

Dear FACTers,

I am sorry I haven't written to you for such a long time, but first I had a really busy holiday, then I was "computerless" for quite a long period of time and after that I had to do all the paper work for the beginning of the new school year!

I was determined to write a report about the BIG event in Zagreb - the IATEFL EAST Conference, but I brought the flu with me so I didn't feel like writing anything! (I think I sound like my students explaining why they haven't done their homework. Sorry! ☺)

The funny thing was that there were four names in the programme, giving three presentations in different combinations: Stefka Kitanova, Keith Kelly, Julian Whitney and me - Maria Koeva, but due to some "technical problems" the first three were not able to come so Elka Goranova and I had to play the five of us! Funny and confusing! The participants thought so as well! Another funny thing was that although there were two British names in the programme, the time dedicated to our presentations - they were all scheduled for Saturday afternoon in a row - was called the Bulgarian Afternoon!

Entering the room we literally brought some Bulgarian flavour, because after a short introduction about SAW (Science Across the World), we started work on the "What Do You Eat" topic with a short practical quiz on... spices and herbs. The participants were asked to identify some typical Bulgarian spices (or at least we thought they were typical Bulgarian). But as this was done quite quickly and most of the spices were correctly identified (so probably they are not only typical Bulgarian, but typical for the Balkan region), we focused our attention on their role in cooking - only for flavour and good taste of the meal or because they were good for our health and used in a special way could treat illnesses and diseases. This led to our next activity: matching cards of plants with their English name, plants with their Latin name, part of it used and diseases it cures. This was followed by an overall discussion on the link between eating habits, diet and health and ideas on other activities to be included when working on the topic.

Our next focus was the new SAW topic "Talking about Genetics". As you can imagine most language teachers were almost terrified to hear that Genetics can be taught in an English lesson, but by the end

of the session they were convinced that it is not that scary, and can be educational and funny for both the students and the teachers. Different activities were tried out, all targeted at developing particular skills in our learner - reading, speaking, listening, writing - while working on a scientific topic. There were texts to read and match and label, a story written by only three-letter words to be arranged, a jumbled text to be sorted out and ... a test for the learners of course! ☺

After these were over, we introduced our FACT group to the participants and as a result we will soon have about 30 new members! As you can imagine there were further discussions, Q&A, exchange of ideas during the break over a cup of coffee and in a bit more relaxed atmosphere!

If you think that was it, you are wrong! After the coffee break Elka skillfully played Julian Whitney, Stefka Kitanova and Keith Kelly and presented the BBBB - Back to Back Big Book. It is a British Council project started by Keith Kelly a few years ago. It aimed at teaching English to young learners by using national folk stories. The first book - "The Blackbird and the Fox" was published first and then was followed by Julian Whitney's "Granddad's Glove". Apart from using familiar stories which are well accepted by children, these stories can be used as an introduction to Biology. If you have a more careful look at them and Stefka's Biology eye, you will find there ecosystems, habitats, etc. Of course the two stories can be used for dramatization - a perfect way for our students to learn English and have fun at the same time! But believe me teachers can have just as much fun as our students! At the end of the session we played "Granddad's Glove" dramatization, which had been recorded at the official launch of the book in Sofia in May, and was performed by teachers and members of British Council - Bulgaria. It was also a chance for the participants to have a quick glimpse of Keith, Stefka and Julian.

Well I think it's more or less that. The only thing I would like to add is that Croatia, and Zagreb in particular, are a wonderful place to go to and Roy had done his best to organise the event in such a way, so that you can enjoy both the perfect organisation of the conference and a few nice walks around the city!

Yours Faithfully
Maria Koeva