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Editors’ Corner

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the BETA-IATEFL e-newsletter!

The current issue marks a long awaited revival of the e-newsletter and brings together contributors offering an amalgam of ideas related to education and teaching. Thus, the first text in this edition is the address of BETA President, Albena Stefanova, who welcomes ‘BETA members, partners and friends’ and briefly introduces the members of the newly-elected committee. This is followed by a piece of poetry by Georgi Dimitrov, the editor of the e-newsletter, whose aim is to encourage all readers to chase excellence seen as all conceivable forms, dimensions, and manifestations of inspiration.

This ceremonial edition is followed by two articles by Bill Templer and Silviya Templer dealing with transformative suggestions for reinventing BETA and learner-controlled, alternative education, respectively. Next, Tsvetelena Taralova reports on an Erasmus+ VET project, followed by Reneta Stoimenova’s article on publishing quality Wikipedia content.

The final two articles take us on a journey through ‘Unusual museums around the world’ and ‘Project-based education R.O.B.E’.

As usual, this issue highlights forthcoming events, including our 30th anniversary conference.

Happy reading!

Georgi Dimitrov (E-Newsletter Editor)

Sylvia Velikova (Guest Editor)
BETA President’s Address

Dear BETA members, partners and friends,

BETA has been going through a difficult period over the last years with the pandemic and the current socio-economic crisis exacerbating the situation. Our community has been faced with difficulties teaching and developing, attending professional events and communicating with like-minded by participating in various initiatives and programmes. Even though it could hardly comfort us, professional organisations worldwide have had the same long list of challenges to tackle.

Now that BETA has a new committee, I would like to briefly outline our main goals in the four-year term we have been elected serve:

• Increasing membership
• Renewing partnership agreements and expanding cooperation with sister organisations
• Renewing the BETA - IATEFL association agreement and the WMS scheme (a scheme under which BETA members can join IATEFL at a very discounted rate)
• Resuming the publication of BETA e-newsletter
• Offering more benefits to BETA members
• Starting new initiatives aimed at our members’ career development
• Redesigning BETA website so that it is more functional, modern and user-friendly

Our 30th anniversary conference is under way and we really look forward to seeing you in Sofia.

Our team consists of seven members, two of them co-opted:

Albena Stefanova – President
Lina Yanbastieva-Petrova – Membership Secretary

Veselin Chantov – International Relations Officer

Boyka Petkova – Treasurer

Georgi Dimitrov – Publications Editor

Tsvetelena Taralova – co-opted member liaising with teachers and partners

Zhenya Tellalova – co-opted member in charge of social media

We would be happy to contribute to our members, partners and friends’ personal and professional development and would welcome ideas and suggestions for improvements and strengthened cooperation.

Albena Stefanova
BETA President
In Pursuit of Excellence

Georgi Dimitrov

Notions abstract and concrete,
Buildings big and small,
Meanings holistic and discrete,
What’s the point of it all?

Beliefs limited and broad,
Dreams shattered and come true,
Things that you can now afford,
What conduct can you faithfully construe?

Journeys long and short,
Advice good and bad,
Decisions in need of support,
Yet again, what drives you mad?

The answers to the questions raised
Can hardly count as an extravaganza,
But one can still be amazed,
By the message of the final stanza.

Pursue excellence, persevere,
Do things creative and allowed,
Forget any feeling, any fear,
At worst be bloody but unbowed.
Reinventing BETA: A Hatful of Transformative Suggestions, Ново Начало

Bill Templer and Silviya Templer

The present draft paper seeks to stimulate future discussion and implementation of a range of creative ideas for a reinvigorating of BETA, restructuring/redesigning BETA activities, dynamic interaction from the bottom-up, Ново Начало. Generating beacons of hope. It’s time for a comprehensive reset. We have to grasp the ELT nettle. Actions speak louder than words. We need to be clearer, sharper in saying what we mean and meaning what we say. Ours is an incredibly important profession as EFL eduCATors and eduACTors – and BETA as well as OPTIMA are currently in organizational restructuring//renewal in Bulgaria. The reasons for that are multiple and need discussion. Read this article, co-

Bill Templer is a Chicago-born applied linguist and translator, with teaching/research interests in ELF, American literature, critical pedagogy, Jewish history and minority studies. He has taught English and German at universities in 10 countries, and is retired from Shumen University. His latest translation is with Yad Vashem in Israel, the memoirs of Charlotte Holzer, a communist Jewish nurse and resistance fighter against Nazism in Berlin during WW II who survived. He is based as independent researcher in NE Bulgaria. Email: templerbill@gmail.com

Silviya Templer holds degree qualifications from Shumen Univ. as a teacher of French and English, and has taught both languages since the year 2000 at a SU comprehensive state school in Shumen district. She has a range of interests relating to encouraging learner voice, creativity and autonomy.
written by Richard Smith, ‘Decentring ELT: Teacher Associations as Agents of Change,’ *ELT Journal* 2021, open-access online. The new downloadable volume edited by A. Padwad and R. Smith, *Decentring ELT: Practices and Possibilities* (AINET 2023) contains a substantial section on ELTAs. And watch/discuss Eric Ekembe’s Dec. 2022 webinar on ‘The role of teacher associations in teacher education’. We need pragmatic vision. In rebooting BETA we can also learn from other ELTAs nearby, such as ELTA Serbia, HUPE in Croatia, ELTAM in NM, Greece TESOL, NELTA in Nepal, JALT in Japan, NATECLA SC, YALS in Serbia, an IATEFL Associate and BG cousin of OPTIMA. See likewise this recent ARTIS conference in Sofia on digital creativity, AI photography, digital painting, animation and 3D modeling, a paradigm mini-conference in BG. STEP BY STEP education center is a model personalized curriculum private school in Sofia we can all learn from. Hyperlinks here are double-underlined xxx.

**Prelude**

♫ We’d like to frame the article with this great poem/song by Bob Dylan, classically sung by Joan Baez, lyrics on the screen. The lyrics are esp. relevant in our situation here & now ♫. And listen 1-min. to George Monbiot.

**Turmoil inc.**

It’s been a bewildering mayhemic 38+ past months as multiple crises have buffeted us all and our students: the viral pan(IC)demic, the deepening global eco-disaster (все по-опасното време тук, Петрохан), United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at the opening of last year’s UN General Assembly in September 2022 starkly reflected a world in crisis. “Let’s have no illusions,” Guterres said, “We are in rough seas. A winter of global discontent is on the horizon. A cost-of-living crisis is raging. Trust is crumbling. Inequalities are exploding. Our planet is burning … We have a duty to act. And yet we are gridlocked in colossal global dysfunction.” See this article on
'Understanding a Solidarity Economy' and Just Transition’ from Observatory. Envisioned by some is building a *global environmental proletariat* in revolt against the dystopic Sy$tem. We need to generate solutions that *disrupt the status quo* – in schooling, politics, class society. Promoting a more bottom-up approach to research that is grounded more on local knowledge and the lived daily experiences of our students, their families, our colleagues, ourselves. Read Dell Hymes on the need for ‘taking back our universities’ from corporate apparatchiks’ and the extreme hardships of underpaid adjunct teachers and other uni staff. Such universities are *icons of exploitation*. Read Rachel Donald ‘Get educated and misbehave. How to build a better us’, explore CIVIC SQUARE.

**Post-pandemic mattering**

In any case, necessary 2023 is what some call **Post-pandemic mattering**: i.e., what matters now most to colleagues (and students) as a research and existential focus area. And a catalytic energized epistemic ecology of discussion, brainstorming and idea exchange. Our students are largely **Gen Z**, growing up in a hyper-digitalized environment and what that can portend. This paper is in that spirit. Fundamental is how to incentivize colleagues to (re)join BETA and to volunteer for Board functions. The profession is dynamic, read **el▪gazette**. In Bulgaria today, reforms are being instituted by the EdMin, such as **curriculum options** and re **museums**.

**Fostering mindgrowth and empowered learner voices**

As underscored in the companion article on democratic alternative schooling, The Hands Up Project 2023 **poetry writing competition** for young learners (aged 15 and below) centers on fostering **learner voices**, a catalytic **growth mindset**, as does the HUP Conference **April 2023** in Harrogate, powerfully reflected in their Harrogate 2023 **program**. Democratic alternative schools are centered deeply, creatively and
fundamentally on developing and empowering learner voices and autonomy, ecologies of personal learning experience badly needed in a transformed Bulgarian education at all levels. Acquire and share, discuss the *Routledge International Handbook of Student-Centered Learning and Teaching in Higher Education* (2021) the *Routledge International Handbook of English, Language and Literacy Teaching* (2010) and the *Routledge International Handbook of Innovation Education* (2013), all three online cost-free. See the material of evolutionary psychologist Peter Gray in our article on self-directed learning, a superb video talk (Sept. 2021) by Dr. Gray. Watch this video as well and this on evolutionary psychology. Get Ken Robinson’s manifesto for educational change *Creative Schools* (2015) and *The Element* (2009) both online cost-free. Hands- and minds-on, download a cost-free copy of *American Teens Talk!* And share with colleagues, use creatively with students. It is a collection of 30 interviews with US high school students in written and audio format, giving learners an authentic view into the daily lives of US adolescents. Each teen interview is accompanied by vocabulary notes and discussion questions. In BG, BETA could create a book *Bulgarian Teens Talk!* Or with colleagues transborder *Balkan Teens Talk*!

**Article overview**

Among the ideas we wish to broach are a new architecture for the Committee, enlarged perhaps to 10 members (TESOL Greece has 12); a separate publications committee (editor-in-chief + several co-editors), including – we would like to suggest – launching a new e-zine to replace the E-Newsletter, also a separate annual BETA Journal online; and a separate sub-committee for organizing BETA events like mini-conferences, local seminars, webinars and online workshops. You can download the *Journal of NELTA*, vol. 26 (1-2), December 2021 as pdf. Its Editorial Board has 8 members. We also truly need creation of BETA local chapters in a no. of towns and perhaps oblasts. *NELTA* in Nepal has 54 local branches, *HUPE* in Croatia has 9 [!]; exploring creation of several SIGs (TESOL Greece has 6 different SIGs); TESOL
International has 20 Interest Sections (IS), which are SIGs, and 13 Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) that members can join, all part of their COPs (access here). Kip Cates (GILE, Japan) has open-access six online bulletins on Teaching Resources on the Ukraine war. Many fresh ideas there. Here is the GILE Newsletter April 2023 on BETA FB. The GILE Newsletter archive has more than 120 issues open-access. GILE is a SIG within JALT in Japan, an association BETA could learn from as an Xcellent TA paradigm. JALT has 32 local chapters and 31 SIGs (more SIGs in fact than any other TA in IATEFL). Among the ‘6 Principles for Exemplary Teaching in TESOL’ is Principle 6: Engage and collaborate within a community of practice. Stimulating Communities of Practice is important here!

Such innovations may well entail a partial rethink of the BETA charter. New ideas on outreach/hands-on cooperation are needed: with Fulbright Bulgaria, America for Bulgaria Foundation, BC and the RELO Belgrade office, and working inventively with local chitalishte, and other local institutions – localization’ as a new BETA watchword; teachers and trade unionism; innovative new approaches in strengthening Continuous Professional Development hands-on, including joint projects esp. in Exploratory Action Research (EAR) [see below]; creating teacher book clubs and WhatsApp teacher/student groups. We also need a creative CPD point system for attending conferences, and other events, see below. In general, it is necessary to rethink what a teacher association can and should be doing, three handbooks on how to create a TA are linked below. The paper concludes with sections on Dogme ELT, TLBT and Eco-CLIL.

Central also is brainstorming on promoting a fuller BETA membership, perhaps even mandating such membership by the EdMin esp. for novice teachers. Yes, ♪ Новое Начало itself is in many corners of the TEFL profession, a 2023 wake-up call cum
trend, also highly relevant in these hyper-difficult times for the A-1 private schools in OPTIMA, see below.

**Caveat collega: let’s agree to disagree 😊**

From the outset here is a useful caveat suggestion: let’s agree to disagree politely about a whole range of possible options for the structuring and work of an association of educators like BETA in necessary and critical reboot. We wish to recommend a new book by two savvy US educators: Nola Higdon & Mickey Huff, *Let’s Agree to Disagree. A Critical Thinking Guide to Communication, Conflict Management, and Critical Media Literacy*. Routledge (March 2022). Watch, ponder & share this [11-min. video](#) where the two authors introduce their A-1 book. It is somewhat costly but maybe a cheaper edition or cost-free pdf or EPUB (pdf [online](#)). We have to acknowledge the situatedness of our knowledge and beliefs, it’s epistemic, we all have ‘positionality’. But through dialogue and multilogue we can also find niches and corners of common ground, share solidarity, all for one and one for all. Catalyzing conversations that problematize our lifeworlds//teaching worlds and all the contradictions that swirl there. There’s a need to learn Deep Listening: “Practising deep listening means tuning into empathy, dialing down the urge to judge people who are different from oneself and listening in a way that other people’s points of view are heard and understood.”

**Some eta paradigms close by**

The **TESOL Greece Board** consists of 9 regular members and 4 alternate members. It has a chair, vice-chair, a no. of members with clearly assigned functions, and several members at large: [https://tesolgreece.org/tesol-greece-board/](https://tesolgreece.org/tesol-greece-board/) The regular members serve for 3 years and the alternate members for 1 year. If a regular member is unable to continue on the Board for any reason, an alternate member takes over. A three-member Oversight Committee oversees the activities of the Board. Oversight Committee members serve for 2 years. See also this on the Annual General Assembly

ELTA Serbia has a system of CPD Credit, which we think should be argued for and introduced in Bulgarian education, see: CPD credit Serbia ELTA. As mentioned, ETAI in Israel also has such a professional credit points system (גמול gmul in Ivrit) for CPD via attendance at webinars, conferences, etc.: https://www.etai.org.il/gmul/. The BG EdMin could be involved in working out a framework for Professional Development Credit. This on PDC from TESOL, an earlier resolution: https://tinyurl.com/yc33mkfa. PDC is incentivizing and now doubly necessary in BG for all teachers tyro and older. As a paradigm, TESOL International has a site on voluntary leadership opportunities, plus a subsite on committee competencies. BETA could try to describe what a voluntary post entails to attract volunteers.

► To our mind, BETA should look at various paradigms of this kind, the structuring of multiple TAs that are Associates in IATEFL. Here is the IATEFL ASSOCIATES link, worth exploring for inventive TA paradigms elsewhere in many TAs South + North. We also think we need a Google discussion group for BETA, the existing BETA FB where Bill posts (as Кумчо) and others too like Sylvia Velikova does not invite for genuine discussion + idea exchange. Yahoo Discussion Groups once did. WhatsApp groups for BETA can/should be created starting soon. It’s a major digital trend in EFL pedagogies, including Gaza, and likewise in Cuba (cf. D. A. Fuentes on using WhatsApp in Cuba IATEFL Voices 286, May/June 2022, 18-19.). This a PP on WhatsApp angles in Africa. Micro-schools, other democratic US models are attracting fresh staff as well. How about more democracy in schools? Jean Theuma (IATEFL Associates rep) has an article on planning a TA event, IATEFL Voices 286 (May/June 2022), pp. 28-29, worth reading.
Membership recruitment and expansion

A key question is: how many EFL teachers are there in Bulgaria, working in a range of contexts in schools public and private, universities, freelancers, retired colleagues? Does the EdMin have data on this? If not, why not? In BG, medical personnel numbers are known precisely. A guesstimate for Bulgaria might be ca. 2,000+ EFL colleagues. Surprisingly, this data is hard to come by for any country re approx. number of active and retired EFL teachers. But in most countries the no. of EFL teachers who are members of a TA is a small fraction of the total no. of such teachers in the country, that is definite. In many countries 5% and less. How can such data can be accurately collated? We think perhaps the EdMin should require new teachers in particular to become members of an ELTA, i.e. BETA. Perhaps the EdMin could also finance that, likewise for student members. We don’t like such requirements being instituted top-down, it is authoritarian //hierarchical, but teachers must contend with various requirements to practice their profession. Maybe there is some kind of data record in BG for each oblast if not nationally. Why is such data confidential? Bill has raised this question repeatedly inside IATEFL. It seems no TA associated with IATEFL can provide a semi-accurate guesstimate on the approx. total number of EFL teachers in their country compared with TA membership, surprising. One large ELTA in India has some 3,000 members; but the total no. of Indian EFL colleagues may be well over 125,000.

New ways have to be found to contact TEFL colleagues and incentivize them to join BETA, spurring membership. The EdMin in Sofia and education authorities in the ‘oblasti’ and the larger cities can be approached to find ways to encourage EFL teachers who are not BETA members to join up, become active. And research is necessary on why teachers refuse to join, or do not renew membership. And also: why volunteer to serve and play a role in an ELTA? This is the whole complex of ‘volunteering as a professional.’ ELTA Serbia, for example, has a number of ‘regional
coordinators’. Why ample volunteers for such functions can be found in neighboring countries but not here in BG is a question for empirical research. Importantly, ABF could be doing far more to assist the TEFL profession here, also helping to encourage BETA activities, membership, developing links with EFL teachers and university English departments (beyond AUBG). Will ABF in fact be represented at the planned Sept. 2023 BETA annual conference? If not, why not? Subscribe to their Newsletter, use it in class. We need research on what ABF has actually done to assist EFL here in Bulgaria Including your own concrete experiences with ABF, for many colleagues perhaps less than нищо.

GDPR and its restrictions
Any Board also has to ponder how to maneuver around restrictions on personal data sharing (even email addresses) under the cloak of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, adopted 25 May 2018 across the EU), re personal data privacy. That can greatly restrict working together and networking online, we see this in the GISIG/ IATEFL personal data policy. Inside GISIG we thus know almost nothing about fellow members, even email or their location! It is deemed ‘confidential’ data. We cannot build proper networks if data is shielded. Yvonne Chappell gave an A-1 GDPR webinar at IATEFL online 7 May 2022.

How about an unconference?
One option for a future BETA event could be an ‘UNCÔNFERENCE’, where participants actually auto-create the conference discussions and interactions bottom-up, and could focus on the current professional plight and challenges of TEFL in Bulgaria, SE Europe. PPM, post-pandemic mattering as colleagues see it. I.e., a conference but no staged ‘presenters.’ Here is an explainer, and a 2-min. video UNCONFERENCE 101. What about a small regional unconf.?
Exploratory action research and TA handbooks

As one framework for transformation, listen to this video keynoter conference talk by Prof. Richard Smith at FWU in Nepal (2022): >Perspectives on change from outside/ from within and between<, a similar talk (19 June 2022). He discusses EAR, and the need for far more research on teacher associations. Prof. Smith co-wrote the article ‘Decentring ELT: Teacher Associations as Agents of Change’, ELT Journal 2021, open-access online, mentioned above. This highly useful from Richard Smith//BC on Exploratory Action Research. And Exploratory Practice. On EP see Hanks + Banat (2022). Highly stimulating is Elsheikh et al. (Eds.). 2018. The Role of Language Teacher Associations in Professional Development. Springer (pdf online cost-free), here is a book on CPD and ELTAs in Africa. Download English Connects Action Research: Learnings from the African Classroom (2023), A-1 new book from BC, 22 articles with a multitude of ideas colleagues can apply in path-breaking new EAR research in BG. You can also download Gary Barkhuizen, Qualitative Research Topics in Language Teacher Education (Routledge 2019) (pdf online cost-free), An excellent book edited by Daniel Xerri & C. Pioquinto is Becoming Research Literate (2018), open-access. An IATEFL volume (2011) open-access is Running an association for language teachers: directions and opportunities (https://tinyurl.com/yeyux5ay), and another TA Handbook from FIPLV; a third by A. Falcão & M. Szesztay (IATEFL 2006).

Research on ELTAs

Our colleague Beatrix Price, based in Budapest, has written and spoken extensively on teacher association research. See her article “Vision and mission: The interconnectedness of ‘possible selves’ in running English language teachers’ associations”. Abstract extract:
English language teachers’ associations (ELTAs) encompass many dedicated English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals worldwide. Leaders of these professional communities have clear ideas about educational change and consider their colleagues as front-line change agents in society (Bolitho, 2012). However, the motivation of leaders to run these professional organisations has received scant attention in previous research in the subdiscipline of applied linguistics or in teacher education. The present focus group interview study aims to reveal the motivation of leaders of ELTAs to sustain the learning organisations through the ‘possible selves’ concept [...]. The qualitative investigation involved 27 leaders, presidents, vice presidents, and other executive board members representing 13 ELTAs from four continents around the world [...]. ([WoPaLP 12], 2018, pp. 94-119).

Beatrix also has a related article “Sailing the seas: The motivational seascape of English language teachers’ associations” published in HLT, 21(2), Apr 2019. Her 2021 IATEFL conf. presentation video recording by a similar title is accessible online, worth watching. She also talks there at one point about an ELTA ‘dying’, referring probably to TEA in Austria, which disbanded several years ago, ‘academic suicide’. At the end of her video she also reflects on the need for revitalizing ‘flagging’ membership in ELTAs. In 2016 IATEFL had 124 Associates, now at last count down to around 96. Why this sharp decline? That is worth research. Beatrix presented at the IATEFL 2023 conference in Harrogate on ‘Sustaining Associations of Language Teachers (SALT) – keeping ELTAs alive’, focusing on how “better understanding of different forms of CPD provided by these associations do not only affect their members’ professional life but help these organisations stay alive, healthy and prosperous.” In addition at the Harrogate 2023 conference, there was a ‘Forum on teachers’ associations and CPD. Empowering teacher association projects in a low-resourced challenging context’ involving colleagues from Cuba and Palestine. Explore also the
aforementioned downloadable volume edited by A. Padwad and R. Smith, Decentring ELT: Practices and Possibilities (AINET 2023), 8 ELTAs report there on decentring initiatives.

A history of BETA?
Certainly BETA has a history that yet has to be researched in new ways, when there was much innovation, strong volunteerism and solidarity. That should be a necessary focus in future research on past BETA accomplishments and dynamism. That dynamism is reflected in the BETA archives still extant online going back to Jan. 1999, and publications back to the year 2000. Despite the pandemic, a number of other ELTAs across the planet went digital and were quite active in 2020-2021 and on into 2022/2023. Although they lost some membership (as in IATEFL as well). One factor perhaps impacting on the BETA E-Newsletter was mounting pressure on colleagues at universities to publish in Scopus-listed more prestigious journals. Yet we all can write an article for a journal XYZ and simultaneously another, perhaps less detailed and ‘academic,’ for a local E-Newsletter. In any case, a history of BETA would be a good joint project for the ELT profession in this country. Here is an intriguing new book just published: Doing rebellious research in and beyond the academy (Brill 2022). A strong review of the book is here. Its zany book launch accessible here.

Trade unionism transformed
How many EFL teachers in BG are members of a trade union, and how does that affect their professional lives? What rights do you have as a working teacher? We think this also needs new encouragement. KNSB, Podkrepa Education have data on this. And new ways of working together between BETA and the BG unions, locally and beyond, need to be brainstormed, experimented with, new US grassroots unionism emergent. Read this on the UK rail strike, a ‘summer of discontent’ and angry strikes in the UK aborning. See Bill’s article on social justice unionism published in FUTURITY #3 (2021), the new e-zine of GISIG/IATEFL, online here. Korstad’s 2003 book on ‘civil
rights unionism’ in the US south very revealing regarding unionism and racism. Unionism involves the whole focus of Teachers as Workers. Some of our colleagues created TaWSIG association several years ago, and it addresses many aspects of worker issues. Such as employment conditions, pay, precarity in TEFL, preparation time allocation, teacher burnout. This on precarious adjunct hiring. Read this on zero hours contracts. The TaWSIG blog has a new two-part eye-opening interview with Geoff Jordan on his new book co-authored with the late Mike Long: English Language Teaching Now and How It Could Be (2022), well worth reading/discussing, here is an extract. It deals in part with task-based learning (Mike Long. Second Language Acquisition and Task-Based Language Learning, 2015) as a key past & future direction, as well as a re-strengthening of Teaching Unplugged (Thornbury & Meddings, 2009). Geoff stresses:

So the ‘next steps’ can be seen as a quickening in pace as we retreat from the global commodification and standardization of ELT. All the projects we discuss in the book share a belief in local action: local groups organizing among themselves; local teachers taking control of their own on-going teacher development, meeting the needs of local people. [...] In such a scenario, compromises will be made, but the hydra of current ELT practice will be a wounded beast, slowly giving way to a better, more vibrant, more interesting, more fulfilling job for ‘the English teachers of the world’ to whom our book is dedicated.

The TEFL WORKERS’ UNION in the UK is also a powerful paradigm of a local union centered on EFL teachers, what demands it can raise, and how it can protect teachers and their rights. Here is their FB page. And here is their website. You can explore their charter there, and interview links, as well as their lesson plans on ‘Labour English,’ instead of ‘Business English.’ The TWU is associated with the IWW. Watch this docu-
film The Wobblies on the IWW. The TWU is a union for all who work at a language school, not just teachers (drivers, secretaries, librarians, cleaners, etc.). They also organize branches and strikes in a single language school. Here is a TWU leaflet. This from TWU on ‘heat’ and Employment Rights. Also this on employment rights and dodgy contracts. See also ELT UNITE in Ireland. Its militant strike activities in Dublin focused on a single language school: See also this. On their struggle, read this article and this. ELT UNITE is a paradigm esp. for teachers in private schools. BC workers plan a strike, TWU agrees. See also this dispute at Northumbria U.. Read this interview with colleagues at the NU Language Centre. Read this on zero-hour contracts from the US and a Supreme Court ruling. Rutgers Univ. in the US experiences a strike of huge magnitude, spring 2023, a ‘historic’ staff action. Teachers in Israel face innumerable problems, a serious EFL teacher shortage. Ian Allinson has written a book on organizing at work, Workers Can Win (Pluto Press, 2022). UK conference on rank-and-file organizing ‘How We Fight. How We Win’ in the UK. Cultural workers (museums, libraries) across Britain are striking April 2023; the crucial role of public libraries needs new support!

Imagine such school-based mini-unions in Bulgaria, maybe emergent on the ever more unpredictable fightback labor horizon. Read this on the new unionism powerfully burgeoning in the US. Nonetheless, as of 2023, only some 10% of US workers are unionized. Watch this 2-min. explainer on the value of labor and show to students, discuss. On ‘class struggle unionism,’ here is an article on the new book by Joe Burns, Class Struggle Unionism (2022). It can be found cost-free online as EPUB (with a modicum of search). Unions are campaigning for a four-day work week, and end to zero-hour contracts, more options for remote working, paid travel time hours, paid CPD training sessions and much more. Many teacher unions in the US are locally based, in a single city, or at a single school or university. This on the CTU in Chicago, which also includes non-teaching school worker staff. Ever more students are also
unionizing, as among graduate students at MIT. And protests: protect kids not guns. This on organizing a Workers Assembly, also an idea we could pursue among TEFL teachers in BG.

**Lives of teachers (LoT)**

We think we need a SIG centered on Lives of Teachers (LoT), TESOL International used to have such a group. See Bill’s article the BETA E-Newsletter (Sept.-Oct. 2018) on LoT and this article published in Malaysia. Also see Bill’s article “Exploring Teachers’ Real Lives and Voices: A Vital Research Focus in Pedeutological Inquiry,” *New Educational Review, vol. 18*, 2009, 141-63. TaWSIG also deals with a range of such questions, teachers’ daily workaday lives. Bill’s article on LoT as a research desideratum in BG appeared in the *BETA E-Newsletter 2015* and another article ‘Breaking the Silence: Discussing the Realities of Our Own Workaday Lives as Teachers,’ *BETA E-Newsletter*, #37, Sept.-Oct. 2018. Stress, burnout in US. Sarah Mercer (Uni Graz) presented on ‘Wellbeing at the heart of language teaching: teacher and learner perspectives’, FOELT conf. 11 July 22, central to LoT, [online](https://example.com). Here is a précis of another new article on teachers and hope co-written by Sarah. See this book on Teachers’ Emotional Wellness by Israeli colleagues (pdf if you explore). [Edutopia](https://example.com) has many good articles on teacher wellness. A review of 69 research articles on TEFL university teachers was recently published. Edutopia has articles on umpteen topics, see their [Index](https://example.com), a wealth of excellent cost-free resources. See also autoethnography for LoL below.

**Workforce housing**

What is the situation of workforce housing for teachers and other school and university staff in Bulgaria in 2023? Common in BG socialism, can it be reinstituted where necessary? Also a means to attract teachers into the profession, and to attract colleagues to certain localities. An intriguing question, read this post on BETA FB. If you can’t open BETA FB, read this VOA article 31 July 2022. This on the housing crisis.
in Los Angeles. Listen to Prof. Harvey on housing in a broken system, itself a kind of autoethnography of his own Marxist awakening.

Read this on confronting corporate landlord greed in the US.

**LoL (lives of learners)**

Colleague Sarah Mercer (cf. above) is heavily interested in that, a broad area of research. Students in many teaching ecologies have lost a lot over the fractioning time of lockdown and peak COVID. Much there to narrate and chronicle in a kind of student autoethnography of lockdown and distance learning. This on experience in Massachusetts schools. Learners’ lives as focus is central in the collection American Teens Talk! recommended above. One key TA research prism is the research subfield autoethnography. Centering existentially on teacher + student identity formation, core ‘stories’ Regarding autoethnography as a growing subfield, you can find a first Routledge handbook (2012) online cost-free and 2nd handbook (2022) online cost-free as well. The RESIG PCE Harrogate 17 April 2023 centered on ‘Teacher research and inclusion and social justice in language education’, including a workshop on ‘Action research and autoethnography for social justice’ (by P. de Costa). Read Peter de Costa et al., ‘Bridging the researcher-practitioner divide through community-engaged action research: A collaborative autoethnographic exploration’. *MLJ 106*(3), 2022, accessible open-access. See also Yazan (2020) and Canagarajah (2012) on autoethnography.

**Finding the time**

Central in our own CPD and working/studying lives is finding and budgeting time. Teachers need to share practical ideas on how they do this in their own daily workaday lives. And brainstorm together on new angles, fresh options. Most teachers are overworked, underpaid, in Bulgaria perhaps in particular. How can time and energy found to volunteer in an association, a union project, a community of
practice? Should some of that time invested be paid for extra, by employers, by the
government. A form of material CPD incentivizing. Some teachers in Bulgaria spend
2-3 hours a day and more traveling 50 km+ to and from their place of work, unpaid
time. TAs need to be addressing this inequity in creative ways. How can establishing
and joining a CPD book EFL club (perhaps digitally) be concretely incentivized? In TaWSIG, we discussed one of Freire’s books digitally over several weeks—enjoyable, enlightening. Experimentation beckons.

Critical pedagogy // IATEFL global issues SIG
Listen to Steve Brown (Scotland) in a podcast interview (18 min.) on the GISIG IATEFL
site. We recommend reading his brief article linked there: ‘Which side are you on:
IATEFL in a messed up world.’ We think it is important to address social issues inside
TEFL classes —casting needed light on the inner workings of power structures and
“manufactured consent” in the classic propaganda model sense of Herman &
Chomsky (1988) in the world today—Steve suggests a certain perspective, grounded
in solid experience. We would also recommend the podcast interview with Harry
Kuchah Kuchah on racism and with Julietta Schoenmann on Extinction Rebellion and
the ever deepening ecocrisis. There are other podcasts. GISIG has an excellent
Resources section, take a look. Acquire and share the Routledge International
Handbook of Critical Education (2009), online cost-free. Some ELTAs around the world
have such special interest groups, such as GILE in Japan and TESOL Int. (SRIS). And we
cant learn to situate the various Sustainable Development Goals in local contexts,
specifically in BG and the Balkans, with all the local contradictions and obstacles.
There is a clear need for bringing PEACE STUDIES back into school and university
curricula, worldwide. Many excellent articles on a range of current issues – social,
pedagogical, political – are downloadable at the THE site Campus. And
read/download Y. T. Cakcak’s diss., based in Turkey, online: >Preparing Teacher
Candidates As Passive Technicians, Reflective Practitioners or Transformative Intellectuals.< See Kieran Donaghy’s article “Embedding a Culture of Empathy in Language Teaching” and multiliteracies/ EFL. Creating a SIG centered on social justice issues is a real option for BETA.

**Philosophy for children (P4C)**

Become acquainted with the Center for Philosophy for Children at PLATO at the University of Washington, a huge storehouse of 250+ lesson plans at levels from preschool to high school and beyond. Read this intro article by Jana Mohr Lone, Center director. Begin to think about how to raise philosophical questions with whatever level of learners you have. It nurtures young people’s curiosity, critical thinking and desire to explore ‘big questions’, including about what is ‘fair’, basic ethics. Build collaborative networking with philosophy teachers in secondary schools in your area, maybe a Community of Practice. This kind of teaching is vital, fascinating, too little explored. We think badly needed, everywhere. See also P4C, and Philosophy for Children (UNESCO 2020 downloadable). Acquire / share/ discuss J.M. Lone’s Seen and Not Heard: Why Children’s Voices Matter (2021), and her book The Philosophical Child (2012), and her Philosophy in Education: Questioning and Dialogue in Schools (2016), (all three accessible online cost-free). Also get the Routledge International Handbook of Philosophy for Children (2017), likewise accessible online cost-free. Dig in!

**New ‘how to …” guides**

The British Council is publishing four such “guides’ designed for colleagues in the MENA macro-region, see here. One available is by Daniel Xerri, How can teachers best be encouraged to engage with research – published and their own practitioner inquiry?, accessible online. Explore an Introduction to these guides.
Encourage and develop far more extensive reading in BG

Get students interested in Extensive Reading, here is an ER-Central. See also Xreading and the Extensive Reading Foundation, ERF’s quiz site mreader is useful. Thomas Robb presented an instructive webinar on ‘ER practice’ 6 Aug 22. accessible as video on the IATEFL site for members. Bill’s paper on ‘Extensive Free Voluntary Reading and Free Voluntary Listening—Some Thoughts On How? And Why?’ in Bulgaria’, BETA Ruse conference June 2012, is downloadable here. Bear in mind: back issues of the BETA E-Newsletter were still accessible on the BETA site until recently, and will be again – the last one Sept.-Oct 2019.

Reimagining reading: creating book clubs

Such clubs are feasible even with lower-level learners, younger kids, older adults using graded readers --- and there is much experience with this in various teaching ecologies. Such clubs also open the door to empirical research on what they accomplish, how they motivate, shape new learner interests in reading and sharing in L1 and EFL. And they create literacy groups and of course encourage Extensive Reading.

BETA should experiment and try to stimulate creation of such book clubs and reading circles, in schools and at universities. Likewise among colleagues as a COP, a digital network focused on reading and discussing a specific book. The concept here is book a book club in the sense of a reading circle and a broader club for students to interact in a more public pedagogical frame for interaction outside of the classroom.

Resources to explore for book clubs

A brief article on literacy and book clubs from the US: https://tinyurl.com/yar5r6m2

This from the BC on English Clubs: This from U Michigan in the US (good ideas and some further resources).
From VOA Learning English

PART 1  **CREATING AN ENGLISH CLUB**

PART 2  **CREATING FUN ENGLISH CLUB ACTIVITIES**

Some other useful resources

Three articles: (1) High school book club, a menu of options; (2) ESL book clubs, how can they work?; (3) Everyday ESL book clubbing

Two books: Book Clubs in the English Language Classroom (U Michigan Press 2005)
READERS CLUB HANDBOOK (US Dept. of State 2018)

Such clubs could also be engaged in writing initiatives, like the HANDS UP PROJECT POETRY WRITING COMPETITION 2023. But in a single country, like BG. Why can’t there be a BETA POETRY WRITING COMPETITION? -- something to think about.

**DOGME ELT + people’s English**

Some of us think Dogme ELT is a doable pathway to tread down and re-energize inside ELT in Bulgaria, definitely a rediscovered trend. Scott Thornbury has a new talk ‘Dogme ELT comes of age’ (2022) and also some older presentations (‘Teaching unplugged’ 2016), here. He gave a plenary talk at the recent Serbia ELTA conf. in Belgrade and at TESOL International in the US. Here are various talks by Scott on YouTube: here is one talk, and here is another, extensive. His book with Luke Meddings TEACHING UNPLUGGED (2009) can be found as pdf online. Xcellent is this Dogme lesson video with Luke 2012 in Exeter. Scott gave a brilliant online talk ‘Dogme Frees the Spirit,’ 14 June 2020 on TEACHER DEVELOPMENT WEBINARS, https://tdwebinars.org/, a great resource site. Scott’s 65-min. talk 14 June is in video archive now.

We long think that we should also concentrate on teaching simpler, downshifted ‘people’s English for the planet,’ that can be also combined with ELT pedagogies grounded in Dogme ELT. And engage in research on such experimentation. Bill’s article ‘Putting the Brakes on Complexity’ (2010) deals with that from several angles,
as does the article ‘A Two-Tier Model for a More Simplified and Sustainable English as an International Language,’ *JCEPS* 7(2), 2009. Another such article is ‘Pedagogies for Plainer Talk: Reclaiming the Commons of Discourse’ (2008). A [mini-research center](#) for this is needed, one could be established in BG.

**Eco-communities of practice?**

What still rarely exists are small groups of teachers at the same school mind-sharing and team-teaching on environmental issues across several disciplinary subjects in the curriculum, such as foreign languages, Bulgarian, history, biology, math, geography, civics / Граж. Об., art, religion, philosophy – focusing on issues important in [democratic, critical place-based](#) education, like the environment. Colleagues at UK universities are calling for making “[sustainability integral to all teaching](#) and a ‘way of life’ on campus.” [STEM learning](#) is also a growing concern in BG. Easy [STEM activities](#) for kids. Teachers in Bulgaria need to cooperate creating various CLIL-oriented multiple-subject learning experiments, combining several school disciplines in looking at some issue, theme or focus. Here is an article on [CLIL and foreign language teaching](#), and a [CLIL-focused bibliography](#) up to 2018 worth exploring. CLIL can also generate [team teaching](#) in a concrete way, and can encourage critical pedagogy, critical thinking and education cutting across several subject areas, geography, history and science in particular. It also can be undergirded by [task-based language teaching](#) (TBLT), as stressed above by Geoff Jordan (and Mike Long) in their new book. See also this [brief article](#) on TBLT, and this new open-access book on implementing TBLT by R. Erlam & C. Tolosa (2022 below). An excellent book to get students talking is Margit Szesztay, *Talking to Learn: Learning to Talk. Group Dialogue in Education* (Brno: Versatile 2020). See [review by S. Hartle](#). [Scaffolding](#) is also good practice, see [here](#).
Create interaction online and face2face: 3 tools introduced and evaluated by Russell Stannard: “ Over the last months, I have been collecting data from teachers about their best 3 technologies for teaching and learning. I ran the survey on my website for a week and I also asked some of the teachers on my courses to complete the survey. The video is proving really popular.” Watch this video. Definitely watch carefully and learn from Russell Stannard (16 April 2023): ‘Practice English Pronunciation with ChatGPT’, using the tool NaturalReader.

TBLT can include a significant amount of improvisation by students in their tasks, and by teachers in task suggestion, The final June 2022 BETA mini-conference plenary by colleague Sylvia Velikova (VTU) focuses on “the improvisational dimension of language teaching. It argues that improvisation is at the heart of teacher expertise and an essential teaching skill that student teachers need to develop during their teacher education.” Also in connection perhaps with aspects of TBLT, where improvising is crucial. Collaborating with other teachers in your school or university, as Aleksandra Zaparucha stresses in her interview (“The What, Why and How”) is a good introduction to CLIL perspectives and parameters, as is Keith Kelly’s article (“Ingredients”) and Ball, Kelly & Cage (Putting CLIL). Keith Kelly, long based in Plovdiv, is active within Trashed World and Tigtag CLIL. Watch & enjoy Aleksandra Zaparucha’s 2019 IATEFL plenary and Xcellent interview. Colleague Zaparucha has great ideas on Content-enhanced Instruction, a form of ‘soft CLIL,’ an article in HLT August 2022. See also ‘Eco-CLIL’ (as at the Plovdiv BETA PCE 2019, Day 1 CLIL - Waste in the Curriculum). deBoer & Leontjev is a useful recent volume, and Dan Xerri has a brief good introduction to CLIL as a focus. On Eco-CLIL, see also the article ‘Implanting Nature’s Voice’ first published in BETA E-Newsletter 2019, and Bill’s book review of Naomi Klein’s new book on guiding students to delve into and deal with climate disaster: How to Change Everything (2021). Tina Landis (2020) offers an incisive Marxist-socialist analysis; read Jodi Dean’s radical Foreword online linked there. Explore
GISIG’s section on the climate crisis. This on refugees/migration in GISIG resources, another good CLIL social justice focus area. Critical environmentalism in local action invites creative collaboration among teachers, which BETA on principle encourages. Students can also become involved with locally-based Green political action groups and youth groups of actual Green parties in BG and elsewhere, as stressed in two articles by Bill (Templer, Galvanizing Critical Citizenship, 2017; From ‘Greed to Green’, 2018). Below links for teaching about climate issues /ecocrisis. See this panel discussion 15 April 2023 as one example of a needed focus: ‘Fighting Capitalism’s ecological death cult’.

We haven’t touched on Ungrading, or the A-1 site for students to create small books of their own: www.bookcreator.com. Topics inter alia for another time and space. Build now toward another regeneration, a new annual conference 9/10 Sept. 2023. BETA напред и успех!

♪♪ As a musical postlude, listen, ponder & enjoy Bob Dylan’s ‘Blowin’ in the wind’, sung by Peter, Paul & Mary. And also this by the trio, Pete Seeger’s 1949 folk classic ‘If I had a hammer.’ Listen also to Pete Seeger singing it with text onscreen in 1964 ♪♪♪.

References/Eco-crisis and CLIL

Ball, Phil, Kelly, Keith & Cage, John. (2015). *Putting CLIL into Practice*. OUP


https://www.amazon.com/dp/B085PZ9Y3X


_____. From ‘Greed to Green’: Toward Hands-on, Place-based Green Pedagogy in TEFL. *IATEFL GISIG Newsletter*, 38, 56-64.

https://www.academia.edu/48905451/Implanting_Natures_Voice_in_ELT_Education_An_Urgent_Imperative

https://www.academia.edu/76497424/How_to_change_everything

Moving toward Self-Determined, Learner-Controlled Democratic Alternative Education in Bulgaria

♩ Listen to Pete Seeger 60 years ago, ‘What did you learn in school today?’ and ‘Banks of Marble’ + ‘Little Boxes’, our article is in Pete’s undying spirit ♩

Fostering self-determined mindgrowth and learner voices

Bill Templer and Silviya Templer

In a companion article to ‘Reinventing BETA’ in these mayhemic toxic times, we wish to suggest here the need today to foster dynamic Mindgrowth, a growth mindset, by engaging more hands-on inside our own teaching and learning ecologies with experiments in democratic ‘personalized’ schooling, self-determined learning, autodidactic forms of ‘sociocratic/ democratic’ citizenship education, моето учене е мой избор! Pedagogy centered on developing learner voices and deep autonomy.

That is increasingly reflected in a whole range of catalytic movements in ‘free school’ experimentation worldwide, and soon (we hope) more in BG. STEP BY STEP education center in Sofia is a model personalized curriculum private school we can all learn from. Make such centers public! In particular, delve into evolutionary psychologist Peter Gray’s A-1 work noted below. His pedagogy centers on liberating and empowering learners’ voices, their own passions, beyond mainstream schooling. Watch his 2018 Ted Talk video ‘How our schools thwart passions’. Mind-changing! And watch Gray on the biology of education and why conventional schooling is obsolescent. Re learners’ voices, share/discuss Jana Mohr Lone’s Seen and Not Heard: Why Children’s Voices Matter (2021), her superb books The Philosophical Child (2012), and Philosophy in Education: Questioning and Dialogue in Schools (2016) (all 3 accessible
Also share/discuss this A-1 book by Paolo Freire, one of his best (downloadable cost-free)!


Schools like this in Canada are one good paradigm of alternative democratic schooling. These are inspired in central ways by Summerhill School (1921) in the UK, the Sudbury Valley School (1968) in the US, and self-directed democratic schools and Sudbury schools stateside & elsewhere. And embodied within a new largely digital initiative Evolving Education, and the Learning Expedition, and Re-imagining Education. Central within AERO (founded 1989), along with pedagogical spaces of student-directed freedom and autonomy like Wondering School (see below), and the work of the Community for Democratic Education (CDE) in Bulgaria. This on the CDE’s daily routine, various CDE articles, CDE news and photo gallery. They will hold a joint international conference together with EUDEC in Sofia 1-7 August 2023. Read EUDEC’s explanation of ‘democratic education’; this on past conferences. We hope some from BETA will attend the August EUDEC conference, preceding the planned BETA conf. 9-10 Sept. The Hands up Project 2023 poetry writing competition for young learners (aged 15 and below) centers on fostering learner voices, as does the HUP Conference April 2023 in Harrogate, its theme ‘learner voices’. See also the Routledge International Handbook of Student-Centered Learning and Teaching in...
Higher Education (2020) and the Routledge International Handbook of Innovation Education (2013) both online cost-free. We strongly recommend downloading a cost-free copy of American Teens Talk!, a collection of 30 interviews with US high school students in written and audio format. Each teen interview is accompanied by vocabulary notes and discussion questions. It gives a view into the lives of US adolescents, student voice and their experience central. Students in your school/ town could create a similar book, BG Teens Talk! See also this recent ARTIS conference in Sofia on digital creativity, AI photography, digital painting, animation and 3D modeling, a paradigm mini-conference in BG.

The April 2023 issue of HLT foregrounds in part approaches in the Rudolf Steiner Waldorf schools, centered on holistic education, improvisation, strengthening learner voices. Get this book: R. Steiner, Teaching Language Arts in the Waldorf School (2012), and M. Barton et al., An Introduction to Steiner Education: the Waldorf School (2013, both online cost-free). Explore also Ecoversities in depth, recommend to colleagues and students. Explore Liberated Learners. Sadly, one great democratic college experiment in Oregon, WAYFINDING ACADEMY, has come to an end, dissolving May 2023, but its achievements cum legacy will live on to inspire many others, WATCH THIS VIDEO. Listen to Adam Fletcher speaking on ‘Modern youth leadership’, youth mainstreaming and empowerment of voice. Hyperlinks ↓double-underlined.↓

Many of us think ‘critical democratic education’ is highly necessary for changing schools anywhere into centers of student self-discovery, centrally driven by student voice, student empowerment and student passions & interests. This needs to be foregrounded far more proactively inside BETA and across the Balkans, and introduced by colleagues in concrete creative collaboration. That is feasible. Sparking learning that is self-willed, “where the learner gets to decide what to learn, when, where, how, and why to learn” (Ricci & Riley 2023, 7). It will doubtless improve a
student’s authentic engaged learning experience in EFL, as students awaken to discovering their own interests and what they really want to learn, their own ‘element’, ‘learner autonomy’ as a graduated process, and ‘learner selfhood’, ‘experiential learning through doing’, using ‘learner-generated content’ (Freire), ‘whole-person learning’ enmeshed in learners’ lives. Also explore Carlo Ricci’s journal JUAL: ‘This journal seeks to bring together an international community of scholars exploring the topic of unschooling and alternative learning, which espouses learner centered democratic approaches to learning’. Watch this event on democratic rights & schools March 2023. Teachers also help to ‘weave’ closer-knit communities. Watch this video on ‘weaving’ together the social fabric, creating deeper social ties. Discuss/share this article on ‘Understanding a Solidarity Economy and Just Transition’ from Observatory.

Evolutionary psychologist Peter Gray

One outstanding psychologist we all should be reading and listening to is Peter Gray, here is a range of his insightful articles in Psychology Today. His book Free to Learn (2013) is well worth studying/discussing. Here is an extended A-1 video on self-directed education by Peter Dec. 2020. And a recent article by Peter on why so many kids are suffering, unfree to learn, their childhood over-controlled by adults. Listen to him here and here is in an extended insightful talk. Here he speaks on ‘What exactly is play?’. Here is an animated video by Dr. Gray, and another. Watch this video as well and this on evolutionary psychology. This is also a superb video talk (Sept. 2021) on self-directed education. Peter helped create the Alliance for Self-Directed Education (ASDE), which BG colleagues can explore/share. See also Tipping Points Press and Akilah S. Richards. Raising Free People: Unschooling as Liberation and Healing Work (2020), online cost-free. And also Naomi Fischer, Changing Our Minds: How Children Can Take Control of Their Own Learning (2021), a Kindle Edition. Preface by Peter Gray.
Educational reform on the agenda

Given that the Bulgarian caretaker government in March 2023 adopted a special ‘education plan’ under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (see https://tinyurl.com/5ete8dd8), the question of ‘democratizing educational practice and schooling, student empowerment’ has taken on a new saliency likewise here in Bulgaria, as a looming glocal ever more timely issue. At the present juncture, many teachers in EFL in Bulgaria have had almost no input for CPD (Continuing Professional Development) over the past 3+ years, due to the pandemic and other factors. Here is CPD for tyro teachers. Also in the context of discussion on educational content in state schools, what coursebooks are used, a roundtable was held on 28 March 2023. BG President Radev has argued in favor of a ‘single textbook’ per subject per grade’ used nationally for subjects like history, geography, Bulgarian literature, clearly a controversial issue.

Doing democratic education hands- and minds-on in BG

For starters in ancillary input on democratic/sociocratic schooling (and creative ‘unschooling’, ‘deschooling’, ‘decentering the classroom’), make sure to read/discuss Mike Weimann’s A-1 article ‘Integrating Elements of Democratic Schools in Traditional Schools’, within a broader volume just published in Vienna. Here is a link to Weimann, and here to the entire volume Doing Democratic Education in School and University (LIT Verlag, Vienna 2023). There are a no. of other excellent articles in English in that volume, like on student management, new structures of student voice, and many concrete, example-based articles in German. This is a key freely accessible collaborative book on democratic education experimentation, worth exploring, perhaps in a reading circle online. The new downloadable volume Padwad & Smith
First national get-together in BG for the free development of education
A conference on imagining more free and deeply democratic educational alternatives was held in Sofia 15-16 Feb. 2014, titled “ПЪРВА НАЦИОНАЛНА СРЕЩА ЗА СВОБОДНО РАЗВИТИЕ НА ОБРАЗОВАНИЕТО<. One striking example of democratic schools has been pioneered by Yaacov Hecht in Israel. He was a keynote speaker invited to the Sofia conference exploring angles on transforming mainstream education into spaces of greater student and mentor/teacher freedom. Here is Hecht’s core Sofia presentation: watch, share/ponder and discuss. Hecht’s work is highlighted further below. Also linked below are other recorded talks from that 2014 conference, unfortunately now little known among colleagues in any school subject today in Bulgaria: presentations on democratic education and the role of education legally in BG and other approaches to learning, knowing -- what, why and how? Watch also this recording! As well as this on democratic, self-organizing parental coops.

Discovering the CDE: My learning is my choice / моето учене е мой избор
These Sofia 2014 talks are connected with the Community for Democratic Education in Bulgaria (other CDE video talks here). The CDE is an NGO founded in 2014 in BG with a core pedagogical aim: to help develop active citizenship in support of free education and to spread the word about the values and principles of democratic education. The CDE’s main project is the Center for Democratic Learning - an off-grid school practising democratic education and self-directed learning. Read more here. The CDE helps organize training workshops and seminars and promotes free learning and democratic education. Another main CDE project is ‘The (im)Possible Education’
Festival, launched in 2017 to make all kinds of humane education and approaches more accessible and popular in Bulgaria. The Festival consists of screenings of documentaries on education, discussions and workshops and was been carried out in 11 towns in Bulgaria in 2019. Here is the Youtube channel of the Festival: Together with the European Democratic Education Community (EUDEC), the Bulgarian CDE is holding a 7-day conference 1-7 August 2023, in Sofia, see here. Explore this on EUDEC, here are some invited speakers.

In the mindsteps of Ken Robinson
An awesome lecture by Ken is ‘Reimagine learning that can change the world’ (Nov. 2017). For supplementation, take time to read/share/discuss Bill’s article on Ken Robinson and anthropologist/eduACTor David Graeber in FUTURY #02 (Global Issues SIG/IATEFL, 2020), available online. And Bill’s article ‘Toward learner-centered, learner-determined alternative democratic education’ (FUTURY #06, March 2023) ditto online. It provides more detail and links relevant to the present article. His book Creative Schools has many sections dealing with ventures like Big Picture Learning, AERO, Steiner schools & more.

AERO and democratic schooling
We suggest exploring alternative democratic education globally through the broad prism of AERO (Alternative Education Resource Organization) founded by Jerry Mintz in the US. Acquire a pdf copy of his book, School’s Over: How to Have Freedom and Democracy in Education (2017), foreword by Ken Robinson (online cost-free). You can find many articles from the AERO archives and the Education Revolution Magazine here. Listen to Dr. Peter Berg, Asst. Director of AERO, speaking 12 March 2023. His research focuses on holistic education, self-determinant education models that are directed by learners, and catalytic transformative leadership. More on AERO in Bill’s
2023 FUTURITY article linked above. Here is the intriguing AERO conference June 23-25, 2023. In the spirit of AERO, beware of miseducation, mass conditioning in standard schooling. Read eduACtor John Gatto: here is a video, some key books, listen here + here to Gatto.


**Big picture learning**

Long allied with AERO is the work of Dennis Littky, his key project Big Picture Learning (BPL). BPL now has some 160 schools in operation across the world. Informative and a real eye-opener is the book Dennis Littky with Samantha Grabelle, The Big Picture: Education is Everyone’s Business (2004, available online cost-free). On BPL’s approach, read this, and on visualizing the process. Meet the BPL team. A good book on BPL is Eliot Levine, One Kid at a Time: Big Lessons from a Small School (2001). Littky also oversees the adult education in the real world of work initiative College Unbound. This on resources for College Unbound. See also Elliot Washor and Charles Mojkowski, Leaving to Learn. How Out-of-School Learning Increases Student Engagement and Reduces Dropout Rates (2013). A follow-up to the seminal Leaving to Learn, Learning to Leave (2023) is all about real-world learning and getting deeply ‘inside the outside’ where youth are engaged with adults around their interests in search of doing things that give their life meaning. More students are also turning to learning beyond the classroom – a decentering of in-depth learning into the worlds of real work and the wider local community – such as via student-self-selected traineeships/ internships/ apprenticeships. And read this from the US on how ever more youth are perceiving the diminishing economic value of both a high school diploma and a college degree and the purpose of such standard education, looking for other options and the skills needed. The situation of US community colleges...
year, lower-cost) is now fraught with serious problems, plunging enrollments. Life-long learning is also a focus in BPL. Read ‘What can Singapore teach us about lifelong learning? Read more on BPL in Bill’s article in FUTURITY #06, 2023 link online.

**Democratic schools in Israel**

Zero in on the work of Israeli eduACTor Yaacov Hecht, also an AERO mainstay in developing democratic schools. Watch his 10-min. overview, A-1. Read this on his ‘Education Cities’ project that sprang directly from Hecht’s work, and an article on An Education City. What about such ‘education cities’ in BG? – we can experiment! Here he reflects on the shift from a Pyramid paradigm to a network paradigm; and on the shift from a Teaching-based school to a learning-based school. He speaks about ‘Finding your element’ (echoing Robinson). Here is Hecht in 2014 in Sofia, speaking to students about ‘Finding your own colour’. A Q&A session with Yaacov in Sofia Feb. 2014, plus a second such section. Explore references to other Hecht talks, including a recent web interview 19 Jan. 2023 (from min. 7:40). Here is Hecht’s background (Wiki), Acquire/discuss his book Democratic Education (2013, online cost-free), also in a Bulgarian translation.

**Evolving education**

Explore the site Evolving Education, you’ll be pleasantly surprised. Download their cost-free ebook QUESTIONING EDUCATION. It advocates new educational practices that empower learners to take responsibility for their learning, self-implemented fresh angles on alternative self-pedagogy and personal in-depth learning. Check out the EE FB site. Tp be sure, EE offers online courses, some of which are a bit costly. But we can learn from their open-access web-based free interviews, like that with Henry Dingle in the UK: he talks in a fundamental way about what his approach to democratic education encompasses, his exemplary experiences as a democratic
eduACTor, mentoring teens to create self-learning grounded in ‘substance’ -- not test results or standard curricula. His school is Young Fire Academy, where students are taking everyday ‘existential responsibility’ for their own learning. His interview can be combined with that of Philipp Klaus, a Summerhill democratic school teacher and educator, many ideas there, anchored in his experience. Summerhill School recently celebrated its centenary. A new book about Summerhill by E. Neill is Barefoot in November, Parenting the Summerhill Way (2023). Many books by A.S. Neill.

Derry Hannam, eduACTor extraordinaire

Also listen to senior eduACTor from the UK Derry Hannam, here speaking in Brazil. And watch this 2017 interview with Derry in the UK: it begins with a question about ‘testocracy’. Do you your students live in a ‘testocracy’, many kids do? Also read Hannam’s report on student empowerment and participation in the UK in alternative democratic schooling (2001, a 74-page influential official document). An excellent text on schooling and democracy is Derry Hannam’s expanded keynote address (August 2018) on the AERO site: ‘We Hold the Keys to the Future and Should Not Be Afraid to Say So’.

Wondering school

Encourage colleagues to explore the videos at >Wondering School<. Watch and discuss this video: Here are a number of videos from WS, including their key film School Circles: Every Voice Matters (it is rentable). You can subscribe to Wondering School and learn more, here are various talks. Listen to this excellent talk on >Humanising Education Systems that Value Participation<. Here is another video talk on >Sociocracy in Schools<, and how decisions about school management are made at democratic schools. Who has a voice, who doesn’t? Watch this presentation on the Osorio School as a ‘practice of freedom’.
Expanding ‘student voice’ in state schooling

Listen to Nikhil Goyal, a young student in the US speaking about democratic schooling. Nikhil wrote Schools on Trial: *How Freedom and Creativity Can Fix Our Educational Malpractice*, a book rooted in his own experience. You can find a cost-free copy at zlibrary. Explore the >Network of Democratic Citizenship Schools< on FB and >Student Voice Research and Practice<

Teaching unplugged?

In TEFL we think teachers and students should determine the books, resources they use, including Dogme/Teaching Unplugged: listen to Scott Thornbury on ‘Dogme Frees the Spirit’, a brilliant webinar 14 June 2022 (with no slides 😊). Read also Jason Parry’s excellent MA thesis on Dogme and Luke Meddings & Scott Thornbury, Teaching Unplugged (2009), a key book is here accessible online. Xcellent is this Dogme lesson video with Luke 2012 in Exeter. We strongly urge you to watch Scott’s webinar on Dogme, it is brilliant and relevant to all forms of democratic participative education in ‘communities of practice’, the whole person acting in the world’, ‘ecological learning’ where learners are exposed to the world beyond the classroom, in a sense ‘going into the wild’. Tom Godfrey has developed Forum Theatre and performative pedagogy as a way for teachers to discover themselves, and to teach in a more ‘unplugged’ way, based in part on ideas of A. Boal, here is recent webinar. Really great!

Global issues in TEFL

Such democratic education also places engaged catalytic stress on teaching and discussing critical issues in society, economy and culture. In latching on to critical pedagogy in ELT, listen to Steve Brown (Scotland) in a podcast interview (18 min.) on the GISIG IATEFL site. We recommend reading his brief article linked there: ‘Which
side are you on: IATEFL in a messed up world.’ See also Bill’s paper co-authored with Silviya Templer: ‘Changing the world, walking the talk: Global Issues hands-on in the EFL classroom’ (BETA conference, Ruse 2012). We think it is crucial now to address social issues inside TEFL classes. Introduce students/colleagues to the International Manifesto Group, its eco-socialist ideas, and the PCI (Post Carbon Institute) and IAC – the core overriding principle of ‘people and planet over profits’. Students at B1 level and above should be encouraged to read explore & read something in IAC (International Action Center) every few days, and maybe write about it in a personal journal. GISIG/IATEFL has an excellent Resources section, take a look. Get a copy of Henry A. Giroux, Pedagogy of Resistance: Against Manufactured Ignorance (Bloomsbury 2022) available online cost-free. Here is a recent article by Henry Giroux on education as the ‘practice of freedom’ and the ‘war on youth’ in the context of a deepening fascism in our neoliberalized times, what Giroux terms the ‘domestication of the unimaginable’. Ponder also sociologist Erik Olin Wright, Envisioning Real Utopias (Verso, 2010 online), many powerful ideas, Watch also Wright, ‘Transforming capitalism through real utopias’, Glasgow U (video talk 2013). Listen to Prof. Noam Chomsky 15 March 2023, and read 10 April 2023 on ‘savage Capitalism’, super! We also think the whole question of re-exploring with BG students the legacy and achievements of ‘real-existing socialism’ before 1990 in Bulgaria and the Warsaw Pact countries should be encouraged, see this for the GDR. We have recently put an article online as draft on healthcare in socialist Bulgaria, something we wrote in 2015 and recently expanded a bit, see here. You are also workers and can go on strike, see this on BC colleagues in Japan. This on the huge education workers strike in Los Angeles. Chris Hedges, in ‘Reclaiming Our Country’ also stresses the strike as a weapon against the entrenched class oligarchy.

In this critical spirit and ethos, we also encourage readers to explore the many recent incisive talks by critical psychotherapist Dr. Harriet Fraad at her website ‘Capitalism Hits Home’, dealing with a range of social/ sociocratic, political and indeed
existential issues relevant in the US and many other countries in our current toxic and dysfunctional Sy$tem. And read this on ‘bootstrapping’, an old metaphor for American individualism and self-reliance, a new book critically analyzes this core US mythologeme (accessible online cost-free). And read this ‘Socialist Education Manifesto’ by eduCATor/eduACTor Prof. Dave Hill. Bulgaria and the GDR had free education, including university, and students in the US are now calling for student debt (often truly huge) to be cancelled, a major demand. Visions of another future that once was. Another excellent book you can download online cost-free is by David Palumbo-Liu, Speaking Out of Place. Getting Our Political Voices Back (2021). Here is a climate justice workshop in Boston. Warming will lead to more severe storms in the eastern US, esp. deadly tornadoes. Economist Lisi Krall is also incisive in discussing the apocalyptic systemic current crisis of humankind and ever expansionist global capitalism, ponder her extraordinary video interview 6 April 2023 and her book Bitter Harvest (2022). Creating a social justice issues SIG is a real doable option for BETA, now’s the time! And maybe a another SIG or two, like Learner Autonomy or RESIG, a SIG many BG colleagues might welcome.

In the framework of educational experimentation, also read/ share Rachel Donald at Planet: Critical about creativity in a crisis given the way most mainstream schooling at all levels is organized and reproduced. She responds to a talk on the new Black Mountains College in Wales, the world’s first college dedicated to the climate crisis, a super talk by Prof. Owen Sheers (Swansea Univ.) ‘Creating the leaders we need’--worth watching and discussing, likewise with students. Also listen to Rachel’s much-acclaimed recent lecture ‘Making sense of the crisis’, 22 March 2023, our world ‘$y$tem’, enmeshed in climate catal$trophe, capitali$t Growth, hyper-con$umption, re$ource extraction, citizen alienation, US-imperiali$m, anti-PRC. Read this Xcellent article by Paul Street, based on a 2 April 2023 speech against the Ukraine war and US geo-militarism he gave in Chicago: ‘No War with Russia’. And read William Robinson...
on the ‘violent crackup of the post-WW II international order’; ‘full spectrum dominance’, and Sevim Dağdelen in Germany. It is a question of US ‘hegemony’ or humanity’s survival, a danger-fraught Second Cold War. Explore Ecoversities, share with colleagues, students. We need to rein in generative AI via ChatGDP, its dark risky enigmas, but see this conference on ‘pens & pixels’.

Definitely watch/ learn from Russell Stannard: ‘Practice English Pronunciation with ChatGPT’, using the tool NaturalReader. Yet best be wary and read this on AI by Slavoj Žižek (2023). Crucial now is to engage in pursuing bright blueprints aiming at vital Degrowth, as brilliantly sketched by Jason Hickel, Less is More (2020) and The Divide (2017), online cost-free. See also Heinberg, The End of Growth (2011). Another mini-urban vision is the 15-minute city, ponder it now.

Listen to Harriet Fraad and All Things Co-op at DaW. We also urge colleagues to read/share Richard D.Wolff’s recent books, Understanding Marxism (2018; 2nd ed. 2021), Understanding Socialism (2019), The Sickness is the System: When Capitalism Fails to Save Us from Pandemics or Itself (2020) as well as Bob Hennelly’s Stuck Nation: Can the United States Change Course on Our History of Choosing Profits Over People? (2021). We highly recommend Prof. Wolff’s website Democracy at Work, including All Things Co-op. Watch Richard Wolff speaking briefly in March 2023 on the question: ‘Does our education system reinforce capitalism?’ He sketches what democratic schools could be like in a socioeconomic system based on worker co-ops and community co-ops of all kinds. And watch this Wolff interview 1 April 2023, dealing with the broad-based continuing assault on the US working class. And this on ‘Going beyond capitalism’, (72 min.) by Rick Wolff in Oct. 2022 and his important insights. Likewise here: Wolff on ‘When we put people first in politics’. And this on PRC China.

‘Less is more’ in TEFL: a simplified basic people’s English for the masses

We long think we should also concentrate on teaching simpler, downshifted ‘people’s English for the planet,’ that can be also combined with ELT pedagogies grounded in Dogme ELT. Bill’s ‘Putting the Brakes on Complexity’ (2010) deals with that from several angles, as does the article ‘A Two-Tier Model for a More Simplified and Sustainable English as an International Language,’ JCEPS 7(2), 2009. Another article is ‘Pedagogies for Plainer Talk: Reclaiming the Commons of Discourse’ (2008). See also this article by Bill: ‘Downshifting discourse: Revitalizing BASIC ENGLISH 850 as a leaner lingua franca in global working-class literacy’ (2012). A mini-research center for this is badly needed. New Zealand has a PLAIN LANGUAGE initiative you can explore. Regarding Linguistic human rights/LHR -- we agree 120% with Tove & Rob!

By way of conclusion

This is only the beginning of what can become an exciting collaborative journey for eduCATors/eduACTors in Bulgaria, and Bulgarian students of all ages, from all social backgrounds, mindsets and life worlds. We are all indigenous. Each is an individual, unique in multiplex ways. As cosmologist Jude Currian says: ‘It is time for the tribes to come together’. As noted, read Bill’s FUTURITY #06 article (March 2023) on democratic schools, readily accessible. It provides more specific detail on some aspects like AERO and Big Picture Learning and ideas of Peter Gray touched on here. In the US, AFT union President Randi Weingarten, in a speech ‘In defense of public education’, spoke on March 28, 2023 about the bewildering webs of problems afflicting many even most US schools and teachers, ‘beset by staff shortages, culture wars, underfunding, and political efforts to divide parents from teachers and destroy public schools’. And dangers of gun violence. Read the article on her Xcellent critical
speech, and also watch/share a full video (min. 22:00 on). Randi speaks impassioned about public schooling and democracy 2023, its obstacles galore. In the US, there is 2023 a surge among young people wanting to be teachers. Finally, Ian Allinson has published an Xcellent book on organizing at work, Workers Can Win (Pluto Press, 2022), get it (ebook), share in BG. Organize for real educational change!

♪♪ And in this spirit, watch/listen/discuss the great timeless and ever timely poem/song by Bob Dylan, sung by Joan Baez, lyrics on screen. ♫♪
EU Career Navigator
Erasmus+ VET Project – a Way to Empower Students

Tsvetelena Taralova has been a teacher of English and a head teacher at the National High School in Finance and Business in Sofia, Bulgaria. She is interested in using ICT in teaching, project-based learning and intercultural communication. For eight years she has been an eTwinning ambassador for Bulgaria. Email: ts_taralova@abv.bg.

The National High School in Finance and Business (NHSFB) in Sofia, Bulgaria is a vocational high school for training of specialists in economics. The school staff efforts are related to the education of individuals who develop key competencies of the XXI century with successful partnerships with business and civic organizations. The NHSFB is an innovative, learning organization that aims to create opportunities for sustainable development, digital transformation and internationalization.

Since 2017, the NHSFB has had the status of an innovative school at the Ministry of Education in Bulgaria, and since 2020 the 1:1 model with Chromebooks has been applied, by participating in Google's certification programs and acquiring the status of a first reference professional school. Also, for several years, the NHSFB has had a new management team, which aims to expand the processes of internationalization and development opportunities through participation in the Erasmus+ KA1-VET program, in order to develop new approaches for integrating students into the European labor market and achieve effective educational interactions.

Last year the NHSFB was accredited as an Erasmus VET school and has a stable access to funding to achieve its long-term goals. We set up an Erasmus Plan to implement high-quality mobility activities as part of a wider effort to develop our organisation.
Erasmus accreditation gives schools simplified access to funding every year to implement their planned mobility activities and achieve the Erasmus Plan objectives.

When planning the activities, we used the backward design method, through which we defined as the final product a portal with resources that will be used by teachers and students at the NHSFB, and after testing will be shared with all interested teachers and students in Bulgaria and abroad. The students in 10th and 11th grade at the NHSFB will also participate in the creation and use of VET subjects resources. The courses that the teachers will attend will be an essential part of the in-school qualification and enable other teachers who have not attended qualifications but are interested in the topics to enrich their pedagogical experience with new teaching methods and digital tools.

So far, we have chosen the course provider Vitalis in Germany and we are preparing our first students’ internship. We have selected the students and teachers who are participating in the first year activities. In April 2023, 12 students and 2 accompanying teachers are taking part in a two-week internship on the topic of Digital Business and 4 teachers are attending a course entitled Design Thinking.

In addition, we have organized parents’ meetings during which students from five classes in the eleventh grade have presented in English their work in the economics training companies to their parents. The presentations were a big success and it was the first activity of this kind organized at school.

We are working on a specifically created project for Google classroom and students have made project logos which have been examined by teachers and a logo winner has been chosen to become the project logo. Meanwhile we are developing the project website in English and in Bulgarian, where we are going to collect lesson plans and information about project activities. Some colleagues have joined an eTwinning...
project SAVE, BE HAPPY; which will expand the activities into the new eTwinning EU platform.

The Best for our VET school is yet to come.

Project website: https://sites.google.com/nfsg-sofia.org/erasmusvet/

Pictures:

Presentation of Training companies in front of parents
The New Platform of the EU Commission ESEP and the eTwinning section with the project the NHSFB takes part in.
Publishing Wikipedia

Reneta Stoimenova

Wikipedia has become one of the most popular means of reference for both young and old reading audiences and, by being such a widely used referencing tool, it is always in need of contributors. Having spotted that as an opportunity, I thought that I may be able to apply some of my efforts to composing and publishing my own articles as a fun activity and, by doing this, I could also include some of my advanced English learning 12 graders. The idea I initially had was about doing research on popular historical landmarks in the local area and then writing up articles in English about them, thus, either creating a brand-new article introducing a new topic or merely adding information or photos to an existing one. That is how my Razgrad Wikipedia Club came into existence.

The first preliminary steps toward this writing project was to teach my students the rules of publishing on Wikipedia. To do this, I collected relevant information from the editorial articles of Wikipedia and organized it into a presentation, which they got online on Teams. Each student chose a topic to research and write on; in the long run, it appeared that only three of them were going to seriously read and write afterwards. Publishing in the English section of Wikipedia is a serious task with very strict rules, so it is done only by advanced learners knowledgeable of academic English writing. The students chose the following landmarks characteristic of Razgrad...
- Ibrahim Pasha Mosque, St. Athansius dug-in church in the nearby village of Poroishte, the town’s first secondary school, now housing the foreign language school, and I chose the clock tower. They also got a reference list prepared by me of books to read and links to check online before composing their articles as each piece of information must be supported by veritable source(s) of reference. Most of the meetings we had were held online, and they were directed mainly at supervising their work, which they essentially had to do by themselves.

To make the experience more educational and personal, we had a couple of trip fields – one was on the feast day of the church’s saint when we went to the village to attend the service, and another to see the inside of the clock tower. My article about the clock tower was the first to appear, and I subsequently used it as a model and stimulus to encourage the other authors. In a short while, the article about the famous mosque was published, and, finally, the article about the village church followed. Afterward, we presented our experience before a group of other students at the regional library, from where we took most of our sources of reference. These are the links to the articles:

Razgrad clock tower:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Razgrad_clock_tower

Ibrahim Pasha Mosque


The Dug-in church in Poroishte

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dug-In_Church_of_St._Athanasius_in_Poroishte#:~:text=The%20temple%20is%20considered%20the,its%20doors%20and%20the%20ceiling.
I myself have continued editing for Wikipedia by doing so far two articles about other local landmarks in Bulgarian and I hope to write even more.
Развлуд в англиската уикендия
на 12 май
от 10.00
в Краезнация
Проект на ПГТЧЕ
"Екзарх Йосиф"
Sonya Arnaudova

Becoming a better English teacher involves continuously developing and improving your skills and techniques in order to provide the best learning experience for your students. That was the reason why I took part in an Erasmus+ project “Motivated teachers for European education.”

I attended two courses (one in Florence and one in Barcelona) of multicultural groups of teachers and educators to learn new methods and techniques to improve our skills. During our courses I enriched my knowledge in the field of online educational tools which have become a compulsory aid in our work if we want to be teachers with up-do-date competences.

As a result of my education, I organized an open lesson with my 8th-grade students for teachers from other schools in my area, a representative of the Regional Inspectorate of Education and the Principle of my school.

The topic of the lesson was “Unusual museums around the world”. The students were given the countries – China, Japan, India, Mexico, Australia, The USA, Europe (the last one was not a country on purpose) and they had to find less popular and somehow different museums in these countries and to present them in front of the class.

The students were divided into seven teams of four. To set the teams, I used The Puzzle method. How does this method work? I created seven puzzles by four pieces with different shapes and colours. Each shape represents different activity related to the task given and the colour represents the team. The shapes were: Searching for information, Sorting out information, Making the presentation (e-book, magazine) and Delivering the presentation.

Due to the fact that I know my students very well, I paid attention to each student’s strong skill (researching, IT, presenting) and gave the pieces to the right persons to form the teams. This method helped each student to be included in the team.
effectively and the work of each to form the whole final product which is presented. Using this method each student felt comfortable with their task and participated actively in the project team work.

To prepare their work, the teams used some educational tools such as Storybook, Toony tool, QR codes, and Flipsnack as a great way to engage them and enhance their learning and technology experience. In brief about them:

✓ **Storybook**: Storybook is an online platform where students can create and share interactive stories. Students can use the platform to write their own stories, create characters, and add interactive elements such as animations and sound effects.

✓ **Toony Tool**: Toony Tool is a free online platform that allows students to create cartoons and comic strips. Students can use the platform to create characters, backgrounds, and dialogue bubbles.

✓ **QR Codes**: QR codes are two-dimensional barcodes that can be scanned with a smartphone or tablet. They can be used to link to websites, videos, or other digital resources. Create QR codes that link to educational videos, interactive quizzes, or other resources that support your lesson plan.

✓ **Flipsnack**: Flipsnack is an online platform that allows students to create digital books and magazines. Students can use the platform to write articles, add images and videos, and create interactive elements such as quizzes and games.

These technology tools can be used to enhance learning and engagement in a variety of subjects and grade levels. By incorporating them into your classroom, you can create a dynamic and interactive learning experience that students will enjoy and remember.

As a result of our work, the students felt proud of themselves for their accomplishments and goals achieved. Feeling proud of themselves can help to boost self-confidence and self-esteem, which can in turn lead to more success and happiness in the future. It is important for students to recognize their strengths and the progress they have made, even if they still have areas for improvement. But taking a moment to feel proud of oneself can be a great motivator and reminder of the value of hard work and perseverance.

My goal as a teacher is develop students’ 21st century skills. Some of the common ones include:

✓ Critical thinking and problem-solving
✓ Collaboration and teamwork
✓ Communication
✓ Creativity and innovation
✓ Digital literacy
✓ Cultural competence
✓ Self-direction and adaptability

These skills are increasingly valued by employers and are becoming increasingly important for success in all areas of life. Therefore, it is essential that education systems and individuals prioritize the development of these skills to ensure that individuals are well-equipped for success in the 21st century.

Web tools

Scan me:
Project Based Education  
R.O.B.E. – impRove knOwledge By stEm

Silviya Apostolova

The Vocational High School for Mechanics and Electrotechnics in Lovech has just finished a very interesting project related to Coding, Digital Technologies, STEM and Project Based Education. The project was run under the Erasmus+ programme in the span of two years. It included vocational technical schools from four countries – Bulgaria, Italy, Slovenia, and Turkey. The goal of the project was to increase digital competence in students as well as boost their motivation to achieve high learning results and improve their knowledge in English as the latter was the official working language of the project.

Due to the travel restrictions aiming to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the mobilities scheduled to start in the autumn of 2020 were severely delayed. However, all four partners agreed not to have virtual mobilities (which was allowed at the time by the National Agency) but to try and push for physical mobilities.

And so, it started at the beginning of April 2022 with the first mobility to Turkey. On 2nd April, seven students and two accompanying teachers from the Vocational High School for Mechanics and Electrotechnics in Lovech travelled to Bursa, Turkey, where
they joined the teams from Slovenia and Italy. The mobility was hosted by the Turkish school Mehmet Kemal Coşkunöz Mesleki ve Teknik Anadolu Lisesi. During the seminar activities, the students learned how to connect sensors to Arduino nano plates, programme them to pick up the human heartbeat, then using Java code the signal was sent from a laptop to a mobile phone. The reading of the heart rate could notify the owner of the mobile phone if anything abnormal was going on with his normal pulse and eventually prevent a heart attack.

The second mobility was hosted by the Bulgarian school in the beginning of May 2022. The city of Lovech welcomed the three teams from Slovenia, Italy and Turkey on the 8th May. During the mobility the students learned about the different sources of energy – wind, sun, water, and human activity. They were given materials with the task to build a model of a power generator and storage using one of the four energy sources. They used Arduino and Java coding to connect devices and start power generation and storage processes. Guest lecturer was Gary Rowlands from STEAMPOWERED.TEAM, Bulgaria.

The third mobility started on 30th May and was completed on 6th June 2022. The host was the Italian school Istituto di Istruzione Superiore Marco Polo – Ruggero Bonghi. During the mobility, the students learned how to programme automobile models using Lego Blocks. The models had to follow a trajectory painted in different colours, then they had to pick and place small blocks through built-in sensors, and cover a given distance in the shortest time.

The last mobility was held in Slovenia in the end of September 2022. The school Šolski center Novo mesto welcomed the three teams from Bulgaria, Turkey, and Italy on its campus and in the span of 5 days the students had to programme Arduino plates to say greetings in five languages (Bulgarian, Turkish, Italian, Slovenian, and English) and flash different colour lights to signal actions. They also had seminar sessions on coding and internet security.
The project was completed in the beginning of December 2022 with an online event where all participants in the project from the four schools joined and shared thoughts on the experience R.O.B.E.
30th BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference (hybrid mode)
A jubilee: the past, present and future of ELT
9th-10th September 2023, Sofia, Bulgaria

FIRST CALL

DEAR COLLEAGUE,

The Bulgarian English Teachers’ Association (BETA-IATEFL) and the University of National and World Economy are pleased to invite you to the 30th BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference, which will take place from 9th to 10th September 2023 in Sofia, the capital city of Bulgaria (in-person and online).

The conference aims to inspire and motivate teachers to make the most of the teaching and learning contexts they work in, and to exploit the potential of various innovative and collaborative practices in all areas of ELT and ESP in particular. We would like to offer you the opportunity to share your experience, expertise and insights into the fascinating world of language teaching and research. Areas of interest include, but are not limited to Teaching Young Learners and Teenagers; Teaching ESP; Teacher Education and Development; Bilingual Education; Literature, Media & Cultural Studies in ELT; Global Issues; Content and Language Integrated Learning; Blended Learning; Applied linguistics; Research; Testing, Evaluation and Assessment.

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

SPEAKER PROPOSAL DEADLINE: 30th June 2023. For speaker proposal forms, fees and accommodation visit https://forms.gle/SZqNQWAB1heP9XUG9 and check http://www.beta-iatefl.org. For further queries, contact beta.iatefl@gmail.com

We very much look forward to seeing you in Sofia.
Kind regards,
The Conference Organising Team
BETA Partners’ Forthcoming Events

- ELTAM-Montenegro, Podgorica, Montenegro, **13 May**

- ELTA-Serbia, Belgrade, Serbia, **19-20 May**
  [https://elta.org.rs/2023/05/03/onsite-registration/](https://elta.org.rs/2023/05/03/onsite-registration/)

- 13th ELTA International Conference, Tirana, Albania, **26-27 May**
  [https://elta.org.rs/2023/02/21/elta-albania-conference/](https://elta.org.rs/2023/02/21/elta-albania-conference/)

- FIPLV/NBR Conference "Future of Languages", Reykjavik, Iceland, **8-9 June**
  [https://vigdis.hi.is/en/events/fiplv-nbr-conference/](https://vigdis.hi.is/en/events/fiplv-nbr-conference/)

- OPTIMA International Conference, Sofia, Bulgaria, **17 June**
  [https://en.optima-bg.org](https://en.optima-bg.org)

- 32nd IATEFL Conference, Wrocław, Poland, **22-24 September**
Writing for the BETA-IATEFL E-Newsletter

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

- 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!

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Disclaimer. The views and opinions expressed in the articles in this e-newsletter are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views or the official opinion of BETA-IATEFL or the editors. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in the e-newsletter lies entirely with the author(s) of the publications.

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