

## Bulgarian English Teachers' Association

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### Editor's Corner

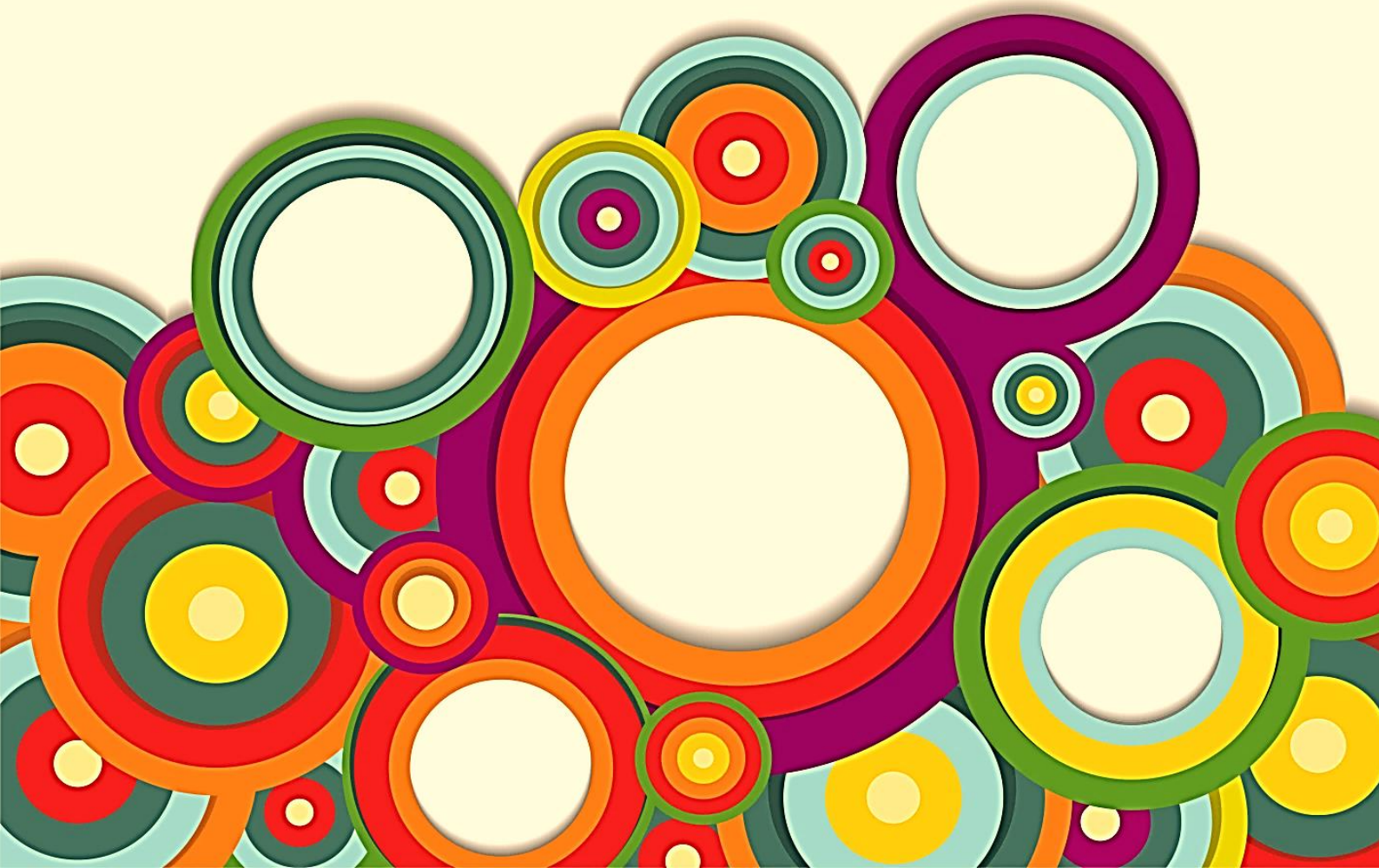
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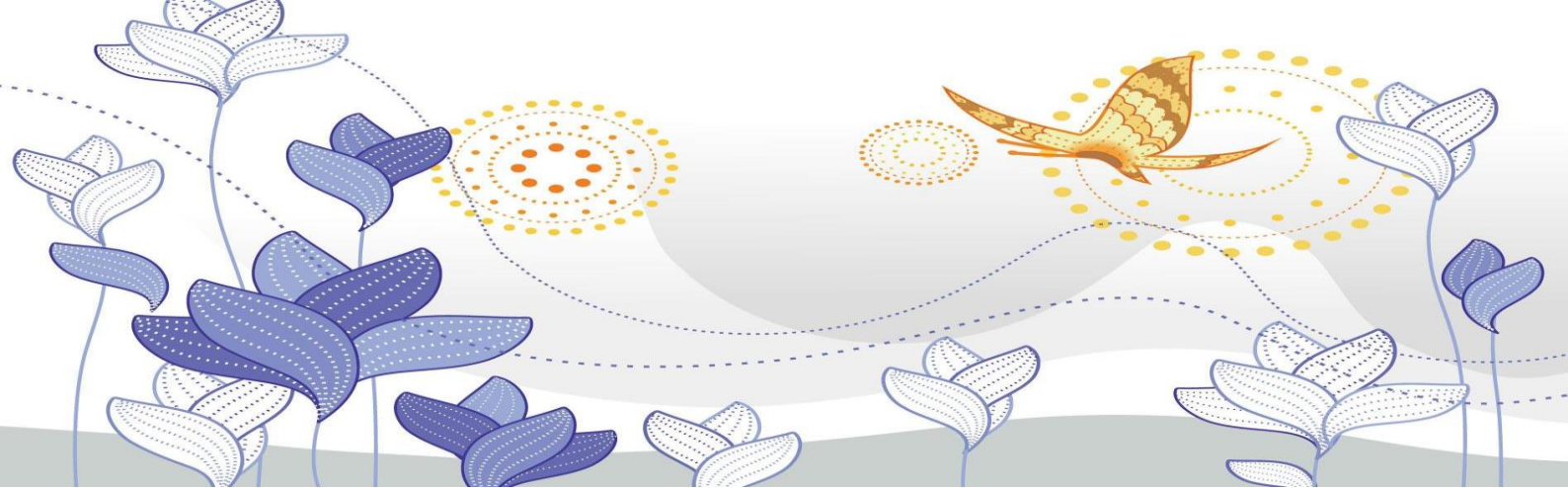
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## EDITOR'S CORNER

Dear Friends,

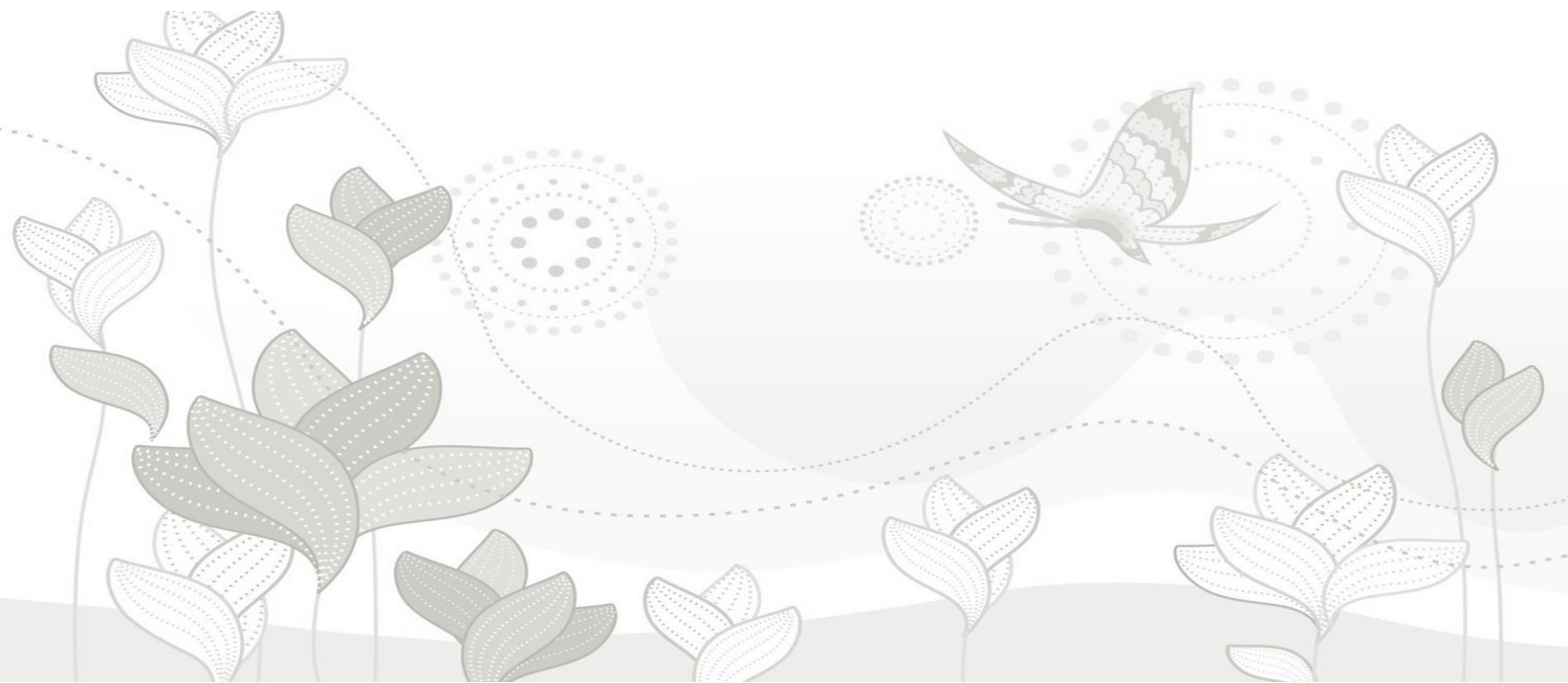
This issue of the newsletter presents to your attention two more interviews with the BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference Speakers – Dr. Terry Lamb and Dr. Ellie Boyadzhieva. They are sharing with us their ideas on the present day realities in the field of ELT and on the challenges we (as ELT professionals) face every day!

There is also the BETA Committee Annual Report (June 2013 – March 2014) which will allow you to get acquainted with the recent developments in the association's policy, achievements and cooperation with relevant organizations and which will give an overview of the activities during the four-year term of the present Committee. And one more article from Gergana Apostolova! See for yourself what she is saying about English language teaching!

I'd like to wish everyone lots of positive emotions, sunny days and happiness!

And don't forget – the 23<sup>rd</sup> BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference in Blagoevgrad is fast approaching! We are looking forward to seeing you there!

Tsvetelina Harakchiyska





# Interview with the

## BETA-IATEFL

### Conference

## Plenary Speakers



**Terry Lamb**

University of Sheffield, UK and FIPLV  
(Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de  
Langues Vivantes)

Sponsored by British Council Bulgaria and BETA-  
IATEFL

*Dr Terry Lamb has authored and edited numerous publications in the areas of learner autonomy, multilingualism and teacher development, and is founder editor of the International Journal of Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching. He has carried out consultancies and presented keynote papers in many countries, and has been involved in numerous national and international research projects, including several at the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz, Austria.*

*Terry is former President of the UK Association for Language Learning and current President of FIPLV (Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes), the world federation of language teacher associations. He has worked closely with the UK and other Governments. He is a Chevalier des Palmes Académiques, an honour awarded by the French Government and recipient of a prestigious Senate Award for Sustained Excellence in Teaching from his University.*

**Philip:** Terry, many thanks first of all for agreeing to be interviewed. Teachers in both Blagoevgrad and Thessaloniki will, I am sure, be looking forward to your plenary talks. One of your main interests (judging from the abstracts for these talks, and from the books and articles you have written) is clearly in the notions of learner and teacher autonomy. Why is the notion of autonomy so important?

**Terry:** There are many reasons why autonomy is important, the most obvious one being that as human beings we need to learn to take responsibility for our own lives and finding our place in the world. Being autonomous for me does not imply being separated from others; autonomy is also needed in classrooms or other group learning contexts. Having some control over what you do is essential for real engagement and motivation, and just because most learning contexts do not allow learners complete control (because of curricula, exams, etc.), this does not mean that they cannot have any control at all. Learner motivation was the reason why I came to develop my ideas on autonomy, even though as a languages teacher in secondary schools at the time I didn't know anything about the academic research in this field. I was just wanting to find ways of encouraging my (often reluctant) learners

to learn and this meant helping them to experience success. I needed to provide appropriate learning opportunities for very different learners with a whole range of attainment levels all in one classroom, so I had to teach them to make decisions where possible. So autonomy for me is important because it is the basis for learning and motivation, it helps learners to learn according to their needs, and it develops the skills for life and for life-long learning.

**Philip:** I imagine that few people reading this would disagree with you about this importance. A huge amount has been written on the subject, and much of this goes back to the 1970s. There is, for example, a bibliography with over 1700 articles and books about learner autonomy in language teaching that can be accessed online at [http://www.innovationinteaching.org/autonomy\\_bibliography.php](http://www.innovationinteaching.org/autonomy_bibliography.php). And this begs the question: if it is so important, why is there not more take-up from teachers of the ideas that you and others have been trying to get across? Why, for example, is my 16-year-old daughter's English teacher in Brussels so unaware of the importance of learner autonomy?

**Terry:** I would say that most teachers are aware of the importance of learner autonomy; just as I always did, they complain when their learners are unwilling to accept responsibility for their learning or when their learners blame the teacher when they are struggling or feeling unmotivated. Teachers would also acknowledge that in their future lives their

learners will have to be autonomous. So your question is a good one. I think that one reason may be that autonomy can be perceived as a goal of learning rather than a means of learning. Another is that formal education is always subject to constraints. Such constraints may be external - a curriculum to teach, exams to prepare for, limited space, large classes, time constraints etc. The constraints may even be internal constraints – teachers' own beliefs about how they should pass on knowledge, or their learners' beliefs about what learners and teachers should do. It is then very difficult for busy teachers to find time to consider ways of enabling their learners to take greater control – it just isn't a priority. And teachers' own autonomy is constrained too, so they often feel obliged to teach in ways which they don't really approve of because they believe this is what is expected. However, having said all of that, we must remember that learner autonomy means many things. I do believe that most teachers are developing their learners' autonomy in some way; they may not feel able to allow them choices, but they will be teaching them to learn vocabulary or to spot their own errors or giving them homework to do. Given time to consider how to enhance their learners' learning despite constraints, teachers are usually able to realise that they can build on what they are already doing, rather than having to do something completely different, and that this involves developing learner autonomy in some way.

**Philip:** Just as there are constraints which limit the possibilities of learner autonomy, there are powerful constraints which limit the possibilities of teacher autonomy. In your work, you have discussed the relationship between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy. Is it possible for teachers to promote learner autonomy without becoming more autonomous themselves? What would you say to a teacher who feels that, because of strong institutional constraints, they cannot develop their own autonomy?

**Terry:** I think that there are constraints on all teachers really. Teachers can rarely teach whatever they like - there are usually exams to prepare for or a curriculum to follow, or physical constraints (classroom size, etc.). When I was teaching in schools, there were tremendous constraints from a new national curriculum, and I was teaching French in a textiles room surrounded by sewing machines on benches, but I had to engage learners more in their own learning as motivation was low, concentration spans poor, and behaviour wasn't always good. If I hadn't, they wouldn't have succeeded anyway and we would all have had a miserable time. I just made sure I did what I was meant to do in terms of the curriculum and monitoring of learning etc., but did it in a different way, which motivated learners and enhanced achievement. I could have thrown my hands up in the air and said I wasn't allowed to try anything new, and become negative and demotivated myself as a teacher, but I chose to do what I could do, even if I would have liked to go further.

I have written about 'spaces for manoeuvre', and for me an autonomous teacher isn't one who is free to do whatever they like, but someone who can find these spaces, who can know what it is they believe they should be doing ideally, and who can move in that direction even if the reality prevents them from getting far. We find autonomy in small steps.

I should add that my experiences as a language learner in school had been far from autonomous. However, teacher autonomy means many things, and where I did manage to be autonomous was in being able to reflect critically on a situation, on possibilities and constraints, and to come up with constructive ways forward. What is more, I see this all over the world - including research being carried out by my PhD students in various countries. Teachers have a tremendous capacity to reflect, to make decisions about what they perceive to be appropriate ways of helping their learners, and to adapt their teaching throughout their careers. I do believe, as I said earlier, that most teachers want their learners to be able to stand on their own two feet, but they will also decide when this isn't appropriate - thus being autonomous in choosing not to allow autonomy at times! This for me is the epitome of the professional.

**Philip:** Terry, many, many thanks for sparing the time to do this.







## Ellie Boyadzhieva

South-West University in Blagoevgrad,  
Bulgaria

*Dr Ellie Boyadzhieva is a lecturer in General Linguistics, English Morphology and Syntax as well as Cultural Studies at the South-West University in Blagoevgrad. She started her career as a teacher of English at the Institute for Foreign Students in Sofia in the late 1980s and since then has constantly been in the profession. Between 2001 and 2007 she was President of the Bulgarian English Teachers' Association (BETA). At present she is Head of the Department of Germanic and Romance Studies at the Philological Faculty of SWU.*



**Philip:** First of all, Ellie, many thanks for agreeing to be interviewed. In the short abstract for your plenary talk in Blagoevgrad, you refer to the changing needs of English language learners as a result of globalization. Is your interest here in new varieties of English that learners may need, or are you referring to some other sorts of needs?

**Ellie:** I do not mean new varieties of English. I mean the needs of Bulgarian learners to communicate in English in different spheres and places. I definitely make a difference between specialists' needs - teachers and translators, and the needs of the general learners that are the majority of learners in BG who need international English stripped of the cultural features of British or American English.

**Philip:** I wonder if there was ever really a time when general English learners in Bulgaria truly needed a specifically British or American version of English loaded with cultural features ... even if this is what they got! In many places I go, I find there is quite a bit of teacher resistance to the idea of teaching a more international English. Why do you think this is so, and how can this resistance be countered?

**Ellie:** I agree with you. At the beginning of English teaching, when the four-volume Eckersley course was used - the beginning of the sixties of the 20th century, the view was that the learner should get as close as possible to native-speaker competence, combining language and culture. This view was embedded in the methodology of teaching at the most prestigious institutions which at that time were the English Language schools (3 - in Sofia, Plovdiv and Ruse) and English philology at Sofia University. These were meant for the 'chosen few' - usually the children of the partocracy who were being prepared for diplomatic and political (etc. ...)

positions. English was not popular as a foreign language and, especially at the time of the Cold War, was seen as a means of spreading rotten capitalist ideas, to which only the ideologically stable were able to resist. Much was done to limit the access of the general public to English learning. I was among the lucky ones because my grandma was able to pay for private courses. Many of the people who completed their studies in these schools are still teachers of English who 'repeat' what they were taught. Of course, there is a new generation of English teachers, but they have been taught by the same old generation. In this way the tradition is constantly renewed. The British Council in Bulgaria tried for some time to promote new ideologies in ELT but how many trainees were involved? Very few, I suppose, compared to the need for English teachers all over the country, especially after 1989. Other problems are: the coursebooks that are widely used at school and universities are predominantly written by native-speakers of English, who, no matter how much they try to internationalize the English language, subconsciously (and quite naturally) are unaware of how much cultural content they put in, concerning both the topics chosen and the vocabulary. Grammar stays somehow untouched, though there are examples of cultural bias there, too. And, last but not least, the teachers are overwhelmed with the material they have to teach in a very short time to meet the requirements of the curriculum imposed by the Ministry of Education and they do not have time to work individually with the students. They are in the role of 'suppliers of

knowledge' – mostly grammar and vocabulary, disregarding speaking and writing where students may be allowed to produce their own thoughts and interests, which, I suppose, will be Bulgarian-oriented. I personally believe that a teacher should be an educator and teach life through English, which is both a goal and a means of teaching.

I am afraid you might find that too many things are mixed up, but I still think the picture is much more complex than it seems at first glance.

**Philip:** I like your penultimate sentence, the idea that we should be educating through English both as a goal and a means. This surely implies that English teachers need to work closely with teachers of other subjects, to ensure some sort of cross-curricular coherence. Is this possible or likely in the Bulgarian context? In most places I work, despite the lofty pronouncements of Ministry people, subject specialists are generally left to their own devices, and so nothing really changes because the underlying processes of education, and the institutions in which they take place, are never questioned. Instead, we get 'soundbite' revisions: minor modifications (usually additions) to the syllabus, which have minimal or zero impact. An example of this in many countries right now is the push to include '21st century life skills' in the syllabus for English. A lot has been said and written about this in the Bulgarian context. Has it impacted on the day-to-day lives of English teachers and students?



**Ellie:** Judging from my year-long observations on the development of CLIL in BG I know that the collaboration between English teachers and subject teachers is traditional. There are two reasons for this: first, the secondary schools in BG that specialise in teaching English (so-called language schools) provide not only classes in English language and literature but their curriculum obligatorily includes teaching special subjects such as History, Geography, Physics, Biology, Math (in some cases) in English. In these cases, the school management looks for teachers who are specialists in the particular subject and are able to provide the training in English. I have to admit that this is a difficult task and I know several cases when students of mine have complained that their History teacher, for example, speaks worse English than the average student in the class. The second case is when teachers of English specialise in a particular subject, but this is possible in the lower forms of the secondary school. Finally, most of the BG universities provide re-training programs in English for subject teachers, which is a good resource to improve the situation at school. For example, my University offers a Master's programme "English Language" training subject specialists in English, most of whom teach a particular subject at school and after graduation acquire an additional qualification *English teacher*.

As for the 21st century life skills, I had to browse the Internet to see what this is about.

**Unfortunately, you seem to be much more**

informed about what is happening in Bulgaria. I personally do not have the slightest idea how (and if) this is popular in BG at all and this is why I cannot answer your last question.

**Philip:** Well, I trust you more than I trust a 'Citizenship Report' written by Microsoft Central and Eastern Europe ([download.microsoft.com/.../29Jan2007-CEE-Citizenship-Report-LR.pdf](http://download.microsoft.com/.../29Jan2007-CEE-Citizenship-Report-LR.pdf))!

What happens in the secondary schools that are not specialised in teaching English (which are presumably the majority of schools)?

**Ellie:** Unfortunately, my impression is that the widely shared views that 'everybody in BG speaks some English', and 'there are no real beginners today' are just myths. This impression is based on the following data coming from two recent tasks I had to do for my university.

First, an English course was prepared for the academic staff where about 160 people applied. About 80 of them signed up for the beginner's groups and among them about 50% were real beginners. Of course, the age range varied between 30 and 60 and this matters in the light of the English teaching



30 years ago that I discussed earlier.

The second case is more shocking as this time students aged between 18 and 22 are concerned, meaning they left school no more than 4 years ago where they were supposed to have been learning English from the 5th to the 12th grade. The exam was offered only to students who did not sit an entrance exam in English, in other words, it involved only non-specialists who take English as an optional course in their major programmes.

Out of a total 1170 students taking the exam, 558 (47.69%) took the exam at level A1, 391 (33.41%) were on level A2. The intermediate levels show 199 students (17%) at B1, and only 22 (a negligible 0.018%) at B2. Of course, there were a number of students who had to re-sit the exam at all levels, and most of them were A1 and A2 as these took the majority of the students – 81.80%. (Unfortunately I do not have the exact numbers of the re-sitting students by levels.)

The figures, however, show that the level of competence in English acquired in the Bulgarian 'common' schools is quite low. Some of my students at the New Bulgarian University where English at B2 is a requirement for graduation in every major say that they have been studying English for over 10 years and every time they have to start a course they start from the beginner's level as they feel they do not know it well enough. (A student of mine, who covered B2 a year ago, told me the other day he is starting a private course in English because

he has forgotten everything he studied in my group. Funny, isn't it?)

In conclusion, in my opinion ELT as promoted by the Ministry of Education for the common state secondary schools shows dramatically bad results despite the widespread view that it is one of the pillars in the compulsory education in general.

*Philip:* It would be very interesting to hear from other teachers in the SEETA region about the situation in their countries. But many thanks, Ellie, for this insight into the Bulgarian context. All the best for the conference in Blagoevgrad, and I hope that we can meet again before too long.

The editorial team would like to thank Philip Kerr for his help with these interviews. For more interviews with plenary speakers across the SEETA region visit *Coming Your Way* at <http://www.seeta.eu/>





# BETA COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

June 2013 – March 2014

The 23<sup>rd</sup> BETA-IATEFL Annual International Conference is fast approaching and so is the BETA Annual General Meeting. Do spare a minute and read the Committee Report.

**T**his report summarises the Committee activity from June 2013 to April 2014. Since our term (2010-2014) is going to expire at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Blagoevgrad, the report also provides an overview of how far we have come in the four-year period and what more there is to be done in the future. Our activities largely reflect initiatives in the following areas: *strategic partnerships, communication, sponsorship and fundraising, membership, international cooperation, event organisation, publications.*

At the start of our term in 2010, we took a decision to work with a clear division of responsibilities between all the Committee members. As the President of BETA I have been responsible for the leadership of the Committee and for ensuring its good communication, collaboration and effectiveness. In addition, I have coordinated the Association strategic partnerships, fundraising and sponsorship, as well as communication. These are the key areas of action that I will highlight in my President's report. Below are also the reports from the Membership Secretary, the International Coordinator, the Public Relations Committee Member, the Annual Competition Coordinator, and the E-Newsletter Editor.

*Sylvia Velikova, BETA President*



Report by Sylvia Velikova, BETA President

### Strategic Partnerships

For the past four years, BETA has made significant progress in partnership at strategic level. Successful contacts have been established with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science. In July 2013, we held a meeting with the Head of the Directorate for Qualification and Career Development. Together we explored possibilities for cooperation and information exchange between BETA and the Directorate. As an outcome of the meeting, in November 2013, BETA submitted a proposal for a joint project with the Regional Inspectorate of Education – Blagoevgrad. If approved (we are still waiting to hear from the Ministry with regard to their decision), the Ministry of Education and Science will provide funding for state school teachers to attend the 2014 BETA Annual Conference. In 2013 and the beginning of 2014, successful cooperation continued between BETA and the Regional Inspectorates of Education in Blagoevgrad, Silistra, and Veliko Turnovo. This was possible mainly

through our contacts with the Foreign Language Experts, our participation in the teacher training seminars organised by the regional inspectorates and in other local and regional activities, such as the 6<sup>th</sup> Regional English Language Theatre Festival, Veliko Turnovo in February 2014.

Since 2010 we have established and strengthened our new partnership with the *Regional English Language Office* (RELO). RELO supports the missions of Public Affairs sections of the United States Embassies in Central and Southeastern Europe through its informational, educational and cultural programmes. This year the Regional English-Language Officer, George Chinnery, will represent the State Department at the BETA conference in Blagoevgrad. In 2012 BETA worked in partnership with the U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer TEFL Program and contributed to the success of the *International Creative Writing Competition Bulgaria 2012*. In 2013 Tsvetelena Taralova (Sofia), Kremena Radoeva (Silistra), and Neli

Gospodinova (Silistra) – BETA members and high school teachers – were selected for participation in the *Educational Leaders' Training Program 2013*, organised by the America for Bulgaria Foundation. They visited the Teachers' College, Columbia University in New York City for a three-week professional development and training. Currently, there is an active information exchange in place between the U.S. Embassy Sofia and BETA.

In 2010 BETA re-established its close links with the British Council Bulgaria and since then our cooperation has been further expanded. In 2011 and 2012, the British Council supported BETA by providing grants to the official BETA representatives (Sylvia Velikova – 2011, Tsvetelina Harakchiyska – 2012) to attend the IATEFL annual conferences in the UK. The British Council and BETA also jointly organised special events at the BETA annual conferences in Ruse (2012) and Varna (2013). In addition, the British Council has supported BETA by providing financial assistance to an excellent array of plenary speakers at the BETA annual events (Carol Read – Sofia 2011; Phil Ball, John Clegg, and Keith Kelly – Ruse

2013; Steve Mann – Varna 2013). This year again the British Council is co-sponsoring a plenary speaker – Terry Lamb, University of Sheffield (UK) and FIPLV President. Similarly, one of the highlights of the 2014 BETA conference is the British Council Bulgaria Event on “Creating an inclusive learning environment for students with specific needs” (featured speaker: Richard Cherry, British Council Bulgaria).

In 2011 and 2013, BETA became a member of two international organisations: the *European Network of Language Teacher Associations* (REAL) and the *International Federation of Teachers of Modern Languages* (FIPLV), thanks to the FIPLV President Terry Lamb who attended our Annual Conference in Varna in June 2013. By joining the strong, collective voice of these associations, BETA will gain more international visibility and cooperation in furthering its mission to support foreign language education and the training and professional development of English language teachers nationally. Over the past four years, BETA also has successfully collaborated with IATEFL and the *Young Learners & Teenagers Special Interest Group* (Dennis Newson represented it as a

speaker at the BETA Conference in Sofia in 2011), and the *European Centre for Modern Languages* (ECML) of the Council of Europe, Graz, Austria (Terry Lamb was sponsored by the ECML as a plenary speaker at the BETA Annual Conference in Varna 2013). In 2012, following my participation in a 'neighbourhood' IATEFL Associates meeting in Ankara (organised by the British Council Turkey and INGED-Turkey), BETA joined the newly-formed alliance called ATA (the Alliance of Teachers' Associations). The members of the alliance formed an e-mail group to enable efficient exchange of ideas and information between partner associations.

Throughout our term we have kept successfully collaborating with the major universities, providing EFL education (including ESP) and training of English language teachers in Bulgaria. From 2010 to 2013 we worked with four universities on the organisation of our annual conferences and teacher training events. The following institutions were involved in the BETA activity as event co-organisers: the New Bulgarian University (Sofia) in 2011, the University of Veliko Turnovo in 2012, the University of Ruse in 2012, the University of Shumen (DIQLL-

Varna) in 2013. This year the South-West University in Blagoevgrad will host our annual conference. Special thanks to Zarina Markova who kindly volunteered to serve as a 2014 local conference coordinator, in addition to her busy role as a BETA Committee member!

The partnerships with language teaching and teacher training organisations in Bulgaria and the UK have been continued and diversified. In 2011 AVO-Bell (Sofia) sponsored Jim Scrivener as a plenary speaker in Sofia. Pilgrims (UK) generously supported our annual conferences by sending their best speakers and teacher trainers: Chaz Pugliese (2011), Adrian Underhill (2012), and Tim Bowen (2012). This year Paul Davis is attending the BETA conference in Blagoevgrad as a featured speaker, sponsored by Pilgrims. In 2010 and 2011, in conjunction with Pilgrims, BETA organised teacher training seminars in Veliko Turnovo and Ruse. These events were highly successful and were attended by over 150 teachers from Veliko Turnovo, Ruse and other regions in Bulgaria (Silistra, Razgrad, Targovishte, Shumen, Pleven, etc.). BETA continued to work with SOL as a key partner at our annual conferences.



Traditionally, SOL generously contributes to the conference prize draw by offering a free place for their teacher training courses in Devon (UK).

BETA has also expanded its collaboration with the ELT publishers in Bulgaria. In 2010 and 2011, Macmillan Education supported our teacher training seminars in Veliko Turnovo and Ruse. The Association was invited to promote its activity by sending BETA representatives and disseminating its promotional materials at the Trinity College London 2<sup>nd</sup> National Conference, held in Varna and Sofia (2012); the Sixth National English Teachers Conference (Cambridge Day 2012), organised by PONS Bulgaria, Cambridge University Press, and Cambridge ESOL; the Pearson Longman Bulgaria seminars with Jeremy Harmer, organised in Varna, Burgas, Plovdiv, and Sofia in 2012; the Educational Centre seminar with Hugh Dellar in Sofia in 2012; the Oxford University Press seminar in Veliko Turnovo in 2013; the Klett seminar in Blagoevgrad and Sofia in 2014, the Express Publishing seminar in Sofia in March 2014; and the Macmillan seminar in Sofia in April 2014. In June and September 2013 we organised two

meetings between the BETA Committee and representatives of the major ELT publishers in Bulgaria. At the meetings we exchanged ideas for concrete actions and joint activities that would help us achieve greater synergy in accomplishing the common goal for supporting ELT and the professional development of the teachers of English in Bulgaria.

### Communication

Our term started with a completely re-designed website, featuring a modern functionality. We decided to renovate the BETA website in 2010 since we wanted to respond to the emerging demands of the Internet era and the need to reach more effectively our members and other foreign language teaching professionals in a world of increased online communication. The BETA site makes use of social media feeds and its content can be easily found and shared by the site visitors. From 21<sup>st</sup> March 2013 to 21<sup>st</sup> March 2014 it attracted 25,591 unique visitors from 184 countries. The top visiting countries were Bulgaria, the United States, and the United Kingdom. It is important to note that over the past four years the BETA website has

served as a platform for the publication of news and updates about ELT events in Bulgaria and abroad, information about the BETA Annual Conference, the conference open-access online publications and the bi-monthly BETA E-Newsletter. The website also connects to the BETA Facebook group, which now stands at 325 members from Bulgaria and internationally.

Though the website content management system is easily updateable and user-friendly, recruiting a volunteer, willing to invest skills, time and efforts in managing the online presence and communication of the Association, has remained a challenge for us. Therefore, currently I have the responsibility to update and publish web content as necessary, while BETA pays an annual subscription fee for general website maintenance by a webdeveloper.

### **Sponsorship and fundraising**

As a non-profit organisation, BETA relies upon the generosity of sponsors for the funding of its activity. That is why, over the years, we have worked hard to attract sponsors for the BETA annual

conferences. Since the onset of our term, we have launched a new sponsorship scheme, offering special sponsor packages. The scheme gives good results and attracts sponsors to all our conferences. Sponsorship takes various shapes – from financial support to guest speakers (invited by BETA), direct donation for coffee-breaks and conference reception to prizes for the conference prize draw. The ELT exhibition has also been enlarged to include a number of organisations (in addition to book publishers), such as the U.S. Embassy Sofia, the British Council Bulgaria, RELO Budapest, international and local ELT service providers and educational institutions. This means that BETA finances are currently in - good order thanks to the generous sponsorship and support of various partner organisations. It also means that BETA has an operational capacity to initiate ELT activities locally, to cover its basic expenses (e.g., website maintenance), and to offer its members a range of bursaries.

## Thoughts and ideas for the future

Since 2010 BETA has established links locally and regionally with EFL teachers and FLT experts. We organised our annual conferences in three different regions in the country – Sofia (the South-West region), Ruse (the North-Central region), Varna (the North-East region), Blagoevgrad (the South-West region). This has significantly helped us to reach more teachers outside the capital region and to attract more members from different corners of the country. These local collaborations on a national scale can be further sustained and diversified and can help recruit BETA representatives from the different regions to coordinate various BETA community events – performances, competitions, teacher training workshops, social events locally.

In addition, the relationships which we have established and re-established with a range of organisations will stand BETA in good stead for the future. Cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science has been a priority issue addressed by the current Committee, with varying degrees of success. However, I am

delighted to be able to report that considerable progress has been made in our communication and cooperation with the State Expert at the *Educational Programmes Directorate*. New contacts have also been created with representatives from other directorates and departments – the *Qualification and Career Development Directorate*, the *International and European Cooperation Department*. I hope the incoming BETA Committee will build on this for the future. These and other links and contacts with the American Embassy in Sofia, the British Council and the international language teaching associations could evolve into mutually beneficial partnerships for collaborative projects and events on a local, national, regional, and international level.

Effective and varied forms of web communication with the ELT community in Bulgaria and internationally is another priority issue for the future. Our website and Facebook group are greatly appreciated and bring many new contacts and members of the Association. The incoming BETA Committee can make every effort to recruit a web-communications member, who could take



responsibility for the technology-based communications (supporting webinars and other online events and resources), including the BETA website and the social media channels. She/he will be an enormous asset to the Committee team and the Association!

In closing, it has been an honour and pleasure for me to be involved with BETA as a President for the past four

years. I would like to extend special thanks to my colleagues and friends at the current BETA Committee for all the shared moments of inspiration, creativity, joy, tribulation, and personal growth while working together towards our Association's mission to support the English language teaching community in Bulgaria. I wish the new Committee all the very best and every success!

## MEMBERSHIP

### Report by Zhivka Ilieva, Membership Secretary

In 2013 there were 96 BETA members. In 2013 more people availed of the opportunity offered by the BETA Happy Days and renewed their membership for 2014 at a reduced membership fee, so we can conclude that organising several happy days was more effective than just one happy day (as we did in 2012).

In 2014 there are 14 representatives at IATEFL under the WMS. We had a quota of 20, which we could not use. So for the next bid (2014 – 2016), for which we submitted an application in February 2014, we expect a reduced quota of 10. We

will let you know about the results of our WMS application as soon as we receive them from IATEFL.

Please remember that BETA membership gives you:

- Access to more information about various events connected to FLT in Bulgaria and abroad. The information is provided on our web site, our facebook group and through e-mails to each member.
- Our members are continuously updated on SEETA events and have

exclusive access to SEETA closed courses.

- Once a year the members of BETA can apply for a grant of 100 euro to take part in a forum in Bulgaria or abroad.
- BETA members can also apply for an official representative at the annual conference of one of our partner associations. BETA members pay a reduced fee of 30 BGN at our annual conference and can take part in our partner's conferences at the fee for their members (not as non-members).

The change of the number of our members for the period 2010-2013 can be followed on Table 1 below. It varies across the years but it is between 70 and 100 on average. It seems that the conferences in Sofia (2011) and in Varna (2013) attracted the largest number of BETA members.

Since 2012 we have introduced a BETA Happy Day (in 2012 for 2013) and several BETA Happy Days (in 2013 for 2014) which gave the opportunity to more teachers to become members at the reduced fee of 15 lv.

During the last two years we could not avail of all the WMS places we had for IATEFL.

Therefore, for the next bidding we asked for less WMS places for BETA. We will keep you informed about the results of our IATEFL WMS bid application for the next two year period.

| YEAR | BETA members | PERIOD      | WMS members | WMS places |
|------|--------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| 2010 | 72           | 2010 - 2011 | 15          | 15         |
| 2011 | 95           | 2011 - 2012 | 15          | 15         |
| 2012 | 79           | 2012 - 2013 | 11          | 20         |
| 2013 | 96           | 2013 - 2014 | 14          | 20         |

**Table 1 Change of the numbers of BETA members**

## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

### Report by Zarina Markova, International Cooperation

Following the established practice, BETA continued to work towards strengthening the links with other ELT / FLT associations which support teachers' professional development and represent teachers' voice in policy. During the period between 2011 and 2014 BETA was officially represented at the Associates' Days and IATEFL annual conferences in UK by Sylvia Velikova (2011), Iskra Angelova (2012), Tsvetelina Harakchiyska (2013) and Zhivka Ilieva (2014). In 2011 BETA became a full member of REAL, the European Network of Language Teaching Associations, and in 2013 BETA joined FIPLV, the International Federation of Teachers of Modern Languages, represented as an NGO with the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

BETA has continued its involvement in the SEETA Community project. Throughout the years the variety of activities at SEETA has increased and at present there are thirteen different features offering open forums, projects, closed courses for SEETA members exclusively and webinars among others. Since March 2013 BETA has had a regular

feature at SEETA: Steliyana Dulkova's *Teaching Young Learners: Tips and Tricks*, where magical teaching ideas have been piling up. Thanks to Steliyana and Mariyana Todorova a SEETA webinar was conducted, on the topic of research on yoga in the ESL classroom. The webinar is recorded and still available to view at the SEETA website

<http://www.seeta.eu/course/view.php?id=96#section-5>.

BETA established new partnerships and continued the cooperation with associations of English language teachers from the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Macedonia and Serbia. The main features of this cooperation are the exchange of newsletters and conference delegates. BETA hosted official representatives from the Czech Republic (one, at the 21<sup>st</sup> BETA Conference in Ruse), Greece (one, at the 22<sup>nd</sup> BETA Conference in Varna), Hungary (one, at the 20<sup>th</sup> BETA Conference in Sofia), Macedonia (two, at the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> BETA Conferences) and Serbia (three, at the 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> BETA Conferences). Correspondingly,



BETA sent and will be sending official representatives to Hungary (one, in 2011), the Czech Republic (one, in 2012), Greece (three, in 2012, 2013 and 2014), Macedonia (one, in 2012) and Serbia (four, in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014). It should come as no surprise that the most effective partnerships have been the ones with organizations from South-eastern Europe, which are SEETA partners and also easier to access.

Apart from partners' conferences, BETA representatives also took part in other events aiming at furthering the cooperation between ELT / FLT associations. Sylvia Velikova represented BETA at the REAL launch conference (2011, Serves, France); Ophelia Pamukchieva gave a poster presentation about BETA at a REAL seminar (4-6 June 2010; Iasi, Romania, with participants from Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Greece, France, Spain and England); Sylvia Velikova represented BETA at the 'neighbourhood' IATEFL Associates meeting (December 2012, Ankara, Turkey). Ophelia Pamoukchieva represented BETA Committee at a seminar on fund-raising (March 2013, Zrenjanin, Serbia).

BETA members have also applied for bursaries towards travel expenses or fees for attending other conferences. During the four-year period, such bursaries were received by Zhivka Ilieva (10<sup>th</sup> Jubilee LATEUM Conference 2011; 11<sup>th</sup> LATEUM Conference 2013), Ellie Boyadzhieva (20<sup>th</sup> Annual International Convention of TESOL Macedonia Thrace Northern Greece, 2013) and Zarina Markova (47<sup>th</sup> IATEFL Conference, 2013).

**Note:** ☺ If you would like to receive a bursary to attend a professional event in Bulgaria or abroad, send us a letter of interest and your speaker's abstract to [beta.iateflbg@gmail.com](mailto:beta.iateflbg@gmail.com)

### Report by Ophelia Pamukchieva, Public Relations

The most important of my activities are as follows:

1. Publication about BETA in *Voices*, the official magazine of IATEFL in issue 222 (September-October) 2011. It was Sylvia's idea to publicise our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The article gives information about our conference – both serious work and entertainment, illustrated by photos. The article was edited by Sylvia.
2. Participation in the Hungarian IATEFL Conference as a representative of BETA in October 2011. It was a very well organised event. Plenary speakers were Jamie Keddie, Sheelagh Deller, Michael Swan and Graham Stanley. My favourite Michael Vince (the author of *Language Practice for ESOL exams*) was also there. I had a workshop about students with different level of knowledge, preparing for FCE exam.
3. Participation at a REAL seminar (4-6 June 2010) with a poster presentation about BETA; Iasi, Romania, with participants from Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Greece, France, Spain and England other events aiming at furthering the cooperation between ELT / FLT associations which led to a full membership of REAL, the European Network of Language Teaching Associations.
4. Having gathered the e-mail addresses and the names of the heads of Regional Inspectorates of Education, we could send e-mails about our annual conferences. I also had some informal talks with authorities about BETA and how the association can cooperate with them.
5. Participation at a fund-raising seminar, held in March 2013 in Zrenjanin, Serbia as an official BETA representative. The different revenue (income) streams available to Teachers' Associations and ways to develop new ones were discussed and fundraising and

sponsorship was reviewed in more detail.

6. The new ideas were immediately applied by organising a meeting together with Sylvia Velikova with a representative of our Ministry of Education and

Science. We firmly believe that the new practices will be established and thus more people will be encouraged to participate both in our BETA conferences and initiatives.

## ANNUAL BETA COMPETITION

### **Report by Tanya Spahiyska, BETA Competition Coordinator (Co-opted Member)**

BETA has organised the Sixth Round of our Competition for Teachers and Teacher Trainers. This year the task for teachers is to prepare and deliver a lesson focusing on practical teaching techniques for presenting grammar or vocabulary, speaking or reading. The winning prize traditionally is an annual BETA membership and attendance of the 23<sup>rd</sup> BETA Conference and Preliminary Conference Event in 2014 with no fee.

## PUBLICATIONS

### **Report by Tsvetelina Harakchiyska, Newsletter Editor (Co-opted Member)**

In 2012, the publication of a bi-monthly E-Newsletter was launched. The publication of the E-Newsletter continued during the year 2013. As it is published bi-monthly, a total of 5 issues have been published:

- January – February 2013;
- April – May – June 2013;

- July – August 2013;
- September – October 2013;
- November – December 2013.

The e-Newsletter is published only electronically and is distributed to all BETA – IATEFL members.

The **editorial team** has not changed and includes:

- Tsvetelina Harakchiyska – Editor and designer
- Sylvia Velikova and Zarina Markova – Newsletter Team

The **topics** which the E-Newsletter covered in 2013 include:

- Reports from BETA-IATEFL representatives on their participation in partner association conferences;
- Reports from educational initiatives (at local or national level or abroad) in which BETA-IATEFL members have participated;
- Articles on ELT topics such as netiquette, teaching literature, working with young learners and many others.

A special edition of the E-Newsletter was published after the 22<sup>nd</sup> BETA-IATEFL conference in Varna. It contained all submitted for publication papers presented at the conference. In order to ensure the high quality of materials published

in the newsletter all manuscripts were peer-reviewed.

Unfortunately, the main problems the editorial team experienced in 2012 have not changed much during the last year. One main problem is the relatively low number of papers submitted for publication from BETA-IATEFL members – this causes a delay of some of the issues and involves ingenuity on behalf of the editorial team.

Still there are some good points:

- Bill Templer is a regular contributor to the E-Newsletter. Perhaps it would be good if he is given a regular “column”;
- We have started a new rubric – Students’ Corner. It would be good if this rubric is kept by the next BETA Committee and enriched with materials.
- Cooperation with relevant bulletins of partner association can be established so that materials of other authors (ELT practitioners from abroad) are included.

29 March 2014

Bulgaria



The BETA Committee currently consists of the following members:

**President:** Sylvia Velikova

**Membership Secretary:** Zhivka Ilieva,

**International Cooperation:** Zarina Markova,

**Public Relations:** Ophelia Pamukchieva,

**Newsletter Editor:** Tsvetelina Harakchiyska, Co-opted Member

**Annual Competition Coordinator:** Tanya Spahiyska, Co-opted Member



# What are you going to teach me today?



## **Gergana Apostolova**

South-West University in  
Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

*Dr Gergana Pehcheva-Apostolova is one of the founders of English studies at the SWU. Her connection with ELT began in the 1990s with starting a private school of English in Kyustendil covering all possible levels and types of courses and based on a preceding doctoral study of Logic and Rhetoric. She invented a methodology called Argumentative approach to ELS.*

*She is interested in the philosophy of the Infosphere and the methodology of language transcendence in the Net from a mentalist perspective. Author of 12 books. Member of editorial boards of three journals. Author of fiction books. A Fulbrighter and a winner of 2007 ESSE Senior researcher grant.*

Teachers seem a funny class of professional people: we all know that human beings are not of the same physique and interests, social and mental capacity, character and experience. Yet, there is no teacher who would set different goals for each of the people, young or older, we have undertaken to teach. We always torture ourselves that our students never reach the maximum achievement. We always suffer when a student is passive, unwilling to change, disinterested or troublesome and noisy. We call these 'difficult' students.

However, 'difficult students' can also be of different nature: they can be children from good families who have planned brilliant careers for them and always blame the teachers at the state school for their 'low standards', and their private teachers if the children fail an exam.

It was somewhere around the turn of the Millennium that I first met the group from the mathematical school in Kyustendil: now, I say 'group' but they, in fact, kept coming throughout a period of 12 years and formed different groups, remaining with me until 2007 and still coming round to see me on their return for a vacation from whatever place in the world they have settled for work or further study: the second thing to do after they had hugged their mums and dads.

The first time some of these bright children enrolled on a September night, they were young and came together

their mothers and fathers who also enrolled for the adult groups. My husband promised to teach the youngest groups and I made the lists and invited them to come the first day of October. Just before the starter date, my husband came home looking guilty and told me his school schedule took up the whole of his day and he had no time to teach this group of children. So I went there the next morning, and getting in front of the class I said: *Good morning, everybody. Mr Apostolov is unable to teach your group because he has to be at school. Do you accept me as your teacher?* They said 'yes' for they were unaccustomed to having male teachers in the primary school and the prospect of having a Mister instead of a Missis had been embarrassing to them. I, however, learned about that later on. At that moment I was somehow pleasantly surprised they wanted me. So I continued: *Look now, I have never taught people of your age: I have no idea how to teach kids. So I shall treat you as grown up people.* They liked it.

All of them remained with me until they graduated and went to

university. We experimented and played games. I taught them grammar and the structure of the exam essay. They taught me how to play PC games; they told scary urban tales and enjoyed when I managed to make my author's tales of them; they advised me where to publish, and they also taught me how to enjoy the *Harry Potter* Series. We adapted our Bulgarian tales to current tastes and they told them in English. We replayed *The Little Match Seller* by Andersen in 23 versions reconstructing its details based on archetype. We read together 27 of Terry Pratchett's novels.

I kept going to conferences of English and shared with them what I had learned. They kept going to school and shared with me what they had learned about the world and about what young people liked and wanted.

After three years I spent all my saved course fees on three computers and we made a summer course of four hours each day.

I used to prepare grammar tests and essay topics for them and they had to do them the first two hours. Then

we had a break of half an hour and after that they taught me how to play games, how to use the language of gamers correctly and how to use a computer altogether. All the time we competed, and they were really happy to have me the winner in game score.

In the 17 years of my private school practice I kept that way of teaching which I called *argumentative approach to English language learning*. It was based on one fundamental question I asked them mutely each morning: *What are you going to teach me today?* I never asked it aloud. Kids do like their teachers to know everything. They, on their part, always asked me the question *Why?* And made me invent explanations of pragmatic nature for kids never accept a motivation of the kind: *It is so because it is so*.

The purpose of all that kind of training is to bridge cultures in a way that allows our bright young Bulgarians to share their achievements the world over. They had to learn English to proficiency, and they were aware of it. Next there came the American English challenge, and it was just an extension of their English world to new socio-cultural dimensions.

Today, when I share what I have learned between 1990 and 2007, people around me usually say: "But this is a special case. The pupils from today's state schools are not like the groups you describe."

I agree completely with them. Our social and cultural environment has changed a lot. Children today do not fit our teaching goals and the capacity of our teaching methodology, and inventive and tolerating skills. Learning together with your pupils is risky for your job position. It is for young teachers, who need to establish a name, and who stand closer to their students in age.

A classroom is a cultural community: we need to construct a shared reality of only one basic objective. The children need to trust their teacher. That's all we need to start with. Next comes learning.

Last Monday we were running the trial trip of my new e-course of translation and interpretation studies with the 3<sup>rd</sup>-year undergraduates of English Philology and Applied Linguistics at the university. I was instructing them how to use the tool of discussion and asked them to write any kind of short message: a question, a



comment, a verse, a hello line. They felt like children let to play a game. I started answering their discussion entries, and that made them extremely happy. Most of the entries concerned their ELT practice. One of the boys shared he enjoyed his 3<sup>rd</sup> year pupils' questions.

Some of them shared their pupils had no great achievement in Bulgarian writing and reading lessons, and our maximalist school programs demanded they were taught spelling and grammar to the best of British English standards today.

The last entry read: *Do you like your job?* The colleague who had asked it started an excuse. But I wrote: *No, but I like my students. Thank you all for the trial trip. That will help me improve my e-course.*

It is funny, but that still works. Kids will always remain kids, and as for teachers, we are probably better disguised as learners.

## South East European Teachers' Association

### Young Learners: Tips and Tricks !



- [Roleplay - Fortune telling and palmistry](#)
- [Amazing Systems for Teaching English to YL!](#)
- [Teach and Practise the Simple Past Tense](#)

### Desert Island Discs



Desert Island Discs

April 2014

SEETA Music DJ : Roger House

### SEETA Teachers' Lounge



On-going community forum

- [My favourite .....is ?](#)
- [Behaviour Management: weirdest tips ?](#)

For more information, please visit the SEETA website at:

<http://www.seeta.eu/>

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.

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

**We are on the web:**

<http://www.beta-iatefl.org>

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