

TEACHING BULGARIAN TO NON-NATIVE BULGARIANS

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Bulgarian community in the UK

Nowadays, when we are all considered people of the world, there are no restrictions in terms of where we decide to live. This relates to the Bulgarians, as well. There is no country in the world where there are not at least few members presenting our community. We, like the other nations, make our choice where to live.

One of the most common choices is the United Kingdom and to be more specifically – England. Officially, there is around 68000920130 Bulgarians that living there. The real number is much higher. There are large communities in the big cities in each county, especially in London. You could go to the North part of the city and you do not even need to know English. You could do your shopping in a Bulgarian shop, have a haircut done by a Bulgarian hairdresser or even have a cup of coffee in a Bulgarian café.

All these emigrants have converted a piece of this multicultural country into a small home, little Bulgaria. And yet there is something missing. Despite the fact they rise their children and communicate with Bulgarians they are gradually losing their identity. In most cases they do not consider themselves Bulgarians regardless whether only one or both parents are Bulgarians. They do not acknowledge our language as their mother thong and they do not know much about our customs and tradition, only whatever their parents are able to show and tell them. They sometimes do not even know where Bulgaria is.

The role of the Bulgarian Sunday Schools and particularly the Bulgarian Sunday School “St. Ivan Rilski” in Cambridge, UK

This is where Bulgarian school comes. In England we have many supplementary schools. Some of them, as the one in the Embassy, work during the week days, after school and others – at the weekend.

The school that I have established is in Cambridge. It was first opened in September 2014. For the first two years we used to work on Sundays but we had to

move place and now we rent a room in one of the libraries there on Saturday. I am lucky to work with extremely devoted teachers.



The teachers in Bulgarian Sunday School “St. Ivan Rilski” in Cambridge – from left to right: Nadya Manolova, one of the teachers in the preschool groups, Tyurkyan Osmanova, teaching Bulgarian language and literature, Nina Borisova, the school director; Radoslava Popandreeva, teaching Bulgarian history and geography as well as running the Folk dance group “Trakiets”

All of us are aware that teaching just the language is not enough. When you teach Bulgarian to non-native Bulgarians sooner or later you face a big problem. It is the fact they are different, not as the children in our county. You have to recognize that you actually teach a foreign language as well as a foreign culture.

That is why we aim to teach our children not only how to speak in Bulgarian but also establish an understanding of the culture. We offer Bulgarian language and literature, Bulgarian history and geography classes and folk dances. Our goal is for our students to develop an identity and preserve their Bulgarian roots.

There is a big debate around the age the child needs to start attending such a school. I have talked to colleagues from other schools and we agreed that this should be at the age of 3.

In our school we have divided our students into the following groups:

- 3 – 4 years old
- 5 – 6 years old
- First and Second grade
- Third and Fourth grade
- Fifth grade etc.

We have separated the preschool group into two smaller ones due to the fact that in the first one they learn mainly songs and build up and expand their vocabulary. Whereas the 5-6 year old are getting ready for First grade. They study the alphabet, make their first steps in reading and writing.

Specific issues when teaching Bulgarian abroad

Teaching Bulgarian needs to start at a very early age due to the difficulties the child could face later. In most of the cases children learn Bulgarian as a foreign language. They often find themselves translating from English. They use Bulgarian words or a mixture of words in both languages (such as using an English word but adding a Bulgarian suffixes – topche, which should mean “a top”) but the structure of the sentence remains English. That is one of the most difficult things to learn. Another difficulty is the prepositions. As native speakers we do not think much about which one to use in a specific situation but for a non-native speaker that is not easy. As with learning any foreign language they need to start from the very beginning.



Learning Bulgarian is always fun!

There is something else that needs to be mentioned. The teacher needs to be very creative to be able to involve every single student in the group. You could imagine a teacher difficulty when you have a group of 10 children in First grade where 3 kids are able to speak Bulgarian, 3 are able to understand but not speak, another three know only very basic Bulgarian and one – none at all. It is extremely challenging to adapt the lessons in order to be assimilated equally from the students. Unfortunately, the adapted versions of the student books are not good enough. These books cannot cater for all students due to their different abilities.

It is not a simple job to prepare such lessons. We are lucky because our teachers are familiar with both educational systems – the British and the Bulgarian ones. They try to present the new material by using the English methodology. From personal experience, we know that teaching the way we were thought does not work here. These are bilingual children who speak English as first language and they learn in a more interactive environment compared to the Bulgarian. Their knowledge is very practically orientated where in our country is more academic and theoretical.



Geography project – November 2016



Dance repetition – November 2016

Differences between Bulgarian and British educational systems

Two years ago I attended a course named “Introduction into the English curriculum”. I have to admit that it was very helpful and beneficial. There were representatives of many different communities. We were able to learn how our children are thought at school, how they study grammar, history, etc. For instance, when they learn about the verb as a part of speech it is explained to them as something that has a tense, not an action as we learn in Bulgaria. It was good to know these little differences because we are able to teach them Bulgarian in the way they are used to learn grammar. Our success lies in adapting the school curriculum to their way of learning in order to make the new knowledge easily accessible to them.

The students often do not use text books at their English schools and they have the right to make a choice what to study. For instance, if they are learning about the ancient times they can decide whether to study about Ancient Egypt, Rome or Greece. They do not have to cover all of them.

The 100th anniversary from the beginning of World War 1 was part of the English curriculum for all classes. Of course, it was adapted to their ages. For instance, the younger ones were learning what kind of toys the children in those days used to play with, what they were made of in order to learn the materials people used to know at that time, etc. The English teachers do not only present a specific period of the history but they teach according to students’ age interests and abilities. That is how we prepare our lessons too. So our students do not have to adapt to different methodology because if we ask them to stay still on the chair for a few hours we will lose their interest and at the end they will not want to come back.

Bulgarian Sunday School “St. Ivan Rilski” as a member of the Bilingual community network

From the very beginning our school became a member of an organization which is in charge of supporting different community schools in Cambridge. The aim is to gather these schools in order to help each other. Members of the group are the Polish, the German, the French, the Russian, the Japanese, the Chinese and our schools. It appears that we all have the same issues. They also struggle with the lack of adapted school books, lack of student motivation because learning their mother tongue is difficult to them due to the fact that it is a foreign language. We share our problems and look for a solution together. The German and the French schools were established a long time ago and support the other schools by giving advice about all the administrative and paper work. They organize different educational courses for the teachers in these communities. One of them was the one I already mentioned above “Introducing into the English curriculum”. Another very interesting training was “Working with children with special educational needs”.

Learning through experiencing the Bulgarian customs and tradition

We aim to show our students the Bulgarian customs and always celebrate together the biggest festivals as Christmas eve, we talk about Kukeri, Baba Marta, Easter, 24th of May. We gather parents, students and the community to show children the spirit of Bulgaria.



*Our preschool group has made some very beautiful Kukeri cards –
January 2017*

We always organize a Christmas party for our students. They dress up in traditional costumes and dance “hora” and “rychenitsa”. The parents bring some delicious homemade traditional dishes and if we are lucky to find the right materials we have a workshop for making “survatchka”.



Christmas celebration – December 2016

We try to keep up to date our families with the newest and the most interesting events in Bulgaria. That is why we invited, together with the Cambridge university Bulgarian student’s community “Canta Bulgaria”, members of Bulgarian history to present their movie “Louis Eyer – the Swiss with a Bulgarian heart”. It was a great pleasure to have them as our guests and to learn about non-native people who have recognized themselves as Bulgarians and sacrificed their lives for Bulgaria. Learning about these people make us appreciate our culture and history even more. We went to Peterborough the same day to present the movie again due to the interest it stimulated at the Cambridge screening.



01.11.2016



01.11.2016

Bulgarian Sunday School “Vyzrazhdane” in Peterborough, UK

This September we opened a branch of our school in Peterborough. It was a result of the joint effort and passion of the community there who helped establish it.

Conclusion

Being a teacher is one of the most honorable and humane jobs. Being a Bulgarian teacher abroad is challenging and even more beneficial. You are never fully prepared for it because it is difficult to give a specific job description. Sufficient materials do not exist and we, the teachers abroad, do our best to nurture the Bulgarian spirit in the new Bulgarian generations.

ПРЕПОДАВАНЕ НА БЪЛГАРСКИ ЕЗИК НА НЕГОВОРЕЩИ ЕЗИКА БЪЛГАРИ

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