIG/IATEFL Committee, serves on the Editorial Board of www.jceps.com and is based as an independent researcher in Eastern Bulgaria.

Email: templerbill@gmail.com
LOCAL! and ENGLISH FOR CHANGE. Our Glasgow PCE centers on English in an unstable world. A key framing question for this unit focus is: How do your students see this ongoing phenomenon of mass migration, and how it affects people’s lives, their dreams, their children – intertwined with what many are calling “the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II?” In some countries, like Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Syria and many others, a number of today’s students may soon become migrants seeking a brighter new life elsewhere, with all the problems that can entail. Through the lens of flash fiction a century ago, the article endeavors to stimulate reflection on the hazards of migration and the realities of dire poverty many (im)migrants faced then and now.

Two Tales of Migration and Broken Dreams

The first story, a mini-fiction (861 words), is When the Letter Came, contained in Riis’ collection Children of the Tenements (1903), about a German immigrant inventor in abject poverty who commits sudden bitter suicide. You can listen with students to a reading of all of Children of the Tenements, the audiobook is a mouse click away. This can be combined with the lead story in Riis’ collection’ Neighbors (1914), The Answer of Ludlow Street (1,359 words), a shattering short tale about an impoverished Jewish immigrant family facing a greedy landlord who drives the jobless paterfamilias to suicide. It offers a strong dark contrast to the story “Kin,” and its Xmas spirit of human kinship, which follows in the book.
Riis the Writer, Sociographer and “Muckraker”

E.L. Doctorow’s famous novel *Ragtime* (1975), set initially in this period from 1906, introduces Riis briefly (p.15):

“At this time in history Jacob Riis, a tireless newspaper reporter and reformer, wrote about the need of housing for the poor. They lived too many to a room. There was no sanitation. The streets reeked of shit. Children died of mild colds or slight rashes. Children died on beds made from two kitchen chairs pushed together. They died on floors. Many people believed that filth and starvation and disease were what the immigrant got for his moral degeneracy. But Riis believed in air shafts. Air shafts, light and air, would bring health.”

Riis’ most famous book, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), is presented here in a video with excerpts. Templer (2016a; 2016b) offers other links and background on Riis worth consulting. Students can also learn about the fearless US muckrakers. Basic studies on Riis include Ware (1938), Pascal (2005), Buk-Swienty (2008), Yochelson & Czitrom (2014). Prof. D. Czitrom gives a short talk and an A-1 lecture.

Important to understand in looking at Riis’ short stories – some of which are grim, others filled with light and hope – is that they are *all* based on fact, actual events and people he encountered or was told about. Read the Preface of *Neighbors*:

“These stories have come to me from many source — some from my own experience, others from settlement workers, still others from the records of organized charity, that are never dry, as some think, but alive with vital human interest and with the faithful striving to help the brother so that it counts. They have this in common, that they are true. For good reasons, names and places are changed, but they all happened as told here. I could not have invented them had I tried; I should not have tried if I could. For it is as pictures from the
life in which they and we, you and I, are partners, that I wish them to make their appeal to the neighbor who lives but around the corner and does not know it.” (pp. v-vi)

That is particularly true in the case of “When the Letter Came,” based on the life of an actual German immigrant by the same name who killed himself in New York City on May 1, 1882; I discuss this below. Riis’ story set on Ludlow St. is also based on some real Jewish immigrant family and their tragedy – I have not been able to identify the source, Riis doubtlessly changed the family name. Further research might yet yield some insight into the actual case, since suicide among Orthodox Jews was and remains rare, although Riis reported on the suicide of a young Jew at the Occidental Hotel on No. 341 Bowery (Buk-Swienty 2008, pp. 172-73). This tragedy on Ludlow St. marked the depths of despair, followed by the sudden brutal eviction into Ludlow St. of a mourning widow and her four fatherless children. Riis’ analytical studies as a self-taught sociographer constitute a kind of participant-observer ethnography of immigrant “tenement poverty” in New York at the very height of the influx of immigrants from Europe to the US. His literary publications offer a highly focused mode of “critical realism” in looking at real people’s lives in hardship and penury during the so-called Gilded Age.

Crisis, Inc. Here & Now

Increasing numbers of Americans, including students, see another “Gilded Age” unfolding today (McAlevey 2016), with huge gaps between the miniscule wealthy elite and the rest, self-termed the 99%. Today we are witnessing an unending immigration of the downtrodden and hopeless from the Global South into Europe, especially the EU, an offspring of neoliberal economics and “globalization,” and the utter chaos of widespread wars. Are immigrants typically marginalized, feared,
distrusted, underestimated? Migrants and refugees are an easy prey for a huge new criminal mafia of people smugglers, and are frequently subjected to terrible ordeals underway. Yet in the EU, Greece has a poverty level of 35.7%, Bulgaria 41.3%, Romania 37.3%. Over 50% of Bulgarians aged 15-29 are in inferior living conditions. Refugees and migrants entering Bulgaria remain a highly controversial issue; their short stay here has been marked by rioting and violence, as in November 2016. More broadly, the Global Child Poverty Challenge is overwhelming (Morgan 2016). McAlevey discusses organizing for change among ordinary workers in a recent Toronto panel. Philipp Ther’s recent interview and new study (2016) are highly insightful regarding changes in Eastern Europe since 1990.

Pre-reading Discussion

Do you live in a place where (im)migrants are pro-actively integrated into society and the economy by clear government measures? Are there migrant children in your town in the schools? Do people welcome (im)migrants or do they see them as taking jobs from local people? Do people where you are worry about unemployment on the horizon, robot technology (not just “immigrants”) taking millions of jobs away from workers in the near future? Is there distrust in particular of Muslims, a kind of culturally-rooted Islamophobia? How do students see this? Do they have any immigrant friends? What is racism? What is fear of the “Other?” What do they think of “multiculturalism” in their country? Are there adequate programs for learning the major language for newcomers to the society (and their children) where you live? Many refugees wait in boredom, they have time for all kinds of classes, such as EFL. If they are not engaged in such classes, why not? There were not in the US or UK a century and more ago. Immigrants
learned as best as they could to speak and deal with English, often without taking any formal instruction. They lived in neighborhoods where they could use their home language much of the time.

**WARM-UP:** Have students discuss in groups of 4-5 if they can imagine becoming migrants themselves, ‘Others’ living in another distant society, the problems they might face. Do they have family members or friends now working abroad?

“**When the Letter Came**”

Godfrey Krueger speaks to his landlord about a “letter” he is waiting for. What is it? What does the landlord think to himself? Is Godfrey (German: Gottfried) a young man or older? Characterize the relation between Krueger and his landlord, and how the landlord is described. Krueger is optimistic: what does he say? What is Krueger’s situation this night as he works on his model airship? How long has he been working on this project? What does he hope to receive from Washington? He had lived on “faith and a crust.” What does ‘crust’ mean here, and ‘faith’? He hopes: “hunger and want would be forgotten.” What is “want” as a noun?

His hope is: “He should have enough. And the world would know that Godfrey Krueger was not an idle crank.” Idle **crank** means a lazy person who is – ? He promises to cross the Atlantic in his airship in 20 hours (!). Quite a prediction in the 1880s. What kind of an airship is this? See the section on airships below.

The landlord is thinking of his $27. For what is that sum, much money in 1882? But the landlord does not believe Krueger, why? “There remained only to fit the last parts together.” What does this mean? We learn he had gotten the idea of
building an airship in the American Civil War (1860-65). Where was he? What is his field as a teacher and researcher? Students can imagine details about his life.

His airship design is very powerful – how do we know this? Describe Godfrey’s last night and the perceptions of the policeman “on the beat.” What is a “mental note?” Then: “The milkmen came, and the push-cart criers. The policeman was relieved, and another took his place.” Then the official letter arrives marked “Pension Bureau, Washington.” What happens?

Describe the suicide scene. Emma, a small girl who knows Krueger – what does she say? We see his Grand Army hat flung beside him, he had put this on before he shot himself, why? Many Americans in 1903 will have understood what this hat is. Finish the half-sentence: “When the letter came …..” I think Krueger’s life would make a fascinating Hollywood film scenario, including his brilliance as an inventor.

**Vocabulary**

bound to  within his grasp  elude whittle  **hang fire**  unaccountably  the means  heave a sigh  famished  flaw  on the beat  the stir was borne  muffled  gleefully  dim window pane  push-cart criers  strewn (with broken models)  strew littered  banisters  fling  on tiptoe  **Grand Army hat**

**Homework Creativity**

(1) Students can write a letter by Godfrey to the Pension Bureau, Washington, D.C., asking for a pension and explaining his background. (2) Or they could write the letter sent by the Pension Bureau to Godfrey, which arrives as he lays dead among his many airship models. (3) Or a letter by his landlord to a friend describing
Krueger and what has happened. (4) Or a report by the policeman on what he observed during the night. (5) Or a poem by Emma about her friend Mr. Godfrey (see Christensen) and who she is. (6) Or a short dialogue between Emma and her father after they discover Godfrey’s body. (7) Or a description by Krueger of his flying ship and what it is. (8) Imagine Godfrey has a close friend, a woman named Marie, also a poor immigrant from Germany. Write a letter by her to her sister telling of her shock over the death of Godfrey, whom she loved. (9) Write a dialogue between the cop on the beat that night and a neighbor in the boarding house where Godfrey lived and shot himself. The policeman talks about his impressions that night (he heard the pistol shot), the neighbor about what she thought of Godfrey, how friendly he was, how intelligent, how dedicated, how very lonely.

**Drawing**

Students in groups of 3-4 can draw an imagined model of Krueger’s airship. How is it powered? Look at the photos of airships below.

**The Factual Basis of Riis’ Tale**

Riis based the whole idea for the story on a widely circulated newspaper report of a suicide on Forsyth St. published on May 2, 1882 in the paper *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* and elsewhere. Students can read the report reproduced below and see the clear facts Riis includes. Only the family name has been changed, in the newspaper report from Brooklyn it is Kreuger, a probable error. He arrived as an immigrant in 1859, and Riis adds in his fictional story that Krueger was a veteran of the Civil War and captured by the Confederate Army. A similar report also
appeared in the *Sacramento Daily Union* that same date, under DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, “Suicide of an Inventor,” [online](https://example.com). The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* issue is [online](https://example.com):

> “William Godfrey Kreuger, the inventor of a flying machine, and who had spent many years of thought and restless toil over it, committed suicide yesterday at his boarding house, No. 186 Forsyth street, New York. He was out of money and in daily expectation of getting the first installment of a pension due him from the Government. It came yesterday morning after he had killed himself. Kreuger was a native of Prussia, and had been in the country twenty-three years. For fifteen years he has been entirely absorbed in studying out the great problem of his flying machine, and did little more than to write an occasional article for the newspapers. The secret of the flying machine died with him.”

The SDU news report is entitled “Suicide Through Poverty” and states:

> “William Godfrey Krueger committed suicide to-day. Poverty was the cause. He was the inventor of a flying machine, which he claimed would carry him to Europe in twenty hours. Krueger was a school teacher in San Francisco for ten years. He was a soldier in the rebellion, and for his sufferings in Confederate prisons he expected a pension from the Government. His application had been favorably received, and he daily expected to hear of its being granted. This morning’s mail brought the expected letter from Washington, but the unfortunate man had taken his life some hours before its receipt. Krueger was a member of Doric Lodge, F. and A.M., of San Francisco”.

The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* report is produced verbatim in Melanie Benjamin’s novel also set in the late 19th and early 20th century, *The Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb: A Novel* (2011, p. 365), one of the “intermissions” from newspapers of the time that author Benjamin places between some of her chapters on the famous Lavinia Warren Bump, who was one of P.T. Barnum’s dwarf attractions. Benjamin makes no mention of Riis in the
novel. Riis was working as a police reporter at the time of Krueger actual suicide. The two reports carry somewhat different information. The SDU states he was a school teacher in San Francisco, a Mason and a Union soldier. Intriguingly, Friedrich Trump, Donald Trump’s immigrant German grandfather, arrived in New York in 1885 at age 16, and first lived at 76 Forsyth St, close to where Krueger’s suicide had occurred (Templer, 2016a, p.38). buk-Swienty (2008, pp171-73) discusses Riis’ fascination with tenement suicides; Riis published an article *The Era of Suicides* in October 1884.

The Flying Machine Technology of the Era

The *Dupuy de Lôme airship* was 36 meters in length, 14.84 meters in diameter, 29 meters wide, and had a total volume of 3,454 cubic meters. It was powered by a 2 horsepower (1.5 kW) engine, providing a speed of between 9 and 11 km/h. The basket under the balloon could carry eight, several operating the balloon and others observing. Regarding airships, see also [here](http://goo.gl/vCLkTc). In Germany, the *LZ1 Zeppelin*, developed in the 1890s by Count Zeppelin, made history in 1900. Clearly Godfrey Krueger in tenement NYC was informed about and a participant in these aeronautic experiments from the 1870s on, perhaps influenced by *Solomon*.
Andrews’ work, and maybe could have made his mark had he not killed himself. One can wonder how he was experimenting with advanced airship models in 1882, living in abject penury in New York, with only abstract calculations possible.

**Literary Echoes**

Perhaps there are classic allusions to the famous fateful letter from Father Laurence to Romeo telling him Juliet is not dead, only “asleep”, in Act. 5 of Shakespeare’s drama: the crucial letter fails to reach Romeo in Mantua, and this leads directly to Romeo’s suicide by her side as Juliet awakes – analogous perhaps to the letter for Krueger that comes a few hours too late.

**“The Answer of Ludlow Street”**

Riis begins the tale very differently from “When the Letter Came.” How? What is the attitude of the landlord here? What is the problem of the Kapelowitz family? “Six years of struggling in the Promised Land.” What does “Promised Land” mean? In the 3rd paragraph, they are speechless, silent. What do we see happening? Important is the sentence: “Each avoided the question in the other’s eyes, for neither had an answer.” What is the question (note the story’s title)? See also the question Judah asks himself below, and has no “answer.” Hence the tale’s title.

How old is Judah? What was their life like back in Galicia, suffering from poverty there and anti-Semitism? Where precisely is Galicia? Judah is able to emigrate, to a “twice-blessed country.” What is the meaning of “twice-blessed?” Do Sarah and their small baby boy go with him? Image how they survive alone back in Galicia.
What job does Judah find in New York? Does he save enough money for a boat ticket for his wife? What “sets all tongues wagging” back in his village? Was the mother hopeful when she left Galicia? What is the small boy’s name?

The next paragraph describes the father’s mood: “In the poor tenement the peddler lay awake till far into the night, hearkening to the noises of the street. He had gone hungry to bed, and he was too tired to sleep. Over and over he counted the many miles of stormy ocean and the days to their coming, Sarah and the little Judah. Once they were together, he would work, work, work—and should they not make a living in the great, wealthy city? With the dawn lighting up the eastern sky he slept the sleep of exhaustion, his question unanswered.” The “answer of Ludlow St.” is also to this question. Do many refugees and migrants have the same feelings today? There are key push-pull factors in migration. Many migrants today leave loved ones, later reunite. There is also chain migration, very common.

Now six years later, what is the situation for his family? He is a peddler, his wife a seamstress. She works for a so-called “sweater,” what is that? (see Riis, The Sweaters of Jewtown). Judah soon stops being a peddler: “till Judah had to give up his cart. Between the fierce competition and the police blackmail it would no longer keep body and soul together for its owner.” What job does he now try? He becomes an “apprentice” for a dollar a day and hopes to become a “journeyman”. What is that? Why is he not a good house painter? The boss refers to Judah as “the sheeny,” a very racist term still in use in the US to denigrate Jews. What do students know about anti-Semitic traditions in their own country? How strong are they today? Bulgaria, unlike Polish or Ukrainian Galicia, or the US around 1900, has never known a strong anti-Jewish racism and bias. Yet, note this in today’s UK.
Soon they have four children. A key passage: “Judah Kapelowitz was only an ignorant Jew, pleading for work that he might earn bread for his starving babies. (...) He found no one to pay the price, and he came home hungry (...). In the afternoon the landlord called for the rent.” How much is he willing to work for?

Judah goes to Mr. Springer. How does he treat Judah? He says something to John, what is it? Is Mr. Springer biased against Jews? What does he say about “anarchists,” a very political and racist statement? Judah now makes a fateful decision. The next paragraph describes his preparations. He places a praying-band on his head and phylacteries [tefilli:n] on his arm above wrist, as Jewish Orthodox males from the age of 13 do in weekday morning prayer. And he covered himself with a tallit (in Ashkenazic Hebrew and Yiddish [talis, טַלִּית]. A Jewish male in Orthodox Judaism is normally buried in white “shrouds” (called [taxrixi:m, תכריכים], not street clothes) and wrapped in his large prayer shawl. Suicide for Orthodox Jews is traditionally a terrible sin. What happens “at the tenement around the corner” as Sarah sits at the police station? Look at the drawings below. They are being summarily evicted, thrown into the street by the rapacious, greedy landlord. Both Judah and his family end up in Ludlow St., he from his leap to death in the street below, the family by immediate (!) eviction.

Vocabulary
clatter stir reckon persecutors scorn sweater scrape together
wagging tongues hearken discernment blackmail journeyman discharge in arrears awed (“awesome” is a popular colloquial adjective now)

Homework Creativity
(1) Write a letter by Judah back to his wife Sarah in Galicia after he arrives in NYC. (2) Write a letter by Judah in which he sends the steamer ticket to his wife. (3) Write a letter by the landlord to his brother, describing why he evicted Judah’s wife and four children. (4) Write a poem by the young Judah about his dad after the suicide, and what he feels. (5) Or a poem by Judah senior shortly before his suicide, looking back on his life (see Christensen). (6) Write a letter by Judah’s wife after his suicide and her eviction describing her situation. (7) With another student, compose a dialogue between Sarah after the suicide of Judah and her ordeal, and a close Jewish friend Mollie, also an immigrant. How does Mollie try to console and help Sarah in her predicament? (8) Does Sarah remarry? Perhaps. Write a mini-fiction: Sarah meets someone a year or two after Judah’s suicide and her eviction into the streets and she decides to marry again, live a life.

**Honing Visual Social Empathy + Literacy**

Present these photos/drawings below and ask students to discuss and describe what they see. Evictions of the poor? How do the children feel, the mothers? Inability to pay rent and evictions were common in the tenements. Here a classic drawing of a landlord demanding rent from a poor family.


A major question in social justice inquiry is: who owned the tenements, who were
the landlords? Why was this nouveau riche moneyed social class preying on indigent immigrants? Speaking of social empathy and its decline in Bulgaria, perhaps ever worsening, Imanuel Marcus recently reminded us about “empathy deficits and strategies suitable to heal that condition,” an article worth reading widely. A classic silent film deserving a unit is Chaplin’s The Immigrant (1917), here images. Intriguing would be an article on this for TEFL in the framework of K. Donaghy’s approach.

Here Riis’ photo of an impoverished Jew on Sabbath Eve on Ludlow St. near Judah’s leap to death, living in a coal cellar in NY (ca. 1890), and a peddler also surviving in a basement on Ludlow St. Here a cheap “5 cents for the night lodging hall,” 1889 — iconic immigrant poverty captured on film. Here is a lesson plan on a Riis photograph documenting poverty, ca. 1890, with suggested projects and a range of source material links.

Immigrant Ballads

Immigrants spoke scores of languages. They also wrote and enjoyed songs about their lives. The Yiddish ballad Di New Yorker Trern (“The New York Tears,” 1910) is a stark narrative of Jewish NY immigrants’ woe and dismay, similar in some ways to Riis’ stories about poverty, here as a ballad. Students can listen, read/discuss the English subtitles, an extraordinary story text, the full English translation also printed there. Another sad Yiddish ballad describes the 1907 polio epidemic in NY, Kinder Mageyfe (“The Children’s Epidemic”). These are ballads Riis had probably heard of, or maybe knew. Here other Yiddish songs from Jewish NYC ca. 1890-1910.
Who Owned the Tenements?

A major question in social justice inquiry, which Riis also addresses in his writings, is: Who owned the tenements, who were the capitalist landlords? What was this nouveau riche moneyed social class that preyed on often indigent immigrants in the largest metropolis during the Gilded Age? For other images plus text on NYC tenement life, see the excellent article by Maggie Blanck, and her essay on “Klein-deutschland” on the Lower East Side in New York City, the third largest German-speaking urban area after Berlin and Vienna from the 1870s to 1910. An A1-collection of articles on life on the Lower East Side around 1900 was edited by Crozier et al. in 1993. It contains an 1896 article by Riis entitled The Jews of New York, reflecting his in-depth analysis of the local Jewish community; here, as Ware (1938, p. 141) extolled him, “he paid a tribute to Jewish indomitability.”

Suicidography in a World in Crisis

There is growing research on suicides among immigrants and refugees, a serious problem that is part of the current humanitarian crisis. Migrants and refugees whose journey ends in desperate suicide are stories not often reported in the media. In Australia, 1 in 4 recorded suicides are among migrants, a truly alarming figure. Here an overview on suicide in immigrants. Tom Widger seeks to develop an ethnography-based approach to suicide (2013), looking at an extended youth suicide case study in Sri Lanka. He stresses: “there’s an urgent need to develop culturally-relevant, resource-sustainable suicide interventions,” based on “ethnographic knowledge – deep insights into ‘small places.’” This is extrapolated in Widger (2014). Students need to see the study of why, when, where and how of suicide as a global issue for insight, research, reflection, and effective prevention.
Bulgarian Immigration to the US, Then & Now

To end on a more positive note, students can explore the Bulgarians immigrant experience in the States, perhaps also tapping the stories of their own relatives or people from their own town. Maybe some dream to study somewhere in the US.

“Bulgarians first started immigrating to the United States in large numbers between 1903 and 1910. During this period, approximately 50,000 Bulgarians from Turkish-occupied Macedonia and from Bulgaria proper, or “the kingdom,” arrived in the United States. (…) For the typical Bulgarian immigrant of the early twentieth century, passage to the United States was not obstacle-free. With little of value to his name, a peasant would sell his land and livestock, mortgage his farm, or take a high-interest loan from a steamship agent in order to fund his transatlantic trip. Such a costly outlay meant there was no turning back. (…) Although their points of departure varied, most immigrants spent the month-long ocean voyage in steerage, in the hold of the ship, where crowded, unsanitary conditions and poor food encouraged the spread of disease. (…) Bulgarian immigration never boomed the way immigration from other southern or eastern European countries did, and in 1924, the National Origins Immigration Act limited the number of Bulgarians who could enter the United States to a mere 100 a year. From 1924 until the lifting of the national origins quota restrictions in 1965, only 7,660 Bulgarians were officially admitted to the United States.”

Perhaps they know To Chicago and Back (До Чикаго и назад, 1894, required school syllabus reading) by Aleko Konstantinov, who is featured on the reverse of the 100 leva banknote. Chicago, my home town, now has one of the largest, constantly growing Bulgarian communities anywhere in the US, with good Bulgarian schools.
References


Intercultural Communication and the Film *Spanglish*: A Bilingual Lesson in English and Spanish

Congratulations to Tsvetelena Taralova, No. 88 Secondary School, Sofia! Tsvetelena is the second prize winner in the 8th round of BETA competition - 2016!

Lesson Plan

**Teacher:** Tsvetelena Taralova

**Age of students:** 17-18

**Level:** B2 and above in English, and A2 in Spanish

**Lesson:** INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION and the film *Spanglish*, a bilingual lesson in English and Spanish

**Teaching aids and materials:** The film *Spanglish* and YouTube videos made by students

**Background of the group:** Students have been studying English intensively for 3 or 4 years and Spanish for 2-3 years

**Main aim:** To increase students’ ability to understand aspects of intercultural communication and other cultures.
The lessons has been planned and carried out by two foreign language teachers at No. 88 Secondary School in Sofia. The lesson plan will be included in the Erasmus+ KA2 project “ONE is Too Many” brochure on improving the school environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT Stage / Procedure</th>
<th>WHY Objectives</th>
<th>HOW Interaction pattern</th>
<th>Timing</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students watch the film <em>SPANGLIGH</em> before the lesson</td>
<td>To familiarise the students with the whole story</td>
<td>Teachers and Students</td>
<td>90 mins</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1. Introduction</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Spanglish is one of the newest languages in the world. In this language people use words and grammar of Spanish and English. Students watch the first video to see some of the most famous examples of Spanglish. They recognize the mixture of English and Spanish words. <a href="https://youtu.be/IF3F8dhGQAM">https://youtu.be/IF3F8dhGQAM</a></td>
<td>Warm up activity to arouse interest in the topic of multicultural communication</td>
<td>Teachers and Students</td>
<td>5 mins</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Questions to be answered:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>WHY IS IT IMPORTANT NOWADAYS TO UNDERSTAND OTHER CULTURES? What help us be more successful in communication with the other cultures?</td>
<td>To focus students’ attention on the aim of the lesson</td>
<td>Teachers and Students</td>
<td>2 mins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Additional Details</td>
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<tr>
<td>¿ CREEN QUE ES IMPORTANTE CONCER LAS DIFERENTES CULTURAS Y POR QUE?</td>
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<td><strong>3. Film summary in English and Spanish</strong></td>
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<td>Students watch the second video - a summary recorded by two students</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="https://youtu.be/a2bQsT4IMpc">https://youtu.be/a2bQsT4IMpc</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>To revise the plot</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students and teachers</td>
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<td>3 mins</td>
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<td><strong>4. The American (English) and Mexican (Spanish) cultures in the film</strong></td>
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<td>Students watch episodes about the two mothers in the film- Deborah and Flor</td>
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<td><a href="https://youtu.be/iz0v6FlfxLY">https://youtu.be/iz0v6FlfxLY</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>In groups students fill in the culture features about the two mothers in the handouts. Students do it in English.</td>
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<td>To create conditions for the analysis of the differences between the two cultures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Work</td>
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<td>15 mins</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deborah</th>
<th>Flor</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family/Children</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Body language</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Speaks more</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(What about)</td>
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<td>How do they overcome problems?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Money</td>
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<tr>
<td>Values (what is important for her?)</td>
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</table>
The mixture of the two cultures – the daughter of Mexican (Spanish) origin who lives in America (English)
Students watch a video about the daughter, Cristina. They fill in their findings in Spanish in the handout below.
https://youtu.be/-LZN3qS6470

Cristina
Rasgos y virtudes procedentes de sus ...

| ... orígenes latinos | ... educación y entorno norteamericano |

6. Groups presentations
Filled in sheets of students’ groups are shown on the projector screen with the help of a document camera
Students present their work in English and in Spanish

To provide space for the presentation of findings
Students in front of the class

7. Class Discussion
Helping questions:
When do Deborah and Flor change?
Why do they do it?
Why does Flor change her job?
Why does Deborah change her attitude towards John?
Who helps Deborah overcome her problems?

To raise students’ awareness of the process of intercultural communication
Teachers and students

---

To foster students’ understanding of what happens when two cultures meet
Group work
15 mins

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_BETA E-Newsletter Issue 26_
Why?

Students are asked to think about our Bulgarian culture. They discuss which culture we are closer to – The Spanish or the English.

Why is it important nowadays to understand other cultures? What help us to be more successful in communication with the other cultures?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>8. Homework</th>
<th>To stimulate additional consideration of the topic</th>
<th>Students on their own</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students find some other Spanglish words or Bulgarian English words (e.g. пекелер from pain killer)</td>
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</table>

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS: SUMMARY, NOTES AND PICTURES:

Summary of the film:

IN ENGLISH:

The movie Spanglish is a story about conflict between two cultures. Flor emigrates from Mexico to the USA. She starts working as a maid at Deborah’s house without knowing a single word in English. The two families tangle themselves in complicated relationships. After a majority of misunderstandings, a clash of values and a battle of characters, Flor makes a hard choice. She sacrifices the love of the man because of her daughter. It brings her back to her Mexican roots.

IN SPANISH:
La película “Spanglish” es un relato del choque de dos culturas. Flor abandona México con su hija para emigrar a los Estados Unidos. Flor es empleada a trabajar como criada en casa de Débora a pesar de que no sepa ni una palabra de inglés. No obstante su hermosura y juventud la ama de casa Débora demuestra una insatisfacción permanente - de su carrera, de su esposo, del aspecto físico de su hija, de las peculiaridades de su madre y su hijo. Las dos familias se embrollan en relaciones muy complicadas. Tras una serie de malentendidos, confrontación de valores y guerra de caracteres. Flor toma su decisión. Sacrifica el amor del hombre por el amor de su hija. Para que Cristina no pierda su identidad la hace retornar a sus raíces.

*The same lesson has been taught to two classes and all the students gave us positive feedback. We invited the head of the school and other teachers to the lessons.*

**Students’ handouts:**

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_pletB_SijUbnA3dkpxZ29ISzQ/view?usp=sharing

**Photos of the lessons:**

Class 10a:  
Class 11a:
Re-imagining Teaching, or 9th ELTAM Biannual International Conference in Struga, 14-16 October 2016

Reneta Stoimenova

According to Aleksandra Popovski Golubovikj, this year’s new ELTAM President, Macedonia’s biggest professional development event is taking place in Struga not as a result of a random choice: the conference venue, beautifully located on the shore of Lake Ohrid, is a place where you can do just that – relax and reinvent yourself as a teacher.

Lake Ohrid, the deepest lake of the Balkans with a mean depth of 155 m and a World Heritage Site, is in itself a view well worth the Balkan journey. If life has grown out of water, the idea of reinvention sounds quite relevant to the place and the event. Despite its fearful depth, the lake is as blue and generously peaceful on a sunny day as any other big body of water with a proud origin. The town of Struga, Macedonia’s second best gem situated lakeside, also has a special attraction to every educationalist coming from Bulgaria – it is the home place of the very same Miladinov Brothers, who collected Bulgarian folklore and published the important *Bulgarian Folk Songs* book in the dim and distant 1861.

Reneta Stoimenova teaches English as a foreign language at the Foreign Language School in Targovishte. Reneta has an MA in English and Bulgarian Studies, and has done postgraduate studies in EFL teaching methodology and attended teacher training courses in Bulgaria and the UK. Her interests include teaching literature, using ICT in the foreign language classroom and teaching through drama. Reneta has been BETA’s official representative at the 9th ELTAM Conference.

Email: rainy.en@hotmail.com
On a different note, the leading names in today’s greatest forum of ELT professionals in Macedonia are those of Marjorie Rosenberg, IATEFL President, and Elizabeta Hristovska Icheva, International Baccalaureate (IB) Coordinator, both panelists and plenary speakers, as well as George Kokolas (Express Publishing), Fitore Sulejmani (Berat University, Albania), Tim Bowen (Pilgrims Representative and Macmillan Education Consultant) and Shpresa Delija (University of Tirana) – also plenary speakers.

As for me, conferences are about special moments:

In the photo: Pre-launch of the conference with a panel discussion on the role of teachers’ associations. From left to right: Aleksandra Popovski (ELTAM President), Mark Andrews (SOL), Imer Leksi (ELTA Albania), Alenka Tratnik (IATEFL Slovenia), Marjorie Rosenberg (IATEFL President), Dragana Andric’(ELTA Serbia) and Elizabeta Hristovska (ex-ELTAM President and current IB Coordinator). The event tried to spark a dialogue about the level of recognition teacher associations have from the state and the extent to which they influence the development of official educational standards.
Lake Ohrid is just a short walk from the conference venue.

Modern culture has gone a long way: before there was Brecker Brothers, there were the Brothers Miladinov. In the photo: the Miladinovs’ house in Struga.

The conference venue – Hotel Drim – located right next to the beach of Lake Ohrid.

Traditional Macedonian gastronomy presented at the dinner in a Balkan-inspired setting: Tavche gravche (or “gravche na tavche”, baked beans with peppers), Macedonia’s national dish.

Photo credit to Aleksandra Jevtovic.
In the photo: Showcasing a number of communicative activities using Cuisenaire rods - a shot from Alenka Tratnik’s workshop (an illustration of how to teach verb tense and aspect – a timeline).

What is actually meant by *Cuisenaire rods* is a set of coloured sticks of different length, originally used as a learning aid for mathematics. Whatever the nature of the link between music and mathematics, it must have been instrumental in the introduction of the rods as a teaching tool, because Mr Cuisenaire, the Belgian who invented them in the early 1930s, taught both music and maths to primary school children. Since their sudden popularisation some 20 years later they had been adopted by teachers in over 100 countries, mainly, I suppose, for the purposes of teaching math until the moment when proponents of the Silent Way discovered their possible application as a language learning tool. Alenka, who presented the rods, had started using them after attending a similar workshop at another teaching event, and in her words they are great for creating visual models of constructs related to:

- prepositions of place, comparatives and superlatives, determiners, tenses, and adverbs;
- sentence and word stress;
- various physical objects, which can lead to storytelling.
Finally, the pair of touching ELTAM gifts we found in our hotel rooms before departure: handmade by Knigovez, bookbinding & leathercraft gift shop based in Ohrid. Knigovez offers free workshops on making hard cover notebooks and hand stitching on leather, which could be good news to school projects seeking similar activities and to those who would like to put Macedonia on their project and travel agendas.

My workshop looked at a few creative techniques for using songs in English lessons and also gave a demonstration of Joomag as a digital publishing platform. The outline and key steps of the workshop can be viewed at:

More highlights from the event and links to published conference papers are available on the ELTAM web site: www.eltam.org.mk.

In conclusion, I would like to thank BETA and ELTAM for sponsoring my participation, thus making the above amazing experience possible.
Interview with

Tanya Bikova Interviews Penny Ur

Penny Ur has thirty years’ experience as an English teacher in primary and secondary schools in Israel. She has taught courses on aspects of language teaching methodology at Oranim College of Education and Haifa University. She has written a number of books on English language teaching, published by Cambridge University Press.

Tanya:

Penny, thank you for agreeing to this interview. Have you ever regretted leaving the UK at the age of 23?

Penny:

No, though there are people and things that I miss!
**Tanya:**

Have you thought what your life would have been like if you had stayed? Would it have been connected with education and teaching English the way it is now?

**Penny:**

I think I would still have been a teacher, but not ELT: my professional development was clearly based on my situation teaching English in a situation where the main language of the population I teach is Hebrew. Also the expansion of the use of English as an international means of communication which led to a greater demand in expertise in this area.

**Tanya:**

What culture shocks have you experienced and are there any culture differences you are still uncomfortable with?

**Penny:**

Good question! There are things in the Israeli culture I really like, for example the Israeli directness and efficiency, ‘just go out and do it’, as contrasted with British more indirect, diffident and polite culture. The downside is that this quality can also develop into rudeness and pushiness, as in the way Israelis drive and push ahead in queues, for example. Another culture difference I still can’t get used to is lack of punctuality: but that’s true also of other Mediterranean countries.

**Tanya:**

In your interviews you say that you write your books because you want to share your teaching experience with the world and I, as a teacher, would like to thank
you for the endless enthusiasm and desire to share with others. Still what is left unspoken?

**Penny:**

Lots still to be said, and lots of interesting debates going on in the field. One thing that has interested me a lot recently is the use of materials by teachers in the classroom: there’s quite a lot on materials development as such, but very little guidance to teachers how to use them or adapt them to their needs.

**Tanya:**

What are your professional plans for the future?

**Penny:**

I’m at the moment working on a book on adapting the coursebook. Would like to keep travelling and meeting teachers at conferences, but naturally family and grandchildren are taking up more and more time!

**Tanya:**

What is your opinion on the role of new technologies in ELT?

**Penny:**

I may be going to disappoint you on this one: I don’t think the new technologies are going to revolutionize ELT! If well used, they can streamline and make certain processes more efficient or attractive: if badly used, they can hold things up, frustrate, and waste time. We need to learn how to use them, and raise awareness of teachers and materials writers where and how they can contribute.
to the teaching/learning process - and where the use of traditional technologies, like paper and pencil for example, may be more effective.

**Tanya:**

Apart from Andrew Wright and Michael Swan, who you have worked with and speak highly of, would you like to mention anyone else working on language-teaching methodologies you admire?

**Penny:**

Yes: Jeremy Harmer, David Hill and Scott Thornbury. Apart from their brilliant contributions to ELT, I’m impressed by (and envious of!) their abilities in other areas: music, for example. And David is very wise and knowledgeable about all sorts of other areas, like birdwatching, poetry, architecture, art....

**Tanya:**

What achievement do you most pride yourself on?

**Penny:**

My loving, ‘fun’, and supportive (of each other) family: husband, children and grandchildren. Or do you mean professionally? If professionally, then I suppose my books, particularly *Grammar Practice Activities* and *Penny Ur’s 100 teaching tips*.

**Tanya:**

You have already shared one of your most memorable moments as a teacher in other interviews, when at the end of your first year of teaching you were
discouraged by your so called bad lessons (noisy ones) and you were advised by a classroom teacher to reconsider quitting, thinking again whether your 10-year-old students were actually learning English and having fun. So could you share another one, maybe from recent years?

Penny:

One perhaps trivial-sounding experience was when I finished a lecture at a conference, and a member of the audience came up to me and said: ‘That was an excellent lecturer, but why are you so solemn? Why don’t you smile?’.

That was when I started relaxing and in practice allowing myself more smiles and humour, both in conference sessions and in routine teaching... Told myself to stop being so tense, relax and go with the flow. It was a valuable lesson, learned perhaps a bit late in my career, but better late than never!

Tanya:

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

Penny:

Travel and walking. My husband is a botanist, so I accompany him on hikes and searches for rare plants. Reading, of course: my Kindle goes with me everywhere!

Tanya:

This is not your first visit to Bulgaria. What do you think about our country and with what feelings are you coming back as a plenary speaker to the 1st FIPLV East
European Regional Congress and 26th BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference - 22nd – 25th June, 2017 in Varna?

**Penny:**

I have really enjoyed coming to Bulgaria, one of my favourite places! Thank you so much for inviting me back! I’m really looking forward to the Conference in Varna.
Christopher Buxton, born in 1950 from theatrical stock, retired from a successful career in teaching English/Communication related subjects in a variety of places – Portugal, Norway, Bulgaria and the UK, becoming a department leader in a College of Further Education. He has since written seven novels and translated a number of Bulgarian literary texts. Email: sozopol456@yahoo.com

Dimcho Debelyanov and the English Poets of the First World War

Christopher Buxton

In 1914, without any clue as to the reasons – apart from “some Archduke getting shot in the Balkans” - my grandfather became a soldier. His sole motivation: “to fight for King and Country”. One year later Dimcho Debelyanov was a soldier in the same war, but on a different front. At least he knew why he was fighting – for the lost Bulgarian homelands of present-day Macedonia and Thrace. But whatever the motivation, my grandfather and Dimcho Debelyanov were embroiled in a mad war in which a whole European generation was needlessly sacrificed. But out of this war the greatest poetry emerged.

If any question why we died,
Tell them, because our fathers lied.

This is what a repentant Rudyard Kipling wrote after the death of his only son. Kipling as a stalwart patriot had used all his connections to get his son into the army at the outbreak of war, in spite of the latter being at first disqualified for his very poor eyesight. Throughout the First World War, the average life expectancy
of junior officers was 11 days – let us not think about a young man with inadequate eyesight, leading a squadron towards the machine guns.

*My friend, you would not tell with such high zest,*

*To children ardent for some desperate glory,*

*The old lie: Dulce et decorum est*

*Pro Patria Mori*

(a sweet and fitting thing to die for your country)

This is how the famous poem by the most celebrated British war poet, Wilfred Owen finishes. He died days before the end of the war, on the Western Front. With the exception of the disastrous Gallipoli campaign, the attention of the British press was concentrated entirely on the Western Front. It was as if the British, French, Bulgarian and German soldiers who struggled on the so-called Thessaloniki front had not existed. On the few occasions the English press did get around to writing about this front, they wrote off the soldiers as *Thessaloniki gardeners*: i.e. they did nothing there except dig holes in the ground.

This was far from the truth. In the mountains around Bitola and to the west and east, long lines dug into the bare rock, forcing a harsh stalemate. Soldiers died from malaria en-masse. But the British learned to treat their brave opponents with respect, calling them Johnny Bulgar.

Dimcho Debelyanov played the role of Johnny Bulgar. The great poet who had lived on the edge of society, describing himself as an outcast, a solitary pine tree sentry, a faithful son to the faithless night, declared in *Orphan Song*: 
If I die in this war
regret will sting no-one

I shall depart this world
As I entered it – homeless
Tranquil as the song, which
Shores up needless memory.

It is a real injustice that Dimcho Debelyanov does not appear in any collection of war poets, published in the English-speaking world. He is a worthy comrade to all the rest of the better known poets from Britain, Germany, France and Russia. Dimcho Debelyanov, like his colleague Wilfred Owen, wrote a poem about a meeting with a dead opponent:

Той не ни е вече враг - Now he’s an enemy no more
Живите от враговете - the stormy wave has swept away
бурна ги вълна помете - those of our surviving foes
нейде към отсрещния бряг - to pitch up on the opposite shore.
Ето, в хлътналия слог - In the broken briars there
легнал е спокойно бледен - he lies pallid and at peace,
с примирена скръб загледан - staring with measured grief..
в свода ясен и дълбок - at the sky vault deep and clear

In the poem Strange Meeting, Wilfred Owen dreams of a meeting in some dark underground tunnel with an enemy soldier that he had killed that day. At the end of the poem his one-time opponent says:
I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now . . .

(More translations of Dimcho Debelyanov can be found in my anthology of classic Bulgarian poetry, *Flowers don’t grow singly*, available from Amazon.)
55 in third person: a space odyssey

Paul L. Thomas

Sometimes I catch myself trying to remember the last time
I had meaningful physical contact with another person,
just a hug or a heartfelt squeeze of my hand, and my heart twitches.
*The Girl on the Train*, Paula Hawkins

he wants to taste something
he has never tasted before

*familiar as if tomorrow were yesterday*

he wants to touch something
he has never touched before

*as warm and comforting as déjà vu*

•

on his home planet
he found himself alone

earthbound and forlorn
he longed to be an astronaut

risking this known terrain
for an unexplored planet

•

scandalous as anything in the second half of a century
walking through anniversaries like quicksand in a swamp
he was everything he had ever been and nothing yet
because despite his place of birth this was not his planet

he sat motionless unable to move into that other world still
morning coffee laced with processed sugar bitter on his tongue

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Forthcoming Events in the World of ELT

1st FIPLV East European Regional Congress

26th BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference

Learning and teaching languages: Creating bridges to the future

Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen, Department for Information, Qualification and Lifelong Learning

22nd – 25th June 2017, Varna

Plenary and featured speakers:

Penny Ur, Oranim Academic College of Education
Diane Larsen-Freeman, University of Michigan
Elka Todeva, SIT Graduate Institute
Terry Lamb, University of Westminster, London

The working languages of the Congress will be English, Bulgarian, German, French, and Russian. For registration forms, fees and accommodation check [http://www.beta-iatefl.org](http://www.beta-iatefl.org). For further queries, contact beta.iatefl@gmail.com
51st Annual IATEFL Conference, Glasgow 2017

PCEs 3rd April 2017

Exhibition 4 - 6th April 2017

For further information, visit:
http://www.iatefl.org/annual-conference/glasgow-2017

IATEFL monthly webinars

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

SIG Webinars

Christina Gkonou - 'Using questionnaires in research into emotions in ELT'

26 January 2017, 5 pm GMT

For further information, visit:
http://www.iatefl.org/web-events/sig-webinars
TESOL 2017, Seattle, Washington

For further information visit:

http://www.tesol.org/attend-and-learn/international-convention

TESOL Online Courses & Virtual Seminars

For information visit:

http://www.tesol.org/attend-and-learn/online-courses-seminars

BETA Partners’ Forthcoming Events

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

- TESOL Macedonia-Thrace, Northern Greece 24th Annual International Convention Teachers, Trends, Techniques: A world of change, 11th -12th February, American College of Thessaloniki. Speaker application form deadline: 5th January 2017

- 15th ELTA Serbia Conference Awaken Your Curiosity, 19-20 May 2017, Singidunum University, Belgrade. Abstract submission deadline: 7th March 2017
Writing for the BETA E-Newsletter

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

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

What exactly do you have to do?

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

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

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

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

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NEWSLETTER TEAM:

Editors: Zarina Markova
   Sylvia Velikova

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BETA – IATEFL

E-mail: beta.iateflbg@gmail.com

Address: PoBox 1047, Sofia 1000, BULGARIA

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