18+

E DUNCAN-GOODWILLIE

THE ENGLISH TEACHERS

RF Duncan-Goodwillie
The English Teachers

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=56557448
ISBN 9785005111296

Аннотация

English teaching encompasses a variety individuals and contexts. Much has been written about their jobs (how to teach, what to teach, etc.) but very little about the people themselves… until now.In a series of interviews with current and former English teachers conducted in locations ranging from Rhode Island to Northern Iraq, Rory Fergus Duncan-Goodwillie provides an insight into the lives of the English teachers.

Содержание

Glossary of Terms 7
1 13
Why does anyone write a book? 13
How to read this book 19
This work is for the following groups of people 20
The Nature of the Book 24
2 26
John Shaw (JS) 29
Ninha (N) 33
ID 35
Nadezhda Boguk (NB) 37
Anastasia Dereviankina (AD) 41
Daniel Saraiva San Pedro (DSSP) 47
Heather Belgorodtseva (HB) 50
Christopher James Leckenby (CJL) 55
Nataliya Pronina (NP) 60
Lisa Shichkova (LS) 62
Luka Miksic (LM) 65
Günther Cristiano Butzen (GCB) 68
Maksim Levkin (ML) 72
Edward Crabtree (EC) 74
Elena Atlasova (EA) 80
Felipe Fülber (FF) 84

	Frances (F)	87
	Chee-way Sun (CWS)	91
	Carlos Monroy (CS)	94
	Cheng Zhang-Stoddard (CZS)	96
	Anastasia Kolcheva (AK)	98
	Luis Clavijo (LC)	100
	Gary Krautkramer (GK) and Polina Pivovarova (PP)	103
	Daria Starova (DS)	107
	Leandri Butterworth (LB)	111
	Irina Grekova (IG)	113
	Varvara Tyurina (VT)	117
	Andy S (AS)	120
	Vika K (VK)	122
	Olga Shushunova (OS)	125
	Sebastian Orlande (SO)	140
	Aline C (AC)	144
	Nico Benger (NB)	147
	Elena Kalkova (EK)	154
3		158
	John Shaw (JS)	160
	Ninha (N)	167
	ID	169
	Nadezhda Boguk (NB)	174
	Anastasia Dereviankina (AD)	178
	Heather Belgorodtseva (HB)	182

Christopher James Leckenby (CJL) 185
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 193

The English Teachers

RF Duncan-Goodwillie

Editor Ivan Fidrovsky
Cover designer Ivan Fidrovsky

ISBN 978-5-0051-1129-6
Created with Ridero smart publishing system

This book is dedicated to its subjects: The English Teachers. Thank you for making the lives of others better… and for making my life interesting

Glossary of Terms

The following is a non-exhaustive list of terms which appear in the book. Some of these subjects have entire books dedicated to them in detail, so what is presented will naturally be an oversimplification best corrected by a more in-depth online search.

1-2-1 teaching – describes a situation where there is one teacher and one student.

Accuracy – refers to a focus on using language correctly. Tasks which focus on accuracy will often involve a lot of correction by a teacher, etc. The opposite of this is fluency, where activities are designed with the idea of students getting their message across regardless of the accuracy. Fluency and accuracy operate on more of a spectrum than two distinct categories.

ADOS – an abbreviation of Assistant Director of Studies. These people are usually English teachers with some management and administrative responsibility, and supervise the work of a teacher. A Director of Studies (DOS) does this in smaller schools or oversees schools at a strategic level.

BKC – a large chain of language schools in Moscow and a franchise of International House. **Blocks** – are classes scheduled on the same day close together. For example: 1500—1600, 1615—1715, etc.

Cambridge Assessment English – a Cambridge Exam board.

Cambridge Proficiency English (CPE) – an exam that shows candidates have mastered English to an exceptional level.

Camp – many language schools also run summer camps during the break between academic years. These usually have less structured curricula, which encourages teachers to be creative and flexible.

Certificate in Advanced Methodology (CAM) – an International House training course for experienced teachers.

Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) – a common initial teacher training qualification.

Chunks – refers to the way that groups of words are commonly found together, sometimes with no obvious reason. They are more common in native-level speech.

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) – teaching subjects such as Science, Maths and History to students through a foreign language.

Communicative approach – an approach to language teaching which involves students communicating real meaning to successfully learn (as opposed to completing mindless activities). Outside of this description, it is hard to define without courting controversy.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) – is ongoing training and development while working.

Controlled practice – activities in a class where students

focus on producing language accurately.

Cover classes – classes taught by a substitute teacher when the regular teacher for the class is ill or otherwise unavailable.

Concept checking – refers to measures to confirm students have understood what has been presented.

Deep-end CLT – a type of communicative language teaching where explicit grammar instruction is rejected and a programme of study, based around communicative tasks, is used instead.

Delayed feedback – given a relatively long time after a task has been completed or an error/mistake has been made. Immediate feedback is given just after an error/mistake has been made or during an activity.

Demand High – another approach to teaching that favours deeper learning over just covering material in books. More detailed examinations can be found online.

Dogme – a teaching approach that prioritises a focus on being light on materials and focusing on the language students produce in class during conversations. More information can be found relating to this online.

Emergent language – language that comes up – usually unexpectedly – during classroom interaction. It is language students use to express the meaning they need to in the moment.

English First (EF) – a large network of schools operating globally.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) – taught to students where English is not the main language.

First Certificate in English (FCE) – a Cambridge qualification for B2/Upper Intermediate level English.

Fossilisation – a phenomenon which occurs when the mistakes students make become a fixed part of the way they speak English. Opinions differ over how much it is possible to correct fossilised errors.

Gamification – in education this process involves taking elements of games and applying them to educational tasks to promote engagement.

Grading language – refers to efforts made by teachers to make their speech more comprehensible to lower level students.

Grammar-translation – probably the method of teaching most people are familiar with. It involves a focus on grammatical rules and translation from one language to another.

Guided discovery – an approach to grammar teaching that involves students analysing examples of language and attempting to deduce the meaning, form and sometimes pronunciation from questions set by the teacher.

International English Language Testing System (IELTS) – an international standardised test of English.

International House World Organisation (IH) – a large network of English Language schools.

Instruction checking questions – questions asked to ensure students have understood tasks and activities.

Intelligibility – how well a speaker/writer can be understood.

The Lexical Approach – an approach to teaching that is based on the idea that a key part of learning a language depends on being able to understand and produce lexical phrases as chunks and these can and should be taught to students.

"Lifting off the page" – refers to the idea of not just teaching from the book. Some activities in books present opportunities for further, more engaging practice than if they were only worked through as they are laid out in the book.

Present, Practice, Produce (PPP) – a standard lesson framework for grammar lessons where a teacher presents language, students practise it (perhaps by doing gap filling activities) and then attempt to produce the language taught in a freer activity.

OGE/EGE – Russian state school exams.

Open lessons – lessons specifically set aside for parents and guardians to visit lessons and observe what happens in a class. This is usually a feature of YL classes.

Pacing schedules (pacings) – documents which map out what pages from certain textbooks should be covered per lesson. Some pacings are more flexible than others and teachers can be permitted to choose materials that best meet the needs of their students.

Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) – a common UK university-level teaching qualification.

Private classes – classes taught outside of a formal institution such as a school – even a large private one. Many teachers

have private students in addition to their formal classes with the institutions they work for.

Satellite schools – refers to schools at locations outside city centres.

Task Based Learning (TBL) – a lesson framework which requires students to engage in tasks that resemble situations similar to those in real life. In weak-end TBL the teacher provides key language to be used in tasks, while in strong-end TBL, students are (at least initially) expected to select the language needed to complete the task.

TESOL – generally describes any non-CELTA certificate in teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Trinity TESOL – an ELT qualification on a similar level to CELTA.

Test-teach-test (TTT) – a lesson framework whereby a teacher tests students, decides the areas that require improvement and teaches those specific points, and then tests again.

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) – a standardised test to measure the English language ability of non-native speakers wishing to enrol in English-speaking universities.

Young Learners (YL) – generally students between 7—16 years old. Very Young Learners (VYL) generally refers to students less than 5—6 years old.

1

Origins and the Raison D'être

Why does anyone write a book?

Looking back, perhaps this should have been one of the questions I asked in my interviews since articulating my own answer to that question has proven difficult. I often find that discussing questions with other people helps form my own perspective, but since this really is only a question I can answer, I will muddle along with what I have.

The idea for this book did not come to me overnight in a single burst of creativity. It was a confluence of several events. One of these was my DELTA (Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) Module 3 research, during which I noticed a wealth of books and blogs about how to teach and what to teach, but very little on the teachers themselves in terms of how they felt about their work. Perhaps the closest was Peter Medgyes' "The Non-Native Speaking Teacher" which did a very good job of capturing the thoughts and feelings of many teachers throughout the world along the divide of native and non-native speakers.

I found Medgyes' work to be quite influential in terms of appreciating the issues facing teachers regarding this most crucial of issues and how to raise awareness in teachers and students of how to approach it. Perhaps at present a two-tier system exists between native and non-native speaking teachers in some cases, but working towards an ideal where there doesn't have to be such a divide is something we could all benefit from.

Similarly, Kathleen Graves also recorded the thoughts and feelings of teachers as they related to course design via direct quotes from teachers in question. In turn, I would like to quote Kathleen's insightful observation that: "Dialogue among teachers is a crucial step in giving teachers more power in their professions: it helps teachers to be more aware of their own practice and how it relates to that of their colleagues." As with Medgyes' awareness raising, I drew a great deal of inspiration from this when forming my ideas about how to structure this book.

One of the unfortunate aspects of the work of these two writers, however, is that the wealth of sources in Medgyes' case had a focus on the particular native/non-native cleavage, and Graves' focus solely on course design limited the scope of the work for my purposes. I hope to address these issues by increasing the range of issues facing teachers and changing the focus to the teachers themselves respectively. The primary aim of this book is to help current and prospective English teachers by showing them what teaching is actually like for those already

working in the profession.

It seemed a common flaw in the books on how and what to teach was that they largely neglect a crucial source of information: the teachers themselves in the teaching environment. Often the reason authors seek to provide information is out of a feeling that budding professional teachers need it (and they often do in my experience!) but this has led to an imbalance in texts. Some authors have tried to address this with comments and examples from teachers and I hope to continue this.

A second origin point was my own science fiction book, "The People's War", published in the summer of 2019. The book was based around a series of interviews with people following the end of a galactic conflict. Of all the books I had written up to that point, it was the one I had the most fun writing and I often wondered if I could do something similar with real people. The one issue was I had no idea what I would ask them about.

That crucial gap was bridged after an unexpected question came up during a conversation I had with a colleague while I was working in Moscow. I'd just delivered a presentation for a workshop and outlined some useful sources of information. I was a regular presenter at my school and also in others, and my colleague asked me when I would be bringing out a book. I explained I had already and I was a science fiction writer, but she clarified in a straightforward manner with words to the effect of, "No Rory, I'm not interested in science fiction. I mean, when

will you be writing a book about teaching?"

Afterwards, while walking to my afternoon classes, I wondered what I could actually write about teaching. It seemed that everything about teaching had been said and a lot of what I was presenting – and indeed what teachers were doing in their classes – was just the work and words of other people. And therein lay the answer: not presenting something about teaching, but presenting the voices of teachers and what they have to say about their work. There's so much theory and so many practical ideas, but little on what people do or say or feel.

Lastly, the book aims to tackle an issue that emerges as a side effect of English Teaching and Learning as a business, summarised in the following comment: "I don't feel listened to as a professional teacher, when I have so much important information to share." You could perhaps replace the job title "teacher" with any role since this lack of "listening" seems a feature of many businesses. I do not believe this is because managers are evil and do not care (at the time of writing I myself am a manager and I am reasonably certain I am not evil – though others may beg to differ!). The first four letters of "business" give the problem away; in business we are all very busy and do not have the time to sit down and actively listen to every single thing people have to say. Much as I would like to in my day job, if I did this I would get nothing done and then I would really be in trouble.

So, I set out to ask questions and listen to what I heard.

My aim was to listen to teachers' answers to relevant questions about themselves. I tried not to place unnecessary limits on what participants said and allowed them to interpret questions as they saw fit. In a day and age where teachers find themselves increasingly constricted by red-tape and so-called "teacher-proof" courses (where the teacher has little control over the material and methods used), I wanted to give them as much freedom as possible. They are, or were, in public and private institutions. Newly-qualified and experienced. Teachers, academic managers and teacher trainers. While they were being interviewed as English teachers first, sometimes other roles crept in to provide some invaluable insights.

A final point about the writing of the book was one that emerged months down the line as I was writing the final draft in the spring of 2020. As I made the final edits, the world found itself in the grip of the coronavirus (Covid-19) and face-to-face contact was limited, narrowing our capacity for "real conversation" as everyone switched to digital options for interaction.

It seems we may be in this situation for some time and must remember the significance of genuine conversation with another human being. With this in mind, I hope that bringing some examples of this to people in an accessible format will not only remind us of what we have lost, but to truly value it when we find it again. Listening to the voices of other people has helped me through self-isolation in Moscow. Hopefully, it will help

others, too.

How to read this book

Ironically for a teacher and academic manager, I hate telling people what to do. However, sometimes ways of doing things are not so obvious and some pointers can be useful. This is how I justify myself at least.

With that in mind, you could read this book line after line, cover to cover. And if you can keep track of over 30 different conversations in your head at the same time, then you are welcome to do this.

Another way might be choosing what you want to focus on and skipping right to the section which catches your eye. This is also valid and I've tried to give some comments of what was discussed previously for context, though you might need to read the parts of the interviews in surrounding chapters to get a fuller picture. It's also possible to read this book one conversation at a time and appreciate them as single, continuous dialogues. This might give a fuller experience as though you are a fly on the wall of the conversation.

Whatever your approach, it should be the most comfortable one for you.

This work is for the following groups of people

1) Teachers I often find one of the features of even general conversations with teachers is the constant quest for ideas. How can I improve my practice? How can this lesson be more interesting? How do I make more money!? Hopefully, this work will assist with answering these questions, but they are not the primary focus for teachers. I hope teachers will find common ground in terms of the issues they face and help each other (however indirectly) to find solutions. In particular, the matters of stress management seem particularly pertinent for teachers already in the profession. This book is also designed to be relevant to those who are considering teaching as a start or change to their career. I have found that several teachers have come into the profession with certain expectations which are then not met and they are left bitterly disappointed. I would encourage those prospective teachers to read the sections on what the students are like and the reality of teaching English. Hopefully, it will help them prepare for the rewards and challenges that lie ahead.

Many of the people in this book are teaching, or have taught, in the Russian context and so this book might best be called, "The English Teachers of Moscow", but I believe the issues discussed here are largely universal and any teacher (or potential teacher) working in any context would benefit from reading about them.

Still, I acknowledge that possible shortcoming and hope people will be willing to accept it. If you can't, perhaps writing a book about teachers in your context is a route to consider. You would certainly find a willing audience in me.

2) Managers Management, like government, strikes many as something of a necessary evil and certainly few people go into management to be liked (and if you have then you really should have known better). As already mentioned, managers are busy people with little free time on their hands. I hope they will use some of that free time to look at the thoughts of those they manage and keep them in mind when they are planning their next steps. The chapter on teaching contexts and teaching in general will likely be the most useful in these cases.

3) Teacher Trainers I would not be exaggerating if I said all the teacher trainers I have ever met have been some of the smartest people I know. Of course, you can know everything in the world and still miss an important aspect: at the end of the day, we are training people. By offering some insight into teachers' thoughts and feelings about training and professional development, perhaps trainers will be able to tailor their approaches more effectively.

4) Students A book about teachers that students can read?! It doesn't make much sense on the surface, but students are curious people (in every sense of that adjective!). Why else would they take the time to learn a language and ask questions about it? Students do wonder what teachers do and what they think about.

Perhaps by sharing some of this with them, teachers can become more relatable and students can become more engaged with the learning process. It is perhaps a distant dream in the minds of many, but if we do not try to encourage students to understand their teachers, we will never know. With this in mind, I have tried to make the conversations as clear as possible for those who do not speak English as a first language. Of course, if you cannot understand everything it's possible to use a dictionary… or pay an English teacher to help you!

5) The Ever-Curious Public Everyone has an opinion on education. Everyone. My least favourite opinion is when people tell me (and it is always "**telling**", never "saying") how easy my job must be. It's all, "Repeat after me, please!" and drinking vodka with the locals. My favourite opinion is when people assume I know everything about English. While I do know more than the average person, I wouldn't claim a perfect knowledge (though it does provide a nice ego boost!).

I hope the insights shared by the teachers in this book will help enlighten the public about what we do and how we work. We might be teachers but we are still people and, as in any job, we face many issues and garner numerous rewards from our work. Perhaps, through deeper understanding, non-teachers will be able to appreciate our work more fully and appreciate us as people.

I have made the book as open in language as possible. There are a lot of abbreviations and acronyms in ELT – English

Language Teaching – and I have added notes where I feel this would help. However, if anything is unclear, I would refer to the glossary at the start of the book and then to the TKT (Teacher Knowledge Test) glossary which was designed for a teaching exam but written in very clear language by Cambridge Assessment English. It is online and free. Also, Scott Thornbury's A-Z of ELT which is online and free.

The Nature of the Book

I have structured the book by dividing it into chapters broadly based around key questions with explanations as to why this is my focus. I hope I have chosen wisely. I have then provided the transcripts of teachers' answers to these questions. These have been edited for relevance and succinctness I had no intention of boring readers with every "um" and "ah" – even though we all do it! Furthermore, my audio recording and transcribing software has been far from accurate in places. Speaking is a notoriously less accurate skill than writing, so I have also had the transcripts edited by a professional editor to keep the contributions understandable for readers by making minor changes to the tenses used etc. but with the original meaning kept intact.

At the end of the book there is a conclusion with my own ideas and beliefs as a commentary, and some questions for readers to consider. I have done so to draw the chapters to a close, not with the intention of encouraging readers to believe everything I have written. Indeed, I would be appalled if that happened; life would be very boring if we all had the same opinions.

I've kept some of my interviewees anonymous on request. English teaching is a wonderful job, but some aspects of business and educational culture do not lend themselves to open and honest dialogue with a name attached.

Similarly, I have kept the use of the names of specific institutions to a minimum.

The views of 35 people speaking in 2019 have been recorded here and it's possible they may have changed their ideas since then. Most of the interviewees are teaching in Moscow, though many have international experience which they have also contributed. Some contributors may express what seem to be mutually exclusive viewpoints. I think this is something the vast majority of people do, such is the nature of humanity. Read the book both critically and with an open mind.

My personal email is at the end and I welcome questions, ideas and constructive criticism.

2

"Where do you come from?" – Teacher Backgrounds

English teachers are spectacularly diverse in almost every aspect. They come from all around the world for different reasons, speaking many dialects and possessing a variety of outlooks on life and the English language. When many of us start teaching students for the first time, we are encouraged to do a "needs analysis". This helps teachers find out about their students' backgrounds, language requirements and goals for development. The idea is that by knowing our students better, we can teach them more effectively. Similarly in this book, to understand our teachers more effectively we must have a complete picture of where they come from. Life may be more about the journey than the destination, but it's a good idea to know where you started from to know where you are going.

This chapter is somewhat different to the others which follow. For each interview I'll provide a section called "Setting the Scene" where I'll describe the participants, where we met, how they were feeling at the time and what the atmosphere was like as we talked. Some smaller comments will be provided later to add

context but the focus – as ever – is on what is being said.

Every interview I conducted started with the same request: "Tell me about your background." To avoid repetition, I have omitted this starter question from the transcripts. With the same objective, I have started the scripts in each chapter with the names of the interviewees and then replaced them with the first letters of the names they provided. With a single exception, they are ordered in the manner conducted from January to August 2019. A full list is below for reference.

John Shaw (JS)
Ninha (N)
ID (ID)
Nadezhda Boguk (NB)
Anastasia Dereviankina (AD)
Daniel Saraiva San Pedro (DSSP)
Heather Belgorodtseva (HB)
Christopher James Leckenby (CJL)
Nataliya Pronina (NP)
Lisa Shichkova (LS)
Luka Miksic (LM)
Günther Cristiano Butzen (GCB)
Maksim Levkin (ML)
Edward Crabtree (EC)
Elena Atlasova (EA)
Felipe Fülber (FF)
Frances (F)

Chee-way Sun (CWS)
Carlos Monroy (CM)
Cheng Zhang-Stoddard (CZS)
Anastasia Kolcheva (AK)
Luis Clavijo (LC)
Gary Krautkramer (GK) and Polina Pivovarova (PP)
Daria Starova (DS)
Leandri Butterworth (LB)
Irina Grekova (IG)
Varvara Tyurina (VT)
Andy S (AS)
Vika K (VK)
Olga Shushunova (OS)
Sebastian Orlande (SO)
Aline C (AC)
Nico Benger (NB)
Elena Kalkova (EK)

Note: Nadezhda Boguk and Nico Benger have the same abbreviations but appear towards the beginning and end of each chapter respectively. I hope this fact and the pronouns used will prevent any confusion.

*****

John Shaw (JS)

Setting the scene: *John was the first person I interviewed in January 2019. It is morning but still very dark as we sit in the spacious room set aside for teacher training purposes. We are both tired from starting work early, but he has brought coffee which soon has the desired effect of bringing us to life. John is jovial and speaks with a Northern English accent that immediately endears him to those around him. If that fails initially, he has a kind nature to back it up which is conveyed by his expressive eyes – even if they are a little tired during the opening round of our interview.*

JS: I'm from a town called Darwen near Manchester. I went to Manchester University, first for a BA then a Masters. After a year or so I decided to become an English teacher. I did my CELTA in Prague and then took my first job here in Moscow.

RFDG: Why did you choose to go into teaching?

JS: Actually, it was by chance. When I finished university it was difficult to find work due to the economic situation. I did various jobs including being a waiter and I volunteered, but I always wanted to go abroad. Most of my friends I knew from the internet – I played a lot of online computer games.

So, when I finished university I was travelling around and staying with friends. I went to a university job fair and there was an EFL stall. They were offering a TEFL certificate. I went back home and was interested in the idea, but after researching

it seemed it wasn't really worth anything. It was just a piece of paper and when you finished you got to stay at one of their schools for a short amount of time. But, while researching, I read about the CELTA* and understood it was a proper qualification. I wanted to do it but not in England. I wanted to do it abroad because I wanted a real experience. I was really eager to start my new career and a new adventure.

*Note: Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults – a common initial teacher training qualification.

RFDG: If the economic situation had been better, would you have considered doing something else?

JS: Probably. When I was a teenager and people suggested I become a teacher it was the last thing I wanted to do. I was at quite a difficult school. Actually, it's closed down now. The students in my class were very disrespectful and I didn't see the point in becoming a teacher. I didn't know EFL* existed. I first came across it because one of my classmates at university said it was what he was interested in.

I wanted to go into something creative because when I was studying History I was doing a lot of research. I went to the Oxford university library and I was looking through archives and at the same time I was staying in a hostel full of partying European travellers and I understood that I'd rather work with people than with sources. So, I'd already moved away from academia and History. But if I had got a job in Marketing or Advertising, which is what I was looking for when I left,

I probably wouldn't have become an EFL teacher. It was just spontaneity and luck that helped me find the job.

*Note: English as a Foreign Language (taught to students where English is not the main language).

RFDG: You did CELTA in Prague. Why did you come to Russia?

JS: When I finished in Prague I was looking for a job, but it was difficult to find work. Prague is in the European Union and has a reputation for being beautiful with lots of cheap tasty food and alcohol, so you find a lot of British teachers there already. Also, the demand for English isn't as high because they speak English quite well there. I came to Moscow because my school in Prague was an International House school. I went on the IH* website and found that IH-Moscow was offering jobs for newly-qualified teachers and training at the same time which interested me.

*Note: IH stands for International House World Organisation, a large network of English Language schools.

RFDG: Why not China or South America where there are also opportunities?

JS: I wanted to go somewhere far away from home, but not too far away and the Czech Republic and Russia aren't a million miles away from each other in terms of culture. I enjoyed my time in the Czech Republic and I found their humour very funny, so I thought I'd fit in well in Moscow. I suppose if I hadn't met Russian people in my course maybe I wouldn't have considered it.

RFDG: If you could change now, would you continue being a teacher?

JS: I'd definitely stay in education. I like being a teacher. Of course, there are some small things I would change. For instance, some of the classes I get can be trouble, but at the moment I think being a teacher is what I want to be.

*

Ninha (N)

Setting the scene: *Ninha is not her real name, but she is very real and frank in her tone and expression. Little can be given away in terms of appearance and accent, but it is clear she has a focus on young people and inspiring them to learn, along with the knowledge and experience to make that a reality. We speak in hushed tones in a quiet room set aside for us as the morning winter chill of Moscow slightly ices the windows from the outside.*

N: I'm from Poland and I've been a teacher for 17 plus years. I've always wanted to be a teacher. I'm one of those boring people! I studied History first and as soon as I graduated I moved to another university to study English?

RFDG: Why do you think you always wanted to get into teaching?

N: I have no idea. I just always wanted to be a teacher. When I was younger and people asked what I wanted to be, I said, "I want to be a woman!"

She laughs slightly at the memory.

After a brief spell of wanting to be a doctor and a ballerina – being five had a role to play in that, I guess – I just wanted to be a teacher.

RFDG: Why did you choose Moscow?

N: I had been to other places already and I wanted to come here. Actually, Moscow was my first choice, but then there was

a job opening in Spain so I went there and then when a job was available I moved again. Russian was my first foreign language ever, so it was interesting.

RFDG: It seems like a logical choice.

N: Well, I went west and south, so only north or east was left.

RFDG: And there's not much north of Poland.

N: Yeah, and I started learning Russian when I was 10 years old. I liked it and the culture was here. The whole idea of them being the enemy never interested me.

RFDG: What does Russian culture mean to you?

N: It doesn't mean much because mine and this one are quite similar in many ways. So for me, I guess I would say there were a lot of new things elsewhere. Of course, I read all the great literature, etc. but I mainly just wanted to see what it was like here.

RFDG: And how would you describe here?

N: It's amazing. I love this city. I've been to a few other places, but this place is unique. There are many beautiful parts of the city and people are cool. There are many people from my life who were surprised. All those ideas people have about what Russia is like; when they come here they say it's cool.

*

ID

Setting the scene: *It's Friday in Moscow, which normally takes the edge off the fact that it's winter. As we sit in a long room, part of a large if non-descript business centre near the Kremlin, the atmosphere is somewhat tense. ID is her pseudonym. She is dressed seriously to discuss a serious subject. I soon find out what that is, but not in this opening conversation.*

ID: I graduated from a specialised English school in Moscow. Not a private one, just public. It had a stronger curriculum in English. Then I graduated from university with a degree in International Relations and American Studies. While I was there I started teaching part-time. This was my first introduction to teaching and I was trained at the school where I started working.

RFDG: So, it was a natural progression?

ID: Yeah.

RFDG: Why did you choose to teach here in Moscow?

ID: I'm a Muscovite. This is my mother city, my hometown. I'm not willing to relocate. This is basically half-conscious, half-subconscious choice. This is where my family is, this is where my husband is, so I'm comfortable here.

RFDG: Have you ever considered other alternatives?

ID: Yes, I did actually. The problem is that International Relations is a field that it's hard to get a job without connections,

at least in Russia. I struggled to find a job in my field, so I was considering different options and after facing a closed door in many directions I decided to just stay with what I was actually good at. I was pushed toward teaching I would say.

*

Nadezhda Boguk (NB)

Setting the scene: *I haven't quite been able to explain to myself how or why, but even without talking to her in great depth beforehand, I could tell that Nadezhda is a teacher. She sits in a chair in a classroom near the main office with an air of wisdom and calm, speaking in a way that tells me she knows exactly what she wants to say and exactly what she is talking about.*

NB: I come from Barnaul which is a city in Siberia. I graduated from school then went to university and studied for five years. It was the linguistics faculty. That's when I realised the best thing I was taught was to speak English and to teach English. And that's how I ended up in this career. As for Moscow, it was an opportunity to do a postgraduate study. That's why I quit my job in Barnaul and moved to Moscow. I worked at a university. Then I decided to take a little break and after taking the CELTA course I started to work for BKC*.

*Note: BKC is a large chain of language schools in Moscow and is a franchise of International House.

RFDG: Did you do CELTA with BKC?

NB: Yes. It was in June 2018.

RFDG: When you were working at the linguistics faculty did you feel that teaching was the only option for you, or was it an active choice on your part?

NB: It was a choice, I would say. Before starting working, I was applying for different jobs, like being a secretary and I was trying different options, but I felt the most comfortable with this career.

RFDG: What influenced you to make this choice? Is it something that you've always wanted to do, or were there different things that happened?

NB: It started with the language first because when I was in 9th grade and it was time to think about what to do next, what majors to take in high school, I came up with my favourite subject and that was English. Then I thought about the place where English would be taught best in our city.

There were university courses, like Economics plus English, but I wasn't very interested in Economics and International Affairs. So, the best linguistic option was the Pedagogical University. I went there to study English not teaching, but teaching was like the application of this knowledge. The way we were taught and how things were explained, and the practice we had during the course, even though I had the extra courses in translation and interpreting, I still thought teaching was more comfortable for me.

RFDG: You mentioned before you chose Moscow because there was an option for postgraduate studies as well. Were there any other reasons, or was this one opportunity that was the best?

NB: It was the only opportunity because they offered a place to live and in Moscow finding a place to live is a problem.

RFDG: Why Moscow in particular? Were there no other places in Russia that had this option?

NB: The university where I studied had a partnership with this university in Moscow. They were looking for students and they addressed different universities in all of Russia to invite students to come to Moscow.

RFDG: Would you have studied in a different country if you'd had the opportunity?

NB: Yes, I would.

RFDG: Anywhere in particular?

NB: I did a one-week course in England. I still monitor different options, but it's all about having the money for it or getting a grant. In my field it's not easy to find grants, but I still need to continue searching for other options.

RFDG: Why do you think it's difficult to find grants?

NB: Most of the things I've seen have been related to Chemistry, Biology or Engineering. For social studies, especially teaching, it's not so widespread. Not so many universities offer courses or programmes.

RFDG: Is it purely because it's not popular?

NB: I'm not sure if it's about popularity. I know the teaching profession is quite significant. As for other countries, I wouldn't say it's as prominent as here in Russia. Even in Russia there's been a decline in preparing teaching staff. So, that's why abroad there are not so many programmes aimed at this. There can be things like CELTA and DELTA but they are, in my opinion,

somewhat limited. I studied for five years at my university and I had teaching methods, psychology and other basic courses. If we speak about CELTA that's just four weeks and I'm glad I did it after I had some experience. It was like the cherry on top to add to the skills I already had.

RFDG: Would you say it's best to have some teaching experience and then do CELTA?

NB: It can be like a catch 22, I think. On the one hand, it gives the basics, it gives you some ideas. I would suggest having some formal education together with CELTA and study teaching at the very beginning. I had some basic skills and it's not something that has been hammered into me and I am still flexible and ready to accept new things, and modify my behaviour in class. At this point this is also good because I know what to do. I feel comfortable in the classroom and that's why it's not as stressful as it might be when you come and see the group of people and you have to work with them and explain things to them.

RFDG: If you had the choice, would you do a different job?

NB: I also feel comfortable with technical drawing. If I hadn't chosen English I might have gone into Engineering. But I don't know how serious I can be about it because I never had anyone who could consult with me, or notice if I was doing something well. I don't know now.

*

Anastasia Dereviankina (AD)

Setting the scene: *If I could describe Anastasia in a word it would be sharp. Everything about her is sharp. Her eyes, fashion sense, manner of speaking and her knowledge of what she speaks about. Without even speaking, I'm aware she is dedicated to her work and willing to ignore everything unrelated when it's time to work. People who may not know her well might find it jarring, but after several months of working together I find it reassuring to speak to someone who knows what is going on.*

AD: I'm from Saratov and I graduated from the Philological department at the state university there in 2013. I'm a teacher, interpreter and a manager, so I've a lot of different qualifications. I started working as a corporate teacher, teaching business to groups of people, maybe 15—20 adults. I didn't teach kids or teenagers. But then I started working as a private tutor. I was teaching kids ranging from 8—13 or 14. Before moving to Moscow it was pretty much all corporate and for a while when I first moved here it was the same. But now I'm in my new job I have to teach a variety of classes… almost everything.

RFDG: Why did you choose teaching?

AD: I didn't choose it to be honest. I started learning when I was two years old and someone told my mother that I was gifted in languages or something like that. I always had a private tutor because my mother believed I was a superstar of English. The

state programme was never good enough for me and when it was time to choose my future profession I wanted to be a journalist. I found it quite attractive. I've always been quite creative, but my mother insisted on me entering this Philological department since it was connected with English and language. Then when I was 19 I started teaching and I liked it.

RFDG: When you say you were always above the curriculum at school, was that your parents' opinion or was that a fact based on grades?

AD: Both.

RFDG: You didn't feel it was the path you wanted to follow, but was it a particularly bad thing when you look back?

AD: You know, in our country we usually regard this profession as a back-up plan, not something very serious. It didn't come to my mind when I was a child. When I was much younger, teaching English was usually associated with schools and universities. I didn't know about the courses or corporate teaching. So, that's why it wasn't attractive at first, but now I'm quite happy with it.

RFDG: So, with the live experience of being a teacher it feels like a natural fit?

AD: Yeah, I feel this is my calling. I love it and my students love me, and I can see their progress. I think it was the right choice.

RFDG: Why did you choose Moscow?

AD: I'm very ambitious to be honest. Before moving here

I had always dreamt of moving somewhere. Not Saratov because Saratov was never enough for me. I felt like I could do more than Saratov. There were a few attempts. At first I wanted to try St Petersburg but I was alone and didn't feel confident enough, and then I did my CELTA and I had a boyfriend at the time.

Right after CELTA I started applying for different positions in Moscow. It wasn't so serious, it was more like, "Well, why not? Let's try!" I didn't even tell anyone about it. Then I was invited for an interview. I bought a plane ticket the same day and went to Moscow, had the interview, got accepted, got hired and told my boyfriend I was going to Moscow. I wasn't serious about it but he said, "Great. I'm coming with you." And we went to Moscow three or four days later.

RFDG: That's a quick change!

AD: Yeah.

RFDG: Did you feel more confident going to Moscow than St Petersburg, or after taking CELTA?

AD: Specifically after CELTA. I was thinking about St Petersburg and at that time I had a couple of friends there. Moscow seemed like something unachievable. It seemed like I wasn't good enough to live and work there.

RFDG: Why is St Petersburg less of an achievement?

AD: I suppose it's due to some stereotypes about the place. It's nice and cosy. I'm a philologist so I read a lot and at university I had to read a lot and St Petersburg was like a lullaby of all these things I'd read about as a student.

RFDG: So, if St Petersburg is a lullaby, what is Moscow?

AD: Moscow is the opposite. I think it's more my element. A lullaby was not for me and in the end that's why I didn't move to St Petersburg. It was just one of my ideas. It was just one possible step.

RFDG: Would you change your career?

AD: I think I would. I still find journalism quite attractive and being an English teacher I feel like I'm always on the verge of burning out. I give myself every day and I don't feel I get enough back from it. I always give and I rarely get anything back.

RFDG: And you'd get more back as a journalist?

AD: I think so.

RFDG: Are there any comparisons to be made between being a teacher and a journalist?

AD: In my opinion they both require creativity. Being an English teacher I create things every day. Every lesson is different. And journalism is similar; you create things based on facts.

RFDG: What kind of journalism?

AD: Good question. I've never thought of it. Everything I think about now is my work and my students. I think only about them all the time. Journalism is just my ideal world. It would be about travelling and sharing impressions.

RFDG: Is it possible to combine the two?

AD: I think it is and I have thought about it. But in this case it seems to be I won't be able to be 100% present at my current job

and give what I have to give. I feel I have to do my current job very well and I can't think about a few things at the same time.

RFDG: What contributes to that feeling of obligation?

AD: My background. My parents, my childhood. In my family there is always this idea that everyone must work very hard and everyone must do their job properly. I love my job. I just can't imagine myself doing it 50—60%. And I'm a perfectionist. It's important for me to do things well. I always say when I talk to my friends, "If you can't do it then don't do it. Do something else." It's like my motto.

RFDG: Do you think the feeling of needing to work hard is shared by other teachers in Moscow?

AD: Of course not.

RFDG: What's the percentage?

AD: I feel there are very few people like me. To be honest, I rarely meet people like me. You see some hard-working teachers, but for me I live my work. It's not like, "OK, this is the end of my working day I'm going home to relax." When I'm going home my students text me and I am ready to help them. Even at night or one in the morning if it is necessary. In the morning I wake up and think about them. I don't think about my private life. It's different.

RFDG: Why can't other people be that way?

AD: I'm not sure that it's right to be honest. It has a negative impact since it can be like I always live for someone else, for my students, not for myself. At this stage of my life I think this

is right. We are born to contribute something to society or the world and I'm not thinking about my life now.

RFDG: How long have you felt like this?

AD: Maybe the last four to five years. It became stronger in Moscow.

RFDG: Is it important to stay in Moscow now?

AD: No.

RFDG: So, if you could be somewhere else where would you go?

AD: Abroad. I want to travel. I want to see different places and societies.

RFDG: What about in terms of work?

AD: I'm quite unstable I'd say. It seems to me that everything is temporary. The city, my life… I know I'm not going to move anywhere else in Moscow. It's boundless. I don't see any borders here. I like freedom and it's what I get here. I have thought about travelling and living somewhere for a year. I still feel that I haven't found my place.

*

Daniel Saraiva San Pedro (DSSP)

Setting the scene: *Daniel comes across as incredibly friendly and encouraging. He is actually from Brazil despite having a slightly North American accent. But as our conversation progresses it's clear he is very much not American. He's very much the professional teacher and also very much the "busy teacher" (as was I on this particular day) and our interview took place at a brisk pace before our lessons.*

DSSP: I started teaching in Brazil in March 2012. It wasn't because I wanted to be an English teacher. It just kind of happened. I wanted to go back to studying English, so I went back to the English school I was at when I was a child. They did a placement test with me and at the end of the test they said they didn't have any courses for me, but they needed English teachers and asked if I would be interested. I agreed because I was between jobs at the time and I needed the money. I went through the process of the test and orientation, and at the end we taught lessons. They were observed and they would choose teachers from the group of candidates.

RFDG: What did you want to be originally?

DSSP: My major is in Biology and I worked a little in the field, but it just happened that I wasn't working for a while and it was hard. In Brazil, being a biologist you either have to be a teacher or a researcher. It's hard to make enough money and you

have to choose a specific area. I wasn't sure that's what I wanted and I started college when I was 17 and left at 21. It was a big decision then.

RFDG: Why Moscow?

DSSP: I taught in Brazil for five years without any certificates or diploma and I felt I needed to get some knowledge and theory. So, I decided to do the CELTA in Boston, in the USA, in 2014. I also started thinking about working abroad. The CELTA helps you do that. I finished CELTA and went back to Brazil. When I went back I was very enthused after that CELTA. I wanted to go abroad, but when I got back to my old job I kind of lost my enthusiasm and went back to the same old routine.

Then in 2016, again in that period of teaching English, I also stopped teaching for a while because I wasn't sure. Then I went back again and I thought I had to make up my mind and did I want to be an English teacher and progress in this career or change? I just decided to invest in this. I thought I should use my CELTA and looked for jobs aboard. I looked for jobs in Europe but I didn't have a European passport. I even got some interviews, but as soon as they found out I was Brazilian they said there was nothing they could do.

I also decided to work for IH. I was applying for IH schools. I saw BKC in Moscow and they provided the visa and everything went so smoothly. I thought I would give it a try, but it took six months from applying and thinking if it was the best decision.

RFDG: What influenced your decision to focus on ELT?

DSSP: I got advice from some wise people, but also I was happy with what I was doing despite some hard times. Deep down it went naturally that way. I think most important decisions should be made this way. They shouldn't be manufactured. You need to feel it and let things flow.

*

Heather Belgorodtseva (HB)

Setting the scene: *In terms of disposition, Heather is the primary school teacher every student and parent would like to have. Cheerful but firm, enthusiastic in presentation but reasonable in ideas. Her jovial English tone carries across the room and down the hallway, even although I am sitting right in front of her in an otherwise empty room. It isn't a problem. I quickly find myself caught up in the fun.*

Heather's interview also taught me a valuable lesson about technology. Halfway through, I got a phone call from a certain British car insurance firm (which shall remain nameless!) which paused the recording application I was using. I only realised this at the end of the interview. Mercifully, both Heather and myself have very good memories and managed to reconstruct the script. If there are other budding authors reading this, perhaps this incident is something to keep in mind. If there are any insurance sales people reading, please find other jobs and never call me again!

She pauses for a long time after I ask my first question.

HB: Sorry, I'm just trying to summarise 20 years. I first came to Moscow in 1996 and discovered I quite liked teaching and quite liked Moscow. I ended up going home and doing a CELTA equivalent. I came back to work for BKC-IH in 98. Then around 2004 I went back to the UK which is where I'm from and worked as a TEFL teacher and teacher trainer. I came back here in 2015,

mainly because I married a Russian and we're kind of stuck between two countries no matter what we do.

RFDG: What did you like about teaching?

HB: I like explaining things to people. English is quite interesting and I discovered grammar. Woo! I quite like grammar, actually. There are rules and that's quite fun, and I'm quite good at it which is a motivating factor.

RFDG: Was it a surprise to discover you liked teaching grammar?

HB: Yes. My family are teachers. Two of my grandparents on both sides of the family are teachers, my cousins teach and my dad ended up teaching. It's sort of a tradition, so I said I would never teach. I ended up teaching by accident. I was teaching temporarily at first and found I actually quite liked it.

RFDG: So, there are some things you just can't escape?

HB: Exactly!

She laughs at the futility of it all.

RFDG: What made you want to come to Moscow and why did you like it?

HB: I came to Moscow after I finished university. It was sort of my gap year, although it was after university and not before. I chose Moscow because it wasn't hot. I had a choice between India and Moscow for various reasons and I thought, "I don't like hot weather so I'd better go to Moscow." And I did.

RFDG: So, the weather first and after that?

HB: Well, I'm a History graduate. Not 20th century history,

so to be honest Russian Studies weren't my thing. But Moscow in the 90s was quite an interesting place.

RFDG: Was it dangerous or scary?

She looks nonchalantly into the middle distance while she searches her memories before thoughtfully saying…

HB: A bomb did go off once at the end of the street when I was teaching. That was interesting. I didn't realise it was a bomb at first. This was back when the mafia were blowing up each other's cars on a regular basis. There was this big CRUMP and sirens and glass noises. I was like, "Oh… anyway page 22, present perfect…" and then I got outside and found out. They also blew up a hotel with a small bomb. It wasn't dangerous for me. I didn't do anything particularly exciting when I was here.

RFDG: But there were things happening?

HB: I guess so, but there is trouble wherever you are. We were here during the apartment bombing in Moscow which was pretty grim because you never knew what was going to get blown up next. There was also the hostage taking while I was here and I had students connected to that which was very upsetting. Things were happening relatively regularly with the terrorist issues and the mafia in the 90s. But I grew up when the Troubles were happening and I was at university in Manchester when one of the bombs went off there. When I moved back to Britain that was when the underground bombs went off and I was in London when that happened.

RFDG: So, it's always in the background?

HB: Well, yes in a big city.

RFDG: If you compare now to then, would you say it's safer and more stable now?

HB: It's changed a lot, actually. We were out of the country for quite a bit and came back because my husband has family here. We would come back for the occasional summer, especially after the kids were born, but because we weren't living here we didn't really hear or pay much attention to some of the things that had changed. But when I came back to live here I realised it really did look like a completely different city: clean, efficient, working kind of place… just before the sanctions hit.

RFDG: Obviously the sanctions are causing issues, but are they significant enough to be noticeable for teachers to notice?

HB: It's difficult to say because I wasn't really here. I came just after they started, so the drop in the rouble had already happened. For me, what I started with was the same as now so I haven't got much to compare it to, apart from 10 years ago which really was very different. I was here in the '98 crash when the rouble really did crash and every day there was a new price.

RFDG: You said initially you didn't want to be a teacher. What did you want to be?

HB: I don't think I'd got that far. I studied History at university, so you can tell I had no idea what I really wanted to do with my life.

She laughs at herself light-heartedly.

Because you don't really study History unless you want to be

a History teacher. Really, you can't do much with it apart from be a History teacher or a museum worker or something. The idea is that it's one of these general degrees, so I don't actually think I'd got very far in terms of what I wanted to do apart from study History. But my problem with continuing that was that I don't speak any languages.

*

Christopher James Leckenby (CJL)

Setting the scene: *We move around a lot between one room and another as we start our interview, just before the bulk of the staff come into work. It's midway through the academic year in Moscow and everyone wants to get things done. Chris is of this mindset, but he takes his time to speak about things. His careful deliberation while thinking, talking and working is something I've seen in many Canadians I've met. The same goes for the strong opinions the tall Canadian is ready to voice.*

CJL: I've been working here in Moscow since October 2014. Prior to that I had some work experience in northern Canada and TA-ing at university. Apart from completing CELTA and another teaching course, that's the extent of my exposure to education as a field or as a career. I specialised in Political Science when I was in university. I was initially hoping that would be my career field and I'm still hoping it will be. It was what I was initially aiming for when I was doing my studies. Teaching was something I sort of fell into as a result of changing circumstances.

RFDG: If it's not too personal, what was the change in circumstances that made you change to teaching?

CJL: When I was in university, I had certain ways of doing things. Ways I would tackle work, ways I would prioritise, ways I would manage my time. They were sufficient when I was in high school and they allowed me to do very well. They worked for

a little while in university, but as I started moving up through the years and the work got heavier and more intensive they weren't really cutting it anymore.

Consequently, I ran into a bit of a wall where I wasn't able to do it anymore, so there was work that didn't get done because I couldn't finish it and that was quite a big blow to me – a big blow to my ego. It was a blow psychologically because school was really my whole life at that point. I didn't really have anything outside of school that I invested a lot of time and effort in. So, when things started going wrong it was really, really destabilising and I didn't really properly recover from that. I think I underestimated just how serious it would be.

So, by the time I finally finished my undergrad I thought, "You know what, I need to move in a different direction for a little bit and try a different field and a different life." You know, get some new experiences doing something else, so hopefully I could kind of hit the reset button and salvage what had been, in some ways, a disappointing couple of years.

RFDG: That makes sense, but most people would not move to a completely different country like Russia. What made you choose Moscow?

CJL: Moscow is somewhere I've wanted to live and visit since I was about 12 years old. It was number one on my bucket list for years. It was sort of two birds with one stone, in a way. When it became clear I was not quite ready for grad school and that I needed to take some time away from academia, I thought,

"Well, I need to do *something*." I was doing volunteer work and I had side jobs and projects. That was OK for a short time, but I needed to do something more substantial.

Teaching abroad was sort of an easy option because it was something I knew other people had done. I knew it was a possibility and I could combine that with my love of travel and my desire to learn foreign languages. Once I started thinking along those lines, Russia was the obvious first choice. It was a place I'd always wanted to visit and I'd promised myself when I was younger that I would eventually make it here once the chance presented itself. So, that's what I started aiming for.

RFDG: What other places were on the bucket list?

CJL: This sounds crazy now and I'm disappointed with the way it worked out, but the first interview I had was with a very small school in Venezuela. I was offered a job there and I accepted. I was in the process of preparing to go. I hadn't signed a document and I hadn't done any packing, but I had in principle agreed to go and work there for a few months. I was really looking forward to that because I did a lot of studying on Venezuela when I was in university.

This was before I did CELTA. When I wrote to Moscow, I heard back from the Recruitment department of the school there to say they couldn't take me on without a CELTA. So, I had to look in some other directions for some sort of other options while I waited to line up CELTA.

Venezuela was actually my first choice and then when stuff

started happening in Venezuela I had to pull the plug on that. I looked at a job in Peru which was high up on the list. I wanted to go to Brazil as well, but I was not able to find a school there that was willing to interview me or take on the costs of bringing me down. Colombia was on the list. I guess most of Latin America because it was a place I was very interested in and the requirements were a little bit lower than some of the posts in places like Europe.

RFDG: I would think most people would have selected those places first because they're closer and warmer. So, was it just the fact that it was easier to get into Russia, or something else?

CJL: You mean most people would have selected Latin America first?

RFDG: Yes. They would have gone there.

CJL: Actually, I'm not so sure that's true. I studied Spanish in university, so there was a lot of cultural stuff that was introduced via my Spanish courses about Latin America. It's not as close as you might think. To fly from my home to Peru or Argentina takes as long as it would to fly to Russia. It would be about an 11-hour flight, so it's not that much closer. The time difference doesn't change very much, so in that sense it's a little bit more familiar, but geographically it's not closer.

The money you make in Latin America, at least in many postings, is not *that* great, partly because of the economic instability in a lot of these countries. I think that turns a lot of people off. That wasn't so important to me at the time and

I was willing to overlook that. I think it was a combination of things. The fact that the opportunities were slightly less organised. They didn't offer quite as much. They were usually smaller schools that couldn't offer contracts for a terribly long period of time. You know, they weren't terribly lucrative. Some of them seemed to me a little bit… not shady, but just not so great. The combination of all of that and the fact that Russia had always been number one sort of pushed me in the other direction.

*

Nataliya Pronina (NP)

Setting the scene: *It's a sizeable room on a Friday morning in Moscow and the teachers attending the Certificate in Advanced Methodology Course have all left apart from one. Her name is Nataliya and we sit facing each other with a projector dangling overhead. All of us (the projector included) are cooling down after a busy week, although Nataliya doesn't seem affected at all by the workload. She speaks happily, even about the less-than-thrilling parts of her job.*

NP: I'm from the Moscow region, born and raised. I haven't been teaching a lot, actually. After university I did some private teaching 1-2-1*. It was about five years ago I started. I began teaching groups in English schools three years ago after my maternity leave. In university I wasn't taught to be a teacher. It was either translator or English teacher. I tried translating and understood it wasn't my thing, so then I turned to teaching and I really enjoyed it. Since I started teaching at the school I'm working in now, I did TEFL then CELTA. After a break I tried different techniques and now I'm doing CAM.

*Note: 1-2-1 teaching describes a situation where there is one teacher and one student.

RFDG: Why a school outside Moscow?

NP: There are difficulties with traffic. I can't really come to Moscow city to teach. It would be two hours both ways and

I have a family. I can't move anywhere so I'm pretty happy where I work.

*

Lisa Shichkova (LS)

Setting the scene: *Lisa is almost the same age as me but appears to be in possession of a wisdom that far exceeds her years. She is quiet and her words are carefully considered. She's very much in control of what she says and does in this interview, speaking with a confidence and clarity that makes talking with her a very pleasant experience. She's wearing dungarees and has a tattoo on her arm showing the mischievous side of her personality.*

LS: I've been teaching for about eight years. I have a degree in International Tourist Management. Five years ago I did CELTA and I have all four TKT modules. I completed a course in teaching Very Young Learners* and I've worked in Tver, St Petersburg and Moscow.

*Note: Very Young Learners (VYL) are students aged less than 5—6 years old.

RFDG: Why did you go into teaching?

LS: That was just a matter of luck. When I graduated from university I realised the profession I chose was absolutely boring and I couldn't do anything useful for society and for the world with it.

RFDG: What had you chosen?

LS: It was International Tourist Management. I didn't even want to try and get a job in this sphere, but I was really interested

in working with people. I spent a year working as an HR manager at an HR agency which was absolutely boring. It was so weird because the only thing I had to do was lie. Lie and smile which wasn't a pleasant thing to do. During that time I was having 1-2-1 classes with a teacher and I'd been studying English for about 15 years. One day I was so disappointed with my profession that I came to my class and told my teacher how awful everything was.

And he offered me a job.

He asked if I wanted to try and if I could deal with teaching. I started with primary school kids mostly. It was quite risky since I didn't have a degree in psychology or linguistics, or working with kids. So, everything I did at the very beginning was experimenting and being honest with myself. If it was terrible I had to talk to myself about why it was terrible.

After a couple of months I realised it was something I loved doing and I still love it no matter how tough the job is in general. I had my last day at this school quite recently and when I said goodbye to my students and saw their reaction, I realised I was still doing something useful… and that I was a terrible person who was leaving them.

She laughs.

RFDG: Why did you choose to come to Moscow?

LS: It just turned out that I had to. I never wanted to live here. I prefer St Petersburg. In Russia it's like a saying that we have two kinds of people: people who love Moscow and people who

love St Petersburg. I'm more a St Petersburg kind of person.

RFDG: In what sense?

LS: Well, it's not that crowded and the city itself is beautiful. Moscow is not. I'm sorry to have to say that but it's not. The atmosphere in Moscow is about money and hard work, and trying to achieve all these goals that people want to have like having a high position, getting promoted all the time and so on. But St Petersburg is more about inspiration and a sense of freedom. I was never money-oriented.

I spent four months working in St Petersburg and I met my boyfriend. He was working in Moscow at the time and we spent a year in a long-distance relationship which was so tough and finally we decided we had to move to Moscow. Even though I've spent three years here, I still hate this city!

She laughs at the irony of it all.

But I've met a lot of really lovely people and I've gained so much experience here. I'd like to come here for a weekend, spend time just walking around and enjoying a beautiful summer day and meet my friends and then go back home to the peace and quiet.

*

Luka Miksic (LM)

Setting the scene: *It's spring in Kurdistan and I've taken two planes, crossed four borders and finally an entertaining 120 kilometre per hour ride in a taxi through the surprisingly flat Kurdish countryside to be here. Outside the air-conditioned, modern university building with its polished marble floors and well-stocked dinner hall is an unassuming valley city, flanked on either side by steep, rocky hills and mountains.*

Luka and I sit in an office cubicle. We are interrupted several times by students asking him about their exam results. Although this is rather annoying, I appreciate they are paying for the privilege of studying here whereas I'm just paying for the beer later. Luka speaks quickly with a slight Eastern European accent I would find difficult to place if I didn't know where he is from. To protect his identity, he only speaks of his time in Moscow.

LM: I did a Masters in Journalism, then I worked as a receptionist for several summer sessions before travelling to Japan where I got the idea of becoming an English teacher when I met other teachers. I did my CELTA after that and 10 months later I came to Russia and worked there for a year.

RFDG: Why did you choose teaching?

LM: Initially it was about having the ability to move abroad and travel. Honestly, I didn't care about teaching that much. It was a means to an end, but since then I've grown to quite like it.

RFDG: Why did you choose Moscow?

LM: There were jobs and it was culturally different from the rest of Europe, which was what I was after when I was looking for a place to live. It was an interesting place and the job was alright for an inexperienced teacher like myself.

RFDG: What do you mean when you say Russia is "culturally different"?

LM: It's hard to describe. Moscow has a different atmosphere. It's not as Western. I don't know how to describe it. It's neither positive nor negative. It's just particular in its own way. The way people treat other people and society in general. That's quite useless, isn't it?

He chuckles a little.

RFDG: What do you mean about the "way people treat other people"?

LM: They have a certain demeanour in Russia which is hard to describe. They are more reserved in a way, but at the same time they are not as reserved as I would say Western Europeans in some cases. And once you break through the ice they are usually really warm and kind people. It's just that when you don't know them they can often seem very unkind and rude. I'm generalising, of course, but that's kind of general vibe I got there.

RFDG: And you still chose to work there despite that?

LM: Yeah.

RFDG: Some people would say that's unusual.

LM: Why?

RFDG: Because it could be interpreted as a hostile environment.

LM: It wasn't hostile. It's weird at first, but as I said it just seems that way until you break the ice.

RFDG: How did you go about doing that?

LM: Trying to speak Russian. Speak a few words of Russian and they just like you 500 times more.

RFDG: If you hadn't become a teacher what would you have done?

LM: I have no clue.

RFDG: What would you like to have done?

LM: Maybe I would have stayed in the hospitality industry because the high school I went to was a vocational high school for that kind of work.

We hear a knock on the door. Another student has appeared for advice, providing a perfect ending to the first section of our interview.

*

Günther Cristiano Butzen (GCB)

Setting the scene: *There's an old church in the Chekovskaya area surrounded by high walls and sitting just off a leafy boulevard nearby. The school Günter and I sit in is in the shadow of that large complex, much in the same way I sit in the shadow of Günter. While imposing in figure, he speaks in a gentle way I associate with people from Brazil. It seems a part of his calm manner more generally.*

GCB: I'm from the south of Brazil. I grew up in a small town in the countryside. When I started university and did Languages and Literature, I had my first experience of going abroad. Since then I've been looking for more opportunities.

RFDG: Why did you choose teaching?

GCB: I didn't choose it. It chose me. I started university, not because I was into languages and linguistics, but because I liked literature. When you're young you're full of dreams and just want to read novels and talk about them with your friends. But you can't make a living out of it unless you have the talent to become a writer yourself.

He raises an eyebrow and nods slightly in my direction, paying a quiet but good-humoured compliment.

But that wasn't the case for me. Suddenly I saw myself going into language teaching. And that's how it started.

RFDG: Why did you decide to work in Moscow?

GCB: Lots of reasons. I'd been teaching in Brazil for a long time and for the last few years had been trying work abroad. After I took my TESOL* and CELTA courses I saw an opportunity and started applying. The problem is you have very few opportunities if you're a Brazilian citizen.

The first jobs I applied for and had a positive response I couldn't take. Some were in Europe and you have to have a European citizenship, so it was not possible. All the others were in Asia or the Middle East and most of them you have to be a citizen of specific English-speaking countries. I applied for a job in Siberia and had an interview, but the interviewer and myself realised it wasn't going to happen because Siberia is so far from Brazil and the ticket would be too expensive. But it opened a window. I realised it was possible to come to Russia to teach, so I started applying for jobs. I applied here, had an interview and was offered a job. And here I am.

*Note: TESOL generally describes any non-CELTA certificate in teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

RFDG: If you could choose where to work, where would you go?

GCB: The Middle East.

RFDG: Why?

GCB: Well, I like different things and think it would be really different. It's a completely different society and way of thinking. I'm not sure if I would survive in such a dry place, but I think I would be able to overcome it. I've also been told the wages

are higher (smiles). And if not the Middle East, then here as I'm in love with Moscow. I would also love to teach in Western Europe. So, if I could pick it would be one of these.

RFDG: Why did you pick this school in particular?

GCB: Frankly speaking, I applied via a platform and you just select a country and there are a bunch of schools. Accidentally, I bumped into BKC-IH. I'd taken a few training courses in IH London and these were two of the best course I've taken in my life. I mean really useful, really nice. The tutor was just fantastic and I left very impressed with the school. When I received an email inviting me for an interview I thought I wouldn't get a job there as I thought I wasn't up to the task.

I was interviewed by an ADOS.* who was very nice. I was a bit nervous because the first attempt at the interview I missed due to the time zone. But they found another time and another ADOS. It went quite smoothly and I was told I'd get an answer in a week. I was happy with that. Just getting an interview meant I had some kind of worth.

A week later I was offered a job and I thought, "Should I leave Brazil? Should I go that far and leave my house, family and job here?" I still have a family there. But I was taking a shower and thought, "It's International House. I want to go." And I got out of the shower and the decision was taken like that.

*Note: ADOS is an abbreviation of Assistant Director of Studies. They are usually English teachers with some management and administrative responsibility, and supervise the

work of teacher. A Director of Studies (DOS) does this in smaller schools or oversees schools at a strategic level.

RFDG: What was so impressive about the training sessions with IH?

GCB: Generally, you don't remember names of courses, but I remember these two. One was "Current Trends" and it was really about that subject. We really discussed things I've recently seen in my academic life and new things. It was not a joke. I checked later on and they were right. The other one was called "Practical Teaching" and again it was that. Practical techniques all the time. No discussion on theory but hands on all the time.

*

Maksim Levkin (ML)

Setting the scene: *The first thing that stands out about Max is how tall he is. Standing a good head above me, I'm thankful when we sit down so I don't have to crane my neck. The second is how energetic he is. His enthusiasm is infectious and rapidly fills the room we have borrowed for the interview, its narrow windows overlooking rooftops in the heart of Moscow.*

ML: I'm 23 and recently moved to Moscow. I always dreamed about living in such a big city. It was boring in a small town, but living here I have many possibilities and I'm into working in such a big company like the one I'm in now. I originally wanted to be a teacher and now that I am, I'm truly happy.

RFDG: Why did you choose to be a teacher?

ML: I never thought about being a teacher before I went to work in a summer camp. While I was there it was almost like something magical happened. I fell in love with teaching children and I realised I wanted to dedicate myself to teaching them and teaching in general.

RFDG: What did you enjoy about it?

ML: I liked that children respect me and I can share my knowledge with them. I also like the feedback I get from the classes.

RFDG: If you hadn't become a teacher, what would you have done?

ML: I think I'd be a photographer. I'm really good at it.
*

Edward Crabtree (EC)

Setting the scene: *I meet Edward at a school in bustling Chistye Prudy as the afternoon traffic and pedestrians go about their business. By contrast, inside it's a quiet day with only a few students coming in for classes and placement tests. We don't get our choice of rooms and we're sitting in a smallish classroom with a high and narrow window looking out onto the courtyard below. There's not much sunlight on this side of the building and the air is cool. A welcome break from the erratic central heating.*

EC: I studied Literature at university. I had aspirations to be a lecturer but found that difficult. I was working in jobs like security, but I took an education certificate and slowly started getting some supply work in Further Education Colleges. Then I got a job at an International Sixth Form. I was working in Leicester at the time.

I was teaching what they called foundation English to West Africans and some Chinese students who wanted to get into university in England. It wasn't TEFL; they were meant to already be fluent English speakers. Unfortunately, the school collapsed due to economic problems and I was without a job after two years. I thought it would be my future, but it suddenly fell from under me.

Then I did supply teaching which was absolute hell, but I tried to persevere. And then I got a job at a semi-rural school which

I thought would be quite nice, but it wasn't. The discipline issues and the hostility from the pupils were beyond belief. It was meant to be long term but I only stayed for two months.

RFDG: Was teaching there similar to being a supply teacher elsewhere?

EC: I got it through being a supply teacher. The idea was if I could hack it then I would stay on, but I couldn't and I didn't.

RFDG: What kind of discipline problems were there?

EC: It was just war. For example, someone putting a condom in my pocket and saying, "Look in your pocket." Another time someone tried to headbutt me.

RFDG: Didn't you get any support from the head teacher?

EC: They were trying but they had their own issues. I was supposed to know how to deal with that kind of thing, but all I had was an adult education certificate. They tried to help but not as much as they could. I was more or less told I'd probably get ill or I could leave. So, then I was without a job and had no ties; I'd just studied there. Maybe going through a bit of a mid-life crisis. Then I came across a website that was offering a bit of volunteer teaching and volunteer work in different locations.

The background to this is my family is a travelling family. My brothers travel a lot and my sister lives in Sweden. I hadn't travelled a lot until that time, so I kind of had a bit of chip on my shoulder about it. I'm not a traveller – even now.

Anyway, I saw the website and one of the countries was Moldova. At the time no-one else in my family had gone there

and no-one else could beat me on that one, so I applied for volunteer teaching there. It was a two-month contract which seemed like a long time to be away. It was a massive leap. I'd only been in a plane about four times before that and then to go somewhere that no-one else had and not know what was at the other end of it.

RFDG: Wasn't that a bit terrifying?

EC: It was. I remember lying in bed at night thinking, "What have I done!?" But it shows how desperate I was for change. So, I did it. I went to the capital. They call it the white city. I was stationed in a Russian school and staying with a Russian family, so I got the Russian angle on everything. Through them I understood that Moldovan Russians are not happy that the Soviet Union collapsed and they feel they have been left high and dry. They feel Russian. They are kind of miserable people and they respond by trying to be more Russian than Russians.

RFDG: How does that manifest itself?

EC: By being very touchy. For example, I wanted to give a talk about the poet John Osborne, which I did in the end. But it mentioned the invasion of Hungary and they said I couldn't say that because Russia didn't invade Hungary, it was invited by the Hungarians. There were all kinds of things you could and couldn't say. Much more than in Russia.

So, I was introduced to Russian culture that way. I was quite amazed because I didn't think it was possible to live abroad. I didn't realise it was something I could do. It was a test

of whether I could do it and I concluded that I could, much to my own surprise. I was kind of intrigued by Russia. The alphabet is completely different, the language is too, but on the other hand it's not as different as Japanese or Chinese. It's different but the same at the same time and that intrigued me.

I had an epiphany when I was sitting and waiting to teach in one of the rooms. They gave me this soup and I was eating it and looking across at the Russian alphabet poster on the wall and figuring it out. It was pretty much the same order of letters and I was enjoying the soup and I thought I could cope with it.

Anyway, I finished in Moldova and went back to Britain skint, but with lots of stories and quite buoyed up by the whole thing. To cut a long story short, I did a summer school and met a guy there who was like a mentor. He was teaching in Italy. Prior to this I didn't know the TEFL industry existed. I knew there were people teaching in China, but I didn't realise this whole big thing existed.

He introduced me to the idea that you could take a TEFL certificate and work abroad. He was kind of my model that this was possible. So I did my CELTA with Saxon Court in London and I looked about the job market and saw an advert for jobs in the Ukraine. I was thinking about Eastern Europe after Moldova and I applied for that and got an email asking me to come for an interview which was in Norfolk for some reason.

I went and the gentleman was very eccentric. It turned out he was a head-hunter and wasn't offering a particular job. He said

there was a post in West Siberia and he helped me through the application process. I got the job and in 2007 I went to this oil town in West Siberia and taught there for a year and a half. It was a good introduction to Russian Russia. There was no expat community. There were no concessions to anything Western or European.

Then I went back to Britain for a while, but there weren't many jobs so I went for a job in Kazan for four years at a small school before moving on to where I am now.

RFDG: I know Moscow wasn't your first choice, but what drew you here?

EC: I just wanted to work in Russia. I applied to St Petersburg, too. I actually didn't really want to work in Moscow, but I've since come to like it here. I used to think it was too big and probably too expensive. Maybe too Westernised as well. But I've come to like it more. Kazan is my favourite city, but there's more going on in Moscow.

RFDG: Why did you decide to go into teaching in the first place?

EC: My dad is an Art lecturer. It's kind of in the blood since my mum is a primary school teacher – and a nurse as well – and I had an interest in my actual subject which is English literature. I was interested in conveying that. I never saw myself as an ordinary teacher. My original idea was to work in adult education or as a lecturer, but then you take what work there is and follow from there.

*

Elena Atlasova (EA)

Setting the scene: *The room we're sitting in is part of a franchise's teacher training department and is far too big for the slight figures of Lena and myself. We've both had our afternoon coffee and it's obvious from the rapid-fire way we speak to each other. Lena confesses she sometimes worries about her English and hopes she will be comprehensible. Her mock nervousness and thoughtfulness as she speaks lets me know this will not be a problem at all.*

EA: I grew up here in Moscow. My mom is also a teacher, but she's a German teacher. I've always wanted to do something connected to languages. My school years were really, really good. I loved school. I was not – definitely not – a star pupil, but I still loved it. I spent most of my time reading.

After school I went to the People's Friendship University of Russia. I did my BA in Philology and my paper was on the peculiarities of the translation from English to Russian in terms of fiction books. Then my family insisted on me doing my Masters. I really didn't want to, mainly because I'd had enough at that point. I really wanted to start working and earning money. Then after some time, I did want to do my Masters, but I went to a different field.

I studied Arts and Humanities. I loved it, mostly because I love education and I love knowledge, especially if it's free and

I don't have to pay for it. But at the same time, it was quite difficult because I wanted to start working. So I did. I worked for a couple of magazines. I worked for the Russian edition of Glamour magazine and for Fashion Collection, but I didn't really like it. It was quite boring, to tell the truth. I mean, probably for somebody it would be the goal of their life, but it wasn't for me. So, I decided to do something else and I came to BKC and worked as an administrator for a year.

Then I did my CELTA and I loved it so much that I haven't been able to stop teaching ever since.

RFDG: I know you said you always wanted to be a teacher, but what do you think are the reasons?

EA: Well, my mom is a teacher and she loves her profession so much. She's a university teacher and she's always said that it's the best profession you can possibly have because you don't have to sit in an office. You get to work with people. I like that and I think she feels the same as I do, that our profession is really, really rewarding, because not only do you get to learn about people, you get to make friendships and acquaintances. It's also very rewarding in terms of making people's lives better. The other part of my family wanted me to go into medicine, but I don't think it's for me. I still love knowing that I'm actually doing something to make people's lives better. So, I think that was the main reason.

RFDG: You grew up here. Is that the only reason you decided to work specifically in Moscow?

EA: No. Until last year I haven't been able to really leave Moscow. I have my whole family here and even though they actually wanted me to go and study somewhere and were ready to give me the money to do it, my grandfather had cancer, so I didn't want to go anywhere.

Now the situation, unfortunately, has changed and I'm free to go wherever I want.

RFDG: If you could go anywhere, where would you like to go?

EA: I love Europe. Maybe it's because I'm very into art. I'm specifically into European art – a boring person! Many people say, "Oh, Europe – every city, every town is absolutely no different from every other one. It's all the same. Blah, blah, blah." I've heard my friends saying that.

But every single little town, village and city I've been to in Europe is so different. And I love it. I love the differences. I love the cultural differences. If you go to Asia, of course there is a bigger difference. But I still love Europe. I'd love to go to England again. I was there three times when I was in school, but I don't really remember much. I do remember it, of course, but I've never really got to explore it, to experience it.

RFDG: Does anything stop you from going there?

EA: No, not really, apart from the financial question because it is very, very expensive. So, right now that's why I'm trying to get the teaching scholarship. But I have a job and I think I could get a visa. Then again, you need a lot of time to actually

explore the UK, so I think I can only do it in the summer.

*

Felipe Fülber (FF)

Setting the scene: *Like many interviewees, Felipe puts a great deal of thought into what he says. Unlike many interviewees, he often makes puns and sly asides. This takes the edge off the wisdom and thoughtfulness that comes through while we sit in somewhat uncomfortable desk chairs in one of the smaller classrooms of a teacher training centre.*

FF: I went to university in Brazil to get a degree in English, so I did some studying of English literature and pedagogy. I worked as an English teacher while I was at university. I started when I was 18. I worked for two and a half years in a school that was mostly audio-lingual, so there was a lot of drilling.

When I finished I got a job at a school which did CLT and that's where I stayed for the next six years. Then I did my CELTA in 2014 and I went to Barcelona and started my DELTA before going back to Brazil to do Module 1. Once that was over I started looking for jobs elsewhere and then I came here.

RFDG: Why did you choose teaching?

FF: To be honest, I didn't know what else to do with my life. In Brazil, when you finish secondary school you have to decide what course you want to do and you have to do a university entrance exam, which is quite hard. It can be a big waste of time if you decide to do a course and give up halfway through. Since I couldn't decide what I wanted to do I decided to go with

what I was good at which was English. It honestly wasn't the hardest one to get into. Midway through I needed some money, so I thought I might as well start teaching. I taught university students and enjoyed it.

RFDG: Brazil and Spain are quite hot, so why Moscow?

He laughs in anticipation of his answer.

FF: Because it was cold. Actually, after I was done in Barcelona and started looking for jobs, I was more interested in going to Colombia or Argentina because I was more interested in practising my Spanish more than anything. Of all the schools I sent my CV to, BKC was the nicest one. It was a similar situation to when I was looking for a place to do my DELTA. I sent my application to IH Vancouver, Barcelona and London. Barcelona was the nicest. They replied the quickest and gave me as much information as I wanted. How receptive the company was, for me, important.

RFDG: So, it's not so much the country as the school or the company?

FF: Yeah, it was mostly about the company because I really wanted to further my career and become a CELTA trainer. That's my immediate goal and I thought I'd have a better chance of doing it here. In my interview, my interviewer mentioned all the seminars and workshops. So far I'm the only person who seems to be excited about seminars.

RFDG: If you hadn't become an English teacher what would you have been?

FF (*deadpan*): Homeless?

I can't help but laugh and join in the fun.

FF: Seriously, I honestly don't know. I feel many English teachers are failed artists of some kind. I did some writing at university and I record music from time to time, so I'd like to be involved in something like that. But I don't think I'd be making as much money as an English teacher which is not that much to begin with, so that's quite discouraging. I guess some sort of boring administrative job somewhere.

RFDG: Is that observation of English teachers being failed artists based solely on your life or encounters with others?

FF: Encounters with others for sure. Including one famous one. If you look up Jeremy Harmer's name on Google, you'll find two blocks. One devoted to ELT, the other to his not so well known music career. So, I'm in good company.

RFDG: Is it beneficial for teachers to have an artistic flair?

FF: It means you're more willing to make a fool of yourself, or that you are more comfortable in public and being the centre of attention… and maybe you want to be the centre of attention. So that helps. Sometimes you find teachers who get anxious easily and don't know how to do it very easily, so perhaps that is somehow connected.

*****

Frances (F)

Setting the scene: *It's getting dark outside. Moscow has yet to emerge from winter and the sun still moves across the sky at a faster pace than the moon. It will be soon be sub-zero outside at the end of a day of many classes and interviews. My final interviewee is Frances. This is not her real name, but she prefers not to be cast in the limelight with her actual name.*

Perhaps this is just as well since the office we sit in – shared with several others – is somewhat messy so giving away the location may annoy some others. Then again, this seems to be hallmark of many teacher trainers working together in one office. Though I cannot describe her appearance much, Frances speaks with an even tone that marks out her years of experience. Occasionally, though, some mischief and sarcasm creeps in.

F: I was born and brought up in the north east of England. I studied Applied Language Studies in London. Since then I have been teaching. The first 23 years in a German context, then here in Moscow. I'm in teacher training and teaching.

RFDG: Why did you pick teaching as a career?

F: I didn't. Well, OK, let's go back. I studied Applied Language Studies and originally wanted to train as an interpreter, but at that time in the UK there were only three places you could do that. One was a poly in London and you had to be either rich and African or very, very good to get in. Another was in Bath,

which was just very, very boring.

The final one was in Bradford. I went all the way to Bradford to the university and did the try out test. It was translation and interpretation and all six of us there got through the translation for both languages. We all got through the interpreting for French, but we all failed the interpreting for German. Basically, the message was, "Go to Germany and come back when you can actually speak the language."

So, I went to Germany and did teaching.

RFDG: So, why didn't you go back to being an interpreter? Why did you stay being a teacher?

F: I don't know. I just never got around to it.

She laughs.

RFDG: And then you came here. Why did you pick Moscow?

F: Because I wanted to do DELTA – God knows why – but I wanted to do it here because in Germany at that time, at the end of the 1990s and 2000s, CELTA was virtually unknown. DELTA was problematic. There was no DELTA school in Germany. I was working in a university context and if you're not an academic on an academic track in the university context in Germany, they don't care what you do as long as your students don't complain. There is no in-service training. There's nothing.

So, I had to leave the country and I went to IH because that's where I did my initial training. IH means something. I interviewed for Prague and for Moscow, and I had students who

were here in Moscow that year, so I came to Moscow.

RFDG: That was the only thing that influenced your decision to choose here and not Prague?

F: Well, that and the fact you got much better pay here in Moscow. Well, it was then and in fairness it still is. It's better than most of Europe. Let's be honest about this.

RFDG: But you stayed.

F: Yeah.

RFDG: Why?

F: Haven't got around to leaving yet?

RFDG: Surely that can't be the only reason.

F: No, I assure you it is. In fairness, I have more opportunities here than pretty much anywhere else in Europe.

RFDG: What kind of opportunities do you enjoy?

F: I enjoy teacher training. I think in Germany, certainly, I would never have been in that context. I know there are CELTA centres now and I'm going to inspect one of them at the end of April, but it's still in Germany. The population is reluctant to pay for its own education and it's a very difficult market.

South of Europe is a much bigger market, but the pay is really bad and there's still not so much opportunity in terms of teacher training. And also here because of the opening up of the Cambridge Exam market and the IELTS* exam market. That's just really taken off in the last 10 to 15 years. I have had lots of opportunities to work as a presenter for Cambridge Assessment English**. And it's good because it's teacher training

and it gets me out of the city.

*Note: IELTS – The International English Language Testing System. An international standardised test of English.

**Note: Cambridge Assessment English – a Cambridge Exam board.

RFDG: Is it particularly important to be away from Moscow?

F: No, but I like travelling.

*****

Chee-way Sun (CWS)

Setting the scene: *We sit in an office shared by several academic managers, though Chee-way is not one (yet). The chairs are more comfortable here, the windows larger and there's an airy feeling in the room, covered as it is by mountains of books and piles of CDs and teaching aids. Despite the appearance of barely-organised chaos, Chee-way seems at ease here, often laughing in the not-quite-manic way I have come to see as one of her trademark features.*

CWS: I was born in America **BUT** my dad is South American Peruvian and my mum is Chinese. **BUT** I am also Canadian because my mum left the States to go to Canada. That's how I'm also a Canadian citizen. Then I began to travel with my dad. I went to China with him. After that I went back to the States and Europe, and was in Latvia for about 13 years. I basically grew up there as a teen and a young adult.

RFDG: Why did you choose teaching?

CWS: My dad is a professor in university. I wanted to be a psychiatrist, but my dad discouraged me because he said if I knew what people think I'd be depressed all the time. He's quite pessimistic. Then I wanted to be a teacher, but Dad wanted me to be a musician. But I didn't pass the music exam (thank goodness) because I never studied.

She giggles. Sometimes teachers make the worst students.

He thought I was studying but I was just pretending. So, I failed and I went to a primary school teaching programme. We had practice in schools. They would send us to schools and kindergartens and after that I decided to find a job. At first I worked in a kindergarten, but I felt the salary wasn't good enough. My best friend was working in IH Riga and she introduced me to the main boss there and, after an interview, I became an English teacher.

RFDG: And you came to Moscow?

CWS: No, I was in Latvia for sometime in IH Riga and then my family moved to Ireland. I left Riga because it was a lot of work for me and my family left, so I wasn't sure what was there besides work. After a year I decided to go to Vietnam.

RFDG: And then you came to Moscow.

CWS: No.

She laughs at my repeated failures to find connections.

We will get there! I actually applied to Moscow when I was in Vietnam, but the visa procedure in Vietnam wasn't successful so I went to Canada. Then I realised I was missing some Canadian documents and without them I couldn't really complete the procedure so I ended up staying there for one and a half years.

At first I couldn't work without the documents so I volunteered for a month in IH Vancouver so I wouldn't' be bored waiting for my papers. Then they arrived and in December 2017. I emailed IH again after seeing the job post.

RFDG: And then you *still* didn't come?

CWS: Yeah, they said they had enough teachers. And then that was postponed until the next year.

RFDG: So, you went through hell to come to Moscow. Why?

CWS: I don't know. I just feel like there is something here I have to come for.

RFDG: That's an awful lot of effort for just a feeling.

CWS: I know! It's interesting.

RFDG: If you had to go anywhere else where would that be?

CWS: Maybe Italy or Spain because the food is great and I usually go for the food… except for Moscow. I don't find that interesting after growing up in Latvia.

*

Carlos Monroy (CS)

Setting the scene: *It's another blue-sky, cold-air day in the centre of the Moscow school where I sit with Carlos. He always seems to have a light manner about him that matches his big smile and floppy black hair which sits across his forehead at a slight angle. He speaks in a way that matches his demeanour: calm, clear and relaxed.*

CM: I studied English literature at university because I wanted to be a literary translator, but then I thought, "How can I travel the world and learn other languages?" I could sooner do it by teaching than by translating. So, I started and I really enjoyed it. I began teaching in a private university, then in the national university and then I started teaching Spanish in some very improved schools. And then I started teaching privately. Then I came here.

RFDG: Did you go straight from Mexico to Russia?

CM: I did my CELTA in London. I was there for three months. I think it was only there I really started speaking English.

He laughs a little.

RFDG: So, it was only for the travel aspects?

CM: Yes, but I really enjoyed it as soon as I started.

RFDG: What do enjoy the most?

CM: Trying to understand how language works and finding ways to explain it. I enjoy seeing students understand it. It's very

rewarding. People often say it's the most rewarding job in the world and I agree to a certain extent. When students don't say things it's not so rewarding.

He laughs.

CM: When it doesn't work it's not so rewarding at all.

RFDG: Why did you choose to come here?

CM: I went to learn another language and Russian was the next best step. I'm sure Spanish, English, French, Chinese and Japanese have very interesting literary traditions, but Russian was what I thought should be next. It was like, "What has some great literature? Oh it's Russian. Let's learn Russian!"

RFDG: If you hadn't come here, where would you have gone?

CM: Well, there is a French visa I can request once in my life before I'm 30. So, I was thinking either France or Moscow, but if I told them I spoke French I would have had to write in French. It was easier to write in English when I applied for a job here. So I did, got an answer in two days and had the interview the following week. Never got to go to France.

RFDG: Do you think you'll go there.

CM: Yes, it's my plan. I have to take advantage of that.

*****

Cheng Zhang-Stoddard (CZS)

Setting the scene: *Spring has finally come to the northwest of Moscow and the grass is growing back in the spaces left barren by heavy winter snowfall. Not that we can see any of this as Cheng and I sit in the small, windowless room in a school in the well-to-do area of Kuntsevskaya. The school is quiet for the moment; the numerous young students who make up the student body here have yet to arrive for their afternoon classes in the busy private school. Although we are cramped, Cheng seems animated by the spirit of spring as she speaks.*

CZS: I was born and raised in China. I stayed there until I was 20 and went to Hong Kong, and then finished my undergrad in China before going to England and doing my Masters in London. I went back to China for another two years to teach English. I didn't enjoy it but I met my husband there. We stayed in Toronto for another year or two before coming to Moscow and I've been here for at least two years.

RFDG: Why did you become a teacher?

CZS: It might sound clichéd, but I watched a video of me in kindergarten when I was five and when my teacher asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up I said, "I want to be a teacher!" It wasn't something specific, it just happened and I suppose it's meant to be.

RFDG: Why did you decide to come to work in Moscow?

CZS: Initially, my brother-in-law worked in the American Embassy and moved here with his family. They came here and told us great things and my husband and I were looking for a place to work and live together. So, I applied for this job, it worked out and we came here to Moscow.

RFDG: If you hadn't picked Moscow, where would you have gone?

CZS: The States or probably in China, but I always wanted to leave there.

RFDG: How was teaching in China different to teaching in Moscow?

CZS: It was awful! The part I hated the most was how there was no sense of professional development, which is what I love about this job right now. I just felt there was no growth in me and I enjoy seeing myself learning different things and becoming a different person. There was none of that so I hated it.

*

Anastasia Kolcheva (AK)

Setting the scene: *The school is a long way from the Kantemirovskaya metro station, but it does have a certain charm, much like the rest of Moscow, as it struggles to warm up in the early spring time. Ana and I have taken refuge in a classroom decorated with posters produced by students and the school administration. She gives off a relaxed, friendly vibe and I quickly recover my sense of calm after my long walk from the metro station.*

AK: I was born in Moscow and I've lived here all my life. I graduated from two universities, a humanities one and a linguistic one, and I've been working as a teacher for almost 17 years. Before I worked in a state university in Moscow.

RFDG: Why did you decide to become a teacher?

AK: I think it runs in the family because my grandfather and my mother were teachers. He was a History teacher.

RFDG: Why did you focus on English?

She smiles with the memory.

AK: I was lucky. I had a perfect teacher at university. I hated English at school but university changed everything.

RFDG: What was so bad about it when you were younger?

AK: The teacher. She was humiliating people. She wasn't a nice person. It wasn't the language, it was a personal thing.

RFDG: Is that a common thing amongst teachers in some schools?

AK: In Russia? Yeah, definitely. My students say if they like the teacher then they like the subject and they go on with their studies.

RFDG: Was Moscow a natural choice from being born here?

AK: Yes.

RFDG: If you hadn't been a teacher what would you have done?

AK: A lawyer. I got the training at high school, but then I had this great English teacher. I originally settled on law, but meeting that teacher changed my life.

*

Luis Clavijo (LC)

Setting the scene: *Some interviewees hated the idea of being interviewed at their workplace. Luis insisted on a coffee shop with a special kind of friendly resolve Spanish speakers are so good at conveying. We sit next to a window overlooking a busy mid-afternoon Tverskaya Street with the sun catching Luis's well-groomed hair.*

We are not alone. Despite having a population in the millions, it's still possible to "bump into" people you know in Moscow and a colleague has plonked herself down with us while waiting for a Cambridge Exam Re-Certification. It is not looked kindly on to reveal the identity of examiners, so we will refer to her simply as Elizabeth in her contributions.

LC: How far back should I go?

I laugh – we only have 60 minutes and Luis has a lot to say.

RFDG: Try to be brief and give me a general picture!

LC: Oh God! OK, about 25 years ago I needed a little bit of pocket money so I decided to go into teaching and I've been doing it ever since. I fell in love with it about a year and a half into it. I started buying books about professional development and CELTA related stuff, and methodology and different techniques.

I was living in South America and I couldn't get any CELTA training or any kind of training there. I had to wait for a long, long time before I got my CELTA in 2003 and I kept doing the

same things only a little better.

RFDG: Is that why you came to Moscow? To do your CELTA?

LC: No, I came to Moscow in 2004/5 the first time because it was my first international job and I wanted to test myself with speakers of a language that wasn't Spanish.

RFDG: You could have gone anywhere, why here?

LC: I applied for three or four different posts and Moscow was definitely the most interesting. I got a job in Turkey and another one in the Czech Republic before they joined the EU. But then the school didn't sound as promising as Moscow. I remember telling my colleague I was very excited about and proud of being a teacher in the school I was going to work in. She looked at me and asked, "What the hell are you talking about!?" That was back in 2004. She didn't share my enthusiasm. She knew how the school worked.

RFDG: What's so interesting about Moscow?

LC: The other schools were IH and one of the things I fell in love with before I did my CELTA was the history of CELTA and how the whole certification came about. I went to the British Council, which was based in Bolivia, and got this beautiful folder that explained all of that. It was IH which was involved with it and I thought one day I'd like to teach for them. That was back in 1998 and I got my wish granted in 2004.

I came here for a year and then I left. I went back to South America for about eight or nine years and came back here.

I figured where else would I be able to do my DELTA and work at the same time. And it was a place I knew about in terms of how to survive the weather, the culture, the many differences that come with a different location.

*

Gary Krautkramer (GK) and Polina Pivovarova (PP)

Setting the scene: *In school I never thought about the teachers having lives or wives or husbands. So often we only see one side of people and have to remind ourselves of the fact that they do have lives outside of work. The smiling young Russian-American couple sitting opposite me are a welcome reminder that teachers can and do find love. On the surface, they look very different. Gary with his dark hair and sharp features. Polina with her lighter hair and softer features. When they get talking, though, both speak with equal passion.*

GK: I studied Linguistics and Sociology at university. I wanted to become a professor, but I got lost in studying languages and thought it might be a good idea to get a certification in teaching English to teach aboard. I was a big fan of travelling so it was a perfect mix for me. I got my certification and went to Costa Rica first, then South Korea and now here in Russia. I've been teaching for a couple of years and I really like it.

PP: I'm from Russia and I graduated here. I've been working as a teacher for more than three years. I basically did my best to educate myself to be a better professional and actually studying English.

RFDG: Polina, Russia seems like an obvious choice for you,

but why Moscow in particular?

PP: My family moved here when I was 13 and I didn't particularly like the idea of leaving my family and friends to go elsewhere. And Moscow is a capital city. There are more opportunities to find a job here and the salaries are better. I wouldn't go back to my native town and work there.

RFDG: Gary, what about you? Why Russia and Moscow?

GK: I was teaching in South Korea for a good deal of money and I thought it was great because I could save up a lot and pay off my college debt, but I ran into some problems in terms of the work environment and housing situation. So, I decided to leave and cut my stay short by six months. I was offered a position with a school in Kazan before I went to live in South Korea, but I turned it down because I wasn't sure I wanted to live in Kazan.

RFDG: Why not?

GK: It was a smaller city and I was hoping for something more like a big metropolis. When I suggested St Petersburg or Moscow, they explained only Kazan was available so I turned them down for South Korea. Six months later I decided to try another chain of schools and took a position there in Moscow.

RFDG: What made you choose teaching?

PP: I was actually going to become a philologist, but my language skills didn't allow me to go into a linguistic university and being a teacher wasn't a very popular profession. The competition for linguistics was higher than for teaching and I didn't have enough points to go there. So I went into a teaching

university and I found I liked it and had a lot of ideas for teaching. I saw a lot of bad teachers at university and a couple of good ones. I compared them and understood how not to teach and which direction to move in. I took it as a challenge and thought I could do it well.

RFDG: Who had a stronger influence, the bad role models or the good ones?

She laughs.

PP: The bad ones. I blame my German teacher for not using the right strategy to teach me German. It stopped me from going into the linguistic university. Had I known that they weren't good, I might have chosen another one and I might have gotten into where I wanted to. So, I thought if I had this skill maybe I could change the world for someone and they could get into the right university!

RFDG: Gary, why teaching for you?

GK: I've been an activist for a long time. I was always focused primarily on the notion of deepening democracy. I joined lots of political groups and took part in some campaigning. I thought it would be possible to change the world, or at least my own country. But I noticed that when I worked for a third party campaign in the United States – it was for a guy called Ralph Nader – I would go door-to-door talking to people and they would say, "I agree with what he stands for, but it's not possible to get him into office because no-one else will vote for him because they don't believe it's possible."

The point is that I realised just campaigning isn't going to change the system since people don't understand how the system works and how to interact with other people. So, I thought that maybe it has to start from education and instead of going to protests I would learn how to teach. In the end I hope to start my own school and make changes that way by teaching people how to communicate better and understand the system in which they live.

RFDG: So, for you it's not that you've arrived at the destination, it's more like this is part of the way there on your journey?

GK: Well, I don't think the journey ever really ends, but yes.

*****

Daria Starova (DS)

Setting the scene: *I conducted this interview with Daria while going through my annual battle with a chest infection which seems to happen like clockwork at this time in the Russian winter. She is sitting opposite me in a quiet teacher's room on a Saturday afternoon while I struggle to breathe. An experienced teacher, she has a lot of things to share.*

DS: I started teaching when I was in my second year at university. I did it just as way to earn some pocket money. I was at a linguistic university, but I was studying psychology. I had my first private student, then another couple and then I finished university and got an office job.

I was a manager in Great Britain and Northern Ireland for some language courses. I did some visa work and found programmes – mostly Masters – for people. After a year I got bored and left. The only thing I could do was teaching, so I got back to teaching and during that year I still had some students and I found more. Two years later I did CPE and two years after that I did my CELTA.

RFDG: So, teaching wasn't the first choice?

DS: When I started teaching I was very scared. I was scared of children and their parents. But my first student's parents recommended me and then more recommended me and I discovered I really like language. I like to explain it, I like

to look at nuances and I still have this love for language, probably more than teaching. I never get bored listening to the same audio again and again. I really like listening to language.

RFDG: Where was university?

DS: It was Moscow Linguistic University, but because it was a linguistic university we probably had more language classes than psychology classes, so I learned English and French.

RFDG: So, Moscow was almost a natural choice. Have you ever thought about going anywhere else?

She pauses, searching back through history and thinking about it deeply.

DS: I have but not as a language teacher. Now I'm married and it wouldn't be easy to go somewhere. And maybe I'm a little scared of going somewhere or teaching in a new environment and country. I haven't travelled much, you see.

RFDG: If you hadn't become a teacher, what would you have done?

DS: I don't know. At one point I really believed I was meant to become a teacher, but then I did my CELTA and I understood that I'm not (laughs). Maybe there is something else for me because it seems that my brain needs more work than teaching. After the intensive month of CELTA I was exhausted, but I could only work with language and I felt my brain was hungry for something completely different, so I became a teacher. But maybe I'll do something else in the future.

RFDG: Were you offered a job after CELTA by the same

school?

DS: Actually, I asked for it. I came up to my trainer and asked if I could work there. He brought me to the Recruitment department and I began to work.

RFDG: Why did you pick that specific school?

DS: Because I prepared here for CPE* and I had two wonderful teachers. I really liked it and I think I have a kind of intuition for good teaching. I know when it's done properly. When I came here I felt it was done properly, unlike my university. They won my trust here.

*Note: Cambridge Proficiency English is an exam that shows candidates have mastered English to an exceptional level.

RFDG: Is there a big contrast between teaching at university and where you work now?

DS: It's huge. At university the atmosphere was completely different. We were expected to learn lots of things by heart, to work with texts and retell them. I don't remember many free discussions. We didn't even do much listening which was outrageous because when I started teaching we listened to all the audios in the books and we never did it at university. So, I had to work on my listening skills myself.

Of course our teachers spoke to us in English at university but it's not the same when you listen to a variety of accents. And it wasn't the communicative approach, it's more like grammar translation.

The teacher's attitude was, "We know everything and who are

you!? You are stupid students who don't remember 100 phrases by heart." And they would say, "Oh, in my time, we would learn pages by heart and you can't even learn 10 expressions."

RFDG: Why does that attitude exist?

DS: I don't know. I think it's something to do with our school of thought. Maybe because they were from the Soviet Union and they didn't communicate much with their colleagues. There was this kind of arrogance coming from teachers.

*

Leandri Butterworth (LB)

Setting the scene: *The coffee shop is uncharacteristically empty on the afternoon we meet in the heart of Moscow. It's not the only unusual occurrence. Leandri is rarely in this part of Moscow but has come in on her day off to pick up her pay. It's a long journey but she speaks with the special lightness I've come to see as characteristic of the Cape Town accent. She wears black-rimmed glasses and her hair is a mass of lively curls. On the bare brick wall behind her is a faded map of the world.*

LB: I started teaching in Cape Town after university in 2012 and worked for a year before doing my CELTA. I taught there for another year and then I came to Russia where I've been for three years now.

RFDG: Why did you want to get into teaching?

LB: Originally, when I was at university, I wanted to get into high school English teaching. I wanted to teach literature because I've always had a soft spot for it. I thought – like many people who go into the Arts do – that I would maybe do ESL for a year or two and pay off my debts. Then when I got my first ESL job, by day two I realised that was what I wanted to do because I felt it was really good knowing that I was helping people, rather than teaching Shakespeare to kids who couldn't care less.

RFDG: Is that a common problem in South African high school education?

LB: I think it's a common problem in high school education everywhere when I listen to what people have to say about it. The way English is dealt with in high school, there's not a lot of freedom about what you can and can't say. I remember we were doing a poem and my teacher was explaining it. I had an observation about how I had interpreted it and her answer was, "No. That's wrong. That's not in the syllabus." And then she moved on. I got a little disillusioned by that.

RFDG: Why did you come to Moscow specifically?

LB: At school English and History were my favourite subjects and they were what I studied at university. In grade 11 in English we did Animal Farm and in History we did Soviet Russia, and I remember our teachers made us watch Dr Zhivago. I fell in love with the idea of the country and I knew if I was going to go abroad I wouldn't go to the East. There's just never been any reason for me to. So, I think if I was going to go abroad and teach it was always going to be Russia because I kind of have a soft spot for the culture.

RFDG: If you hadn't become a teacher, what do you think you would have done?

LB: I never gave it any thought. Being a teacher was always it. I don't think I had any back-up plans.

*

Irina Grekova (IG)

Setting the scene: *We sit in a smallish classroom on the top floor of a six-story building in Tverskaya Street just up from the Kremlin. It's a cold day in early spring and the sky is clear. Nonetheless, I have to open a window since the central heating is on full blast. Irina sits opposite me, a woman filled with an enthusiasm which is infectious. She smiles broadly as she talks from decades of experience, every inch the confident and compassionate teacher trainer. There's a touch of strangeness about this situation. A year ago she interviewed me to create listening material for her students. Now the tables have turned.*

IG: I graduated in 1986 from Moscow Pedagogical University as an English and German teacher. I worked in two schools teaching English and German. I had more German classes. It was an ordinary school. I worked there for three years before the Perestroika. When it started, I joined commercial English courses teaching adults. I never went back to school. I met some interesting people at these courses. Somehow, I became popular because schools I had previously worked for started calling me back.

I was invited to teach teachers at the Chemistry department of MSU. Most of them were PhDs and professors. They asked me to design a course for them on the basis of Beatles' songs, which I did. I spent a year teaching them, maybe two.

After this course at MSU, I did a very interesting teacher development course on Suggestopedia. It's an intensive method of teaching and learning English designed by Georgy Lozanov. This course was two months long. Then I was invited to work for the centre and worked there for four years.

At some point in my life I stopped teaching and I worked for different businesses. For example, I worked for an investment company "Freemasons Capital" and a travel agency organising hiking tours in the Caucasus.

But then an interesting thing happened. A friend of mine gave me a call and suggested doing a training arranged by an Israeli company using a multimedia programme called "English Discoveries." It was a free training.

After doing it I started looking for a teaching job. An interesting coincidence occurred. Somebody saw my work on "English Discoveries" and gave me a call. It happened to be "Lingvo Ru", one of BKC's schools. Working there was interesting because the school director asked me if I could design a speaking club programme for all levels for one month. I said yes and that's how I started my cooperation with "Lingvo Ru."

I did CELTA in 1999 and DELTA in 2001. After that I became an ADOS for satellite schools*, the head of the teacher training department.

*Note: "satellite schools" usually refer to locations outside the city centre.

RFDG: That's a long career of teaching. Why did you decide

teaching was the best career for you in the first place?

IG: This might sound strange, but I never had any other ideas. When I made my first career choice – I think I was 10 – I lived in Cuba at that time. I had a best friend. We both chose a career that we would pursue later. I don't know why I liked English. I spoke Spanish and I lived in Cuba for six years. My best friend wanted to become a doctor and she is a doctor now.

Maybe it's because my parents were teachers. My father was a Physics teacher, but he worked as a school principal all his life. My mom taught Russian and Literature. Many conversations at home were about school.

RFDG: But you also studied German. Did English come as a natural, unconscious choice?

IG: At some point, when I was unemployed, I decided to try teaching Russian as a foreign language. (I got a second education at Pushkin State University in Moscow.) But I didn't enjoy it. I had to abandon my background. I had to abandon English completely which was a disaster. I was teaching native speakers and I wasn't allowed to speak English.

I also had to think about music, poetry and cultural background, so I would feel less in context with all these realia. And it wasn't as appealing as what I'm doing with English.

RFDG: You grew up in Moscow and got all your qualifications here, but you also lived in different countries. What made you choose Moscow as the place where you want to teach?

IG: The answer is simple. Originally, I come from a small town in the Moscow region. That's where I taught English at school. I'm very sociable. I had a lot of friends there, I sang in a choir. Soon people started asking me about doing a course at MSU and whether I would move to Moscow. They made attempts to get me move, but they failed. These people had connections, but they didn't help.

I ran an unofficial course with my friends and acquaintances, about 30 people, and I realised that there were no other opportunities in a small town to run something like this on a regular basis and for professional development. There are more opportunities in Moscow.

*

Varvara Tyurina (VT)

Setting the scene: *We meet on a Saturday after a long morning of teaching TKT for me and teaching intensive classes for her. These classes can last for four hours or more. I'm still recovering from my chest infection but Varvara is very lively, much like her answers, as we sit in a teacher's room crammed with books but deserted by teachers. It's quiet and somewhat dark, but this means I can focus clearly on everything she has to say.*

VT: I studied in an English school where half of the lessons were in English. That took 11 years. Then I went to Moscow City Teacher Training University where I got a Bachelor's Degree in Translation and Linguistic studies. I went on to do a Masters in Linguistics and Cross Cultural Communication, and then I got my CELTA in Edinburgh in 2016.

RFDG: That's a very logical progression though languages, but why did you choose to go into teaching?

VT: I tried alternatives. I was a translator and an interpreter at different events. There was a grand opening of a museum in Moscow and I worked there, but I didn't enjoy it much. It didn't really match my personality because in translation you just need to make sure that communication comes through and that's it. You need to cover your personality as much as possible. That goes strongly against my own behaviour. I'm very emotional and expressive. I think that's why it wasn't for me. I can't sit down and

work with paper at home. I want to communicate with people and share my knowledge with them.

RFDG: You still stuck with languages. Was there a purpose behind doing all this work with languages beforehand?

VT: Absolutely, yes. The overall tendency is that most Russians don't speak English very well. I'd even say the majority don't speak English at all. So, even if you want to teach languages it's wise to learn it first. I know from my experience and that of the people around me that translation teaches you more about the language than teaching does. My friends who graduated with teaching degrees knew a lot about how to teach English, but their level was very low which doesn't make sense to me. I thought it would be reasonable to learn as much as I could first and then move to teaching it.

RFDG: Surely this choice wasn't at the school level. Was it your parents' decision to send you to such a school?

VT: Yes. It was my mum's decision. It was back in the 90s when everything was changing. Not many people thought about English at that time, but my mum thought English would become a very important skill so it was important to invest in it. She put every effort into helping me get into that school. There was an exam I had to sit when I was five. It was my first exam, actually.

RFDG: That must have been quite pressuring.

VT: Yes it was, but I remember being very passionate about learning. I actually wanted to study before I went. It was difficult to pass the exam but I was eager to do it.

RFDG: Do you think your mum was right?

VT: I absolutely think so, because English has opened so many doors for me. That's why I teach it, I want more people to have these opportunities.

RFDG: Why Moscow?

VT: Well, I'm still thinking of teaching in China. I would love to teach in Europe, but due to visa regulations the chances are very low, unfortunately. I'd be very happy to go but I just don't see a way to do this so far. Every single job I come across says, "We are looking for candidates with European citizenship and we are not offering any work visas." At the same time, I'm pretty happy with working in Moscow. There are so many places where you can work as a teacher or a trainer and I don't know of any other cities which can offer that much which are within my reach.

*

Andy S (AS)

Setting the scene: *Gorky Park is lovely at any time of year, but it's at its best in the spring. I meet Andrew for our interview at the giant gates which mark the entrance to this place of myth and legend, spies and conspiracies. Today, it's a place for coffee and interviewing. He wears a tracksuit for his run through the park, a popular place for people to keep fit in Moscow. He's slightly shorter than me, but definitely fitter and stronger. That's not the only thing which is stronger. His Scottish accent is broader than mine, but he remains clear and comprehensible throughout.*

AS: My first job was with the Police in the UK which I did for two years and then I joined the custody service. After that I was in the Navy for four years and then I found my way into English teaching in Russia.

RFDG: What prompted you to make the change to teaching?

AS: I was responsible for teaching new recruits in the Navy and showing them the basics of living on a ship. It was something I enjoyed, so I decided to do something that would let me travel and teach at the same time which was what I always wanted to do.

RFDG: You could have gone anywhere, why Moscow?

AS: I thought it was interesting given the Soviet past and history. I always wanted to live in a big city and they don't come much bigger than Moscow. It's also close enough to home not be too alien, but far enough to be somewhat different to what I was

used to.

RFDG: If not Moscow, where do you think you'd have gone?

AS: I'd have gone to Korea. I did have a break there for a year but I didn't like it.

RFDG: Why not?

AS: I think because there were too many cultural differences that meant I couldn't live there comfortably. Moscow is a happy medium.

*

Vika K (VK)

Setting the scene: *I have sat in this long teacher training room many times for interviews and training sessions. This time it is different, though, as I'm with a colleague who wishes to remain totally anonymous. As a result I can't describe anything more than the passion she speaks with, marked by the occasional levity.*

VK: I did my BA in English Literature and moved to Moscow and did General Linguistics. Then, right after that, my CELTA and I joined BKC IH. I've been there ever since, going through all these extra certificates like YL* course, CAM** and now I'm doing my DELTA.

*Note: Young Learners are usually students between 7—16 years old.

**Note: Certificate in Advanced Methodology. An International House training course for experienced teachers.

RFDG: Why did you want to get into teaching?

VK: When I was in college, we had this internship where we were sent to state schools. We were divided among the teachers and got a chance to teach there and I just loved the feeling. Before that I'd been working as a translator/interpreter/personal assistant for an international film festival and while it was fun, I didn't really want my life to go down that road.

RFDG: Was it a Russian state school?

VK: No, Ukrainian. In Kiev. I did my BA there.

RFDG: Is there a significant difference between Ukrainian and Russian education in your opinion?

VK: Well, I have experience with three systems actually. There's also American – I graduated from high school there – and Russian college education. Russian college education is better in my opinion because it was more hands on and there was less Philological stuff that no-one can use in real life.

RFDG: What about between lower levels of education, like primary school and kindergarten?

VK: I don't know. My son is in kindergarten and the system has been changing for several years. I know Moscow schools are quite different from other schools in Russia. Moscow schools tend to be better, especially if they are specialised like Math schools. There are Lyceums affiliated with the medical university here. It's considered to be the best in Russia. Lots of kids want to get into these types of schools because they open a lot of doors.

RFDG: Why did you choose Moscow if you're Ukrainian?

VK: I'm not actually Ukrainian. I grew up in Crimea as part of the Russian minority there. My parents come from Russia, but the reason I moved here was that I got married.

RFDG: And that was the only reason?

VK: Basically, yes. My husband has a business here so it wasn't an option for him to move and I was doing my MA here at the time. It was the right choice.

RFDG: If you hadn't become a teacher what would you have done?

VK: I had a dream of becoming a doctor, but my parents sent me to a language school from the start because it was the proper thing for a girl to study.

I can't help but raise an eyebrow on hearing this.

VK: Really! I mean it. I used to be very bad at languages and had lots of problems with it when I was a kid. I was so much better at Math and Programming. They came very easily to me. It was like my second nature and I even won some Programming competitions. But my parents decided, because I was a girl, languages were a good career path. I went to the US for a year, came back here for the school leaving exams and then there was nothing else to do but enter a linguistic university.

RFDG: It sounds like you enjoy what you do anyway.

VK: I do. I'm not doing it because I have to do it. It's not a means of survival. I had the choice of becoming a housewife, for example, but it's not for me.

RFDG: Too boring?

She nods vigorously.

VK: Too boring.

*****

Olga Shushunova (OS)

Setting the scene: *It's early afternoon in Tver, a city to the north of Moscow. I took a train to come here, but it seems like I also took a time machine. The buildings have a more Soviet style, at least to my eye. I'm told that a long time ago Tver and Moscow fought to be the capital of Russia. It seems Tver lost that fight, but won a quieter character than Moscow.*

The people here are friendly and very helpful. The night before meeting Olga, I managed to get lost in the centre and bumped into a crowd of English-speaking youngsters who set me right. Olga displays that same friendliness as we sit in a cafe on one of the main streets with a dusty boulevard. Her friendliness is matched by an air of experience and self-assuredness as we get talking.

OS: I started teaching about 13 years ago. I started as a private tutor, but now everything before the private school I started working for, I don't even consider as serious. I look back at that time and think, "Oh my God, what was I doing!?"

So, I started teaching in one of the private schools in Tver. I thought I was using the communicative approach* and it was probably close, but every time I thought I was doing something wrong because I never saw anything different from grammar-translation**. After several students dropped out of my group I thought it was because of me and I realised I was doing something wrong. Luckily, I had a kind of mentor then who told

me there was a CELTA course. I had no idea what that was. It was 2008.

*Note: the communicative approach to language teaching involves students communicating real meaning to successfully learn (as opposed to completing mindless tasks). Outside of this description, it is hard to definite without courting controversy.

**Note: grammar-translation is probably the method of teaching most people are familiar with. It involves a focus on grammatical rules and translation from one language to another.

I applied for the course. It was in Moscow at BKC and when I finally did the course it changed my whole understanding of teaching. I was very happy. When I looked at my tutors I wanted to become a CELTA trainer like them.

When I came back I realised it wasn't as simple as that. I was trying to use what I learned but I realised it didn't work as well as we did it in CELTA group. The environment was different and students have different expectations. And nothing works 100%.

I worked at several schools and realised they were businesses and were run by people who were more into management and making money. This gave me and my partner the idea to open our own school. This was how we founded our private language centre. At first there were four teachers, three of them co-founders and one who was just employed.

After about every three years there is some stagnation if you don't develop professionally and let's say after three years you start feeling this and you start thinking it's not for you or it's

boring.

You can see a pattern here. So, three years after CELTA I co-founded a school. After that – again about three years – my next step was DELTA. Now I think I was completely unprepared for that and after DELTA again I starting thinking how I could progress further and that was my training to be a CELTA trainer.

It was hard to get into because I'm not with IH and every time I tried to contact them they said they didn't do it commercially. It was all in-house. And then – almost accidentally – I was having the same conversation with the administrators and my old CELTA tutor overheard us and said, "Oh woah! You want to become a CELTA trainer!?" She somehow promoted this idea to run a course. I just didn't want to give up and I wrote emails regularly asking if they remembered they were thinking about it.

I realise it's a real problem for people not working for IH. I was lucky I had some help. I don't know why but they considered it and having me freelance. I think I was lucky because one of my DELTA course colleagues sent me an email a few months ago asking how I became a trainer because she was having the same problem.

RFDG: And now here you are. Are there any more steps?

OS: Not yet. It's only two to three years so there's no stagnation yet. Right now I like that I can combine different domains. There's lots of management of the company, academic management, lots of training – I train teachers in Tver and Moscow – and I'm a full-time teacher when I'm not doing

training.

I love it. I think if I had to do only one thing I'd get bored. Juggling all these responsibilities is challenging but really enjoyable and it's my personal belief that you can't be a good trainer if you don't teach on a regular basis. How can you feel it? How can you teach different techniques when you don't use them or you forgot the last time you taught real people?

RFDG: Is that balance sustainable?

OS: Somewhat. In the summer it's more training because I'm in Moscow and it's a dead season for teaching. So, if you look throughout the year it's OK. Summer is more about training and September is about management. I normally love spring because it's more about teaching. Last year I was so into it and I had a few interesting projects. When I realised I had to go to Moscow and leave my students, I didn't want to train. I loved teaching so much!

But every time that happens I remind myself that it's alright. I'll come back and continue teaching.

RFDG: Why did you get into teaching?

OS: I know a lot of people come to teaching like it's not part of their plan, but for me I really wanted it. Even before university. I remember in my first class we had to say what we wanted to do after university and everyone said they wanted to study English. I was the only one who said I wanted to teach English. My business partner, Tanya, was in my group and from time to time we remember that moment.

She says she looked at me and thought, "Is she from the 18th century? Why does she want this? Who wants this!?"

I don't know why I had this idea in my head. It's probably because I had a certain person who I wanted not quite to copy… but my Maths teacher at school, when I saw him teach, you just couldn't help but admire him. I still don't know if he was aware of how he did it. It seemed so natural. Basically, because I had this inspiration in mind, it really helped me to choose my career.

RFDG: What did he do?

OS: Whenever I have a classroom management session and speak about teachers' voices and instructions, I always remember what he did. Imagine 30 teenagers who are quite noisy. He would ask us a question and the answer was not always obvious. Sometimes it was provocative. He asked what we thought and gave us a few minutes to discuss in small groups.

It was interesting because no-one did it at that time and it was just the usual state school. I don't know if schools abroad do this but we did it. It was unusual and interesting. He let us organise ourselves and it was pretty noisy. He never shouted, but to attract our attention he imitated a radio and turned the volume down. At first only one person would notice, but then they would push the others and in 20 seconds there was complete silence and we were looking at him. So, whenever you want to attract attention you never talk loudly, you talk more quietly. He had a lot of techniques like that and it got a lot of respect from us.

He also had a fantastic sense of humour. Maybe the best

thing was that he engaged us. It wasn't a lecture, it was very interactive. You don't see it often at state schools. And this is how you start thinking. People were always surprised that I used to study in Maths class. They were like, "Wow. Why did you go into linguistics?"

Well, Maths gives you lots of logic and it's not only about studying numbers and formulas. It's how you start thinking and studying how to study. And this teacher developed and paid lots of attention to developing our mental skills. Not only Maths.

RFDG: Why was that such a rare thing given how successful it was?

OS: Because you really don't see it. I teach teenagers now and they hate their school. When they start telling me stories I just can't believe that teachers shout at them. But they do. They shout at them. They insult them. They use very bad words to humiliate students. From what my students tell me, they have moments which they like, but generally it's kind of a sad experience for them – 90% of their memories are like that whereas mine are quite good. I always remember my school warmly. I don't remember any situations when a teacher would humiliate me.

RFDG: Why is that the prevailing experience? Is that a feature of the Russian system or the world in general?

OS: I don't know. It's hard to say. I think this is something typical for Russia or maybe the former Soviet Union. When I spoke to someone who had the chance to study abroad or foreigners who come here, they say it's completely different.

Maybe not the attitude of teachers but the form of education: small groups and pairs were unusual for them. I could possibly compare it because I changed schools.

This Maths teacher was one of the first teachers who introduced a points system as opposed to marks out of five. For every answer we got correct we could get points which were used not only in tests but also in projects, etc. They were summed up, calculated and used for your final score. So, the more engaged you were with the process, the more points you were given. He encouraged this competitive system where the brightest could compete and compare and try to be better than each other. They might have had enough but we were competing in smaller groups of the best students. It motivated us a lot.

I'm still surprised he could do this. It was the 90s and it was not the easiest period in Russia, but he was not afraid to do it. Some people were fired for using the communicative approach and his way was definitely not approved, but somehow he managed to get permission. He was the first and then other teachers in other departments followed because it worked. A similar system was also used at university, but that was about 10 years later. It might have been possible because our school was experimental and we were guinea pigs (sniggers).

RFDG: Well, if it worked you were lucky guinea pigs.

OS: Yeah. So, probably the experiment was effective. I know a lot of people who finished school and they are more than OK right now. One of my classmates is the author of a book

about digital currency and he is a leader in the field. It's just one example. Most of them have good careers. It was amazing.

RFDG: Do you think such an approach would work so well if everyone used it and it became normal, or does it work because it's so different that it engages people?

She pauses for a long time, thinking carefully about her answer.

OS: Hmm… I think it must work with teenagers because they are notorious for being difficult to motivate. Probably they need a bit more and this system might be – if implemented correctly and gently – I believe it should be effective. But there are subtle things to consider. Not to be over the top and encourage competitiveness too much. You know, there is this trend of gamification* which builds on the same things to some extent.

*Note: gamification in education involves taking elements of games and applying them to educational tasks to promote engagement.

RFDG: And do you agree with the idea of gamification?

OS: It's interesting. Again, you can never say this is black and white. Some people will like it, but there were always be some students who just can't work with it.

RFDG: And for you?

OS: I've never worked with gamification on a regular basis. It worked for my adult students for a short period, but they weren't competing with each other. We had a game where they had a tropical island and their plane crashed and they

had to compete against the environment. It was engaging and interesting, but probably because it brought some variety to their classes. I used that for consultation and revision and it was much more interesting to revise. Even for controlled* practice it was useful.

*Note: controlled practice: activities in a class where students focus on producing language accurately.

RFDG: Why not do it all the time?

OS: I think with young teenagers and some pre-teens it might work. These guys are sometimes difficult. Some of them are so shy and it's difficult for them to speak to each other and if they have a role in the process it helps them to relate. They are not themselves anymore; they have to solve a problem and that might be helpful.

I like to see the results in the long run because what might happen is they'll get interested in the beginning of the year but if you use the same thing it might not be effective closer to the end of the year because they are so used to it. So, maybe you have to have some shorter games and some kind of plot for only a few months and then change it. I believe that implies lots of teaching work and planning. Not just in terms of the course but also in terms of the game. You need lots of imagination to do this?

RFDG: Are most teachers capable of that?

OS: Well, they say teaching is a creative job, which is also arguable, but if we believe it then teachers should be able to do this.

RFDG: That's what they say, but what do you say?

OS: I think this is possible when a teacher is not alone. If somebody told me, "OK, Olga you are a teacher and you have everything you do and all the paper work (if it's a state school) and you have to create a plan for every two or three months of a game and implement it in the class." I would be like "Whaaaat!? How can I do this?"

Maybe I like the idea, but sometimes you just get stuck with ideas and can't come up with anything. I know for me it works if I can work with someone and at least two others. When you speak about it you start brainstorming and even have some ridiculous ideas and choose the best. It helps discipline things. It's hard to find time and you always plan something nicer to do like surfing the net or watching a series. But when you work with people you have an arrangement and you start speaking and have an hour for this. And then it's much better. I say this from experience.

Recently I developed a course for travellers and I understood that if I did it alone it would take ages. Not because it's lots of preparation and work, which it is, but just to discipline myself. And one of my colleagues did it rather quickly and I think that I'm satisfied with it since the best ideas come from some discussion. So, if we speak about gamification, if there is a team who develop this and plan it in advance while the students are away, then it can be successful.

RFDG: Why do you work in Moscow? Why not exclusively

Tver?

OS: I juggle completely different things. I juggle teaching in Tver and teacher training in Moscow. I do have some teacher training in Tver, but it's at a completely different level. And I can't run CELTA in Tver. There's no authorised centre and I think it's virtually impossible to get it at our school.

RFDG: So, it's about the opportunities Moscow offers?

OS: Yeah, and it's a change of environment which is important. It's a great opportunity to grow professionally. One of my reasons for becoming a CELTA trainer was working freelance and in the future when I have more CELTA trainer experience I'm open to ideas like going to China for four weeks, working there, coming back and still having my job and position here in Tver. It's a travel opportunity, too.

RFDG: Some people might say you have the same opportunities in any large city and yet you go to Moscow. Is there any particular reason?

OS: Since I did my training there I have to do my first three training sessions there. It's part of my programme. And I don't feel confident as a tutor to start looking for a position in other cities. Maybe next year or in two years. Why not? It's not only about working in IH Moscow, although I do love it there and I can compare it with two other centres. This centre is at a very high level and if I work there I'll never blush. I'm sure these people are doing the right thing. I can't say about the school in general, but as for teacher training, they provide high quality. I did my

DELTA 2 in Istanbul.

She scrunches up her face a little.

RFDG: That's not a happy expression

OS: Well… it was… let's say…an interesting experience. I could compare how things should be done and should not be done.

She laughs at the memory of it all.

When I came back to Moscow, I could only say, "Thank you very much" to them. There were good trainers in Istanbul but the whole organisation was terrible. And when you are doing an intensive DELTA it's quite stressful. I think I was not quite ready and should have read more before, but I didn't and instead of focusing on more academic things and planning and teaching, I had to solve a lot of organisational problems, like where to find books, internet, etc.

They didn't even have a library or provide materials. There was no course. It was like, "OK, you guys decide what you'd like to do with your students." For example, we had to teach two levels and I had beginner and pre-intermediate. Can you imagine a beginner class of about 35 students, Turkish beginners? And they didn't have to pay. It meant that it was like people coming and going all the time. For your assessed class you could have a completely new student for the first time and they could be a complete beginner, a false beginner, elementary or pre-intermediate. And they were self-placed. That was the policy of the school. The students came and said, "I think I'm pre-

intermediate." Or, "Last time I went to beginner and thought it was a bit too easy so now I think I'm pre-intermediate." Or, "You know, there is an elementary group but this day is not convenient for me."

RFDG: Not boring then?

OS: It was not boring, but I was used to a certain system and at that time I was a Director of Studies where everything is well-organised and we can identify not only that they are pre-intermediate but what point of it they are at. And we try to arrange it accordingly. We even try to look at personality and see which groups they would feel comfortable in. And then you come to a group of 35 people of different levels who are supposed to be beginner and you are supposed to be trained.

RFDG: You passed though.

OS: I passed.

RFDG: So?

OS: Well, who knows, but I'm happy because I saw a completely different environment and I was happy to work with teachers of very different backgrounds. Most of them were from Turkish universities and I realised how different the education systems were. It was the first time I even heard of flipped classrooms and a lot of my fellow trainees actually used it there. Then I realised they used DELTA 1 to read and prepare everything and then discussed it.

At the same time there were people who taught in the Emirates; Saudi… There were two teachers from Saudi who

were originally from South Africa. They told me they taught girls and boys separately, that there were a lot of taboo topics for them. You could never speak about relationships, music, art, film. It's all prohibited. For me it was a shock. What do they speak about?!

RFDG: If you hadn't been a teacher, what would you have done?

OS: I would definitely have been a manager. Now I have a lot of responsibility. If I had to quit teaching and teacher training, I'd be a fitness instructor.

RFDG: Why?

OS: I love fitness. I'm in good shape and it's close to teaching.

RFDG: So, something involving giving people direction?

OS: Yeah.

RFDG: Are some people just made that way and it's in their nature to teach skills to people?

OS: I know soft skills are the most difficult to develop and there are training sessions for introverts. It's like, "OK, you can be an introvert at home with your family and friends, but when you are at work you have to negotiate."

RFDG: And that training works?

OS: I think so, if they understand they really need it and if they are ready to sacrifice their nature. I'm not an introvert, but my students are always surprised that in life I am very shy. I hate being at parties of more than four people and where I have to initiate conversation. I do it for my job and sit with people that I don't know well and talk about things. But elsewhere, no.

RFDG: Maybe you just need a break from work?

OS: I don't know. Sometimes I feel I should do something and want to do it, but there is this odd feeling and it's awkward. One of the worst moments was when I went to an ELT conference in Moscow and I was there alone. I had no colleagues who I knew there. There were so many people mingling. If people came to me that was perfect. They initiated the conversation and that was fine.

One day there was a kind of after party and I thought, "OK, I can use this chance to start talking to people and exchange contacts, etc." Ten minutes passed and I was in the corner and it never happened. It ruined my confidence and I went away and didn't even go the next day because I was so embarrassed. At the same time, I'm a teacher and when we have such personalities or issues, I tell them that story and they don't believe it. So, some people have different roles in life.

*

Sebastian Orlande (SO)

Setting the scene: *It's summer in Vladimir Oblast, the region neighbouring Moscow to the east. Sebastian and I are underground in the teacher's room of the summer camp where we are working. It's the second week of a two-week session and he looks at me through his thick-rimmed black glasses with tired eyes. Teaching all day is hard – even with an afternoon break – and the heat has not helped. People don't often think of Russia as having warm summers, but like the south of England where Sebastian and his accent are from, it does get rather toasty. Despite being a little tired from the hard day, he talks with little hesitation.*

SO: My background is predominantly academia. I did a degree and was thinking about doing a Masters. I'm also creative and involved in acting at the independent level. And there's also music.

RFDG: So why teaching?

SO: When I was at school we could do work experience and I volunteered to teach primary school kids Latin. I really enjoyed the experience. I did it with a friend of mine and we took half a class each. It was tough, but at the end it was a great feeling. It wasn't perfect – there were lots of issues – but I knew it was a potential career path.

But because I went to university and did an Italian degree, it wasn't one that would be recognised for teaching, so it seemed

like teaching abroad was the obvious choice. However, I wanted to stay in the UK to pursue acting and music, and I had a bit of a negative experience teaching abroad in Italy, so I thought it wasn't a career path that was going to happen any time soon.

RFDG: What did you like about teaching when you did your work experience?

SO: Just the idea of being around people and helping kids improve. It was a very nice school, very easy going. I felt quite strong in the subject having studied Latin at school and a lot of other schools didn't do that or languages in general because they're seen as difficult – and they are. I tried to excite young kids about languages like Latin, which is useful for studying other languages.

RFDG: And why English teaching in particular?

SO: Because I knew ESL was a career path. I'm also passionate about the language in general, even though I have an Italian degree I didn't feel confident about the fact I wasn't a native speaker. On reflection, I was taught by non-native speakers for several years and in several subjects that I didn't think were particularly good at the time. At least, that was how I thought at the time. I've seen colleagues here who are fantastic teachers who aren't native speakers and that's changed my perception.

RFDG: Why are you so passionate about languages?

SO: Looking back, my dad grew up in Switzerland and I would go to France with him a lot. We had family friends there

and he'd speak French. I didn't understand much at the time. So, I think firstly it was a practical thing about being part of the conversation and wanting to understand what was going on and from then working at school on it.

Then moving up to A-level there was the literature, which I liked and seemed more interesting. I found at university that helped me improve my writing and my awareness of my own language because you have to think about your language and you don't often do that as a native speaker.

RFDG: Did you decide to come to Moscow immediately after CELTA?

SO: Pretty much. It was something I was going to do. I tried to get into politics back home, but I didn't really get into it and the band I was in broke up – which was sad because there was a lot of potential there. I saw it as an opportunity to go out and do things since I had nothing tying me to the UK.

RFDG: Why Moscow specifically?

SO: Firstly, I've always been interested in Russian history. We studied it at school and it excited me. There was a school trip, but I didn't go because the trip basically entailed walking around in the snow for eight hours. We had done that in Poland before and I got pretty ill since I don't do so well being out in the cold.

And then at university we studied Marxism and Russian History, so coming to Russia to see the former Soviet Union really appealed to me.

Practically, it seemed like one of the biggest markets. I didn't

want to go to China because it seemed too far away really whereas, in spite of what most people think about Russia as being scary, it always struck me as quite similar to the rest of Europe. And having come here, it doesn't feel much different from being in Germany, for example.

RFDG: If you hadn't come to Moscow, where would you have gone?

SO: Probably Italy or France, but it seems like it's hard to find work there. I'd probably have looked at China, but it wouldn't have been my first choice. So, Western or Eastern Europe. There's an International House in Ukraine.

RFDG: Would you still choose to be an English teacher, or would you choose anything else?

SO: I've looked into teaching English Literature back home. I don't see myself doing anything else, really. I do enjoy teaching. I sometimes see myself in politics, but I think I'm basically too opinionated. I mean, in some parties you can say whatever you like about the opposition, but you have to think that every policy in your own party is wonderful and you can't criticise that. And I think you can make more of a difference in teaching. I've met some great politicians, but I think you have to suck up to a lot of people and I don't think I can do that.

*

Aline C (AC)

Setting the scene: *We are in one of the bedrooms of a log cabin in the summer camp in Vladimir. It's the middle of the day and it's cooler and more comfortable here. Despite the relaxed setting, Aline sits up as straight as her black hair. She speaks slowly and carefully in her relaxed Latin American accent. Her eyes are large like her smile. A warm person on an equally warm day.*

AC: I was born in Brazil and I studied Engineering but I never worked as an engineer. I decided I wanted to change careers and I took the CELTA in 2017. I decided I should be somewhere else and I ended up here in Moscow.

RFDG: What prompted the change?

AC: I really didn't like what I was working and learning with in engineering. I started studying English when I was young and I have to thank my mother for that. She always motivated me to take the certificates so I already had something that would help me get a job in English teaching, at least in Brazil. I figured I could start with that and I actually ended up really liking it.

RFDG: You could have chosen hundreds of countries and cities. Why did you pick Russia and Moscow?

AC: I wanted to work for International House because I got to know their material during the CELTA and I saw Russia was hiring on their website and they would help with the visa. It was the opportunity I needed.

RFDG: Was it always going to be Moscow?

AC: I also applied for Mexico but Moscow answered first. By the time they replied I was already in the process of getting the visa and the adventure had begun.

RFDG: Do you think your life would have been different if you'd chosen Mexico instead?

AC: Definitely. I can't think how different, but I am probably three days away from home and six time zones away, so communicating with my family would have been easier and it would get to me sometimes. And when it comes to the cultural aspect, I think if I were in a Latin American country it would have been easier to adapt and communicate with people.

RFDG: Are you still glad you came?

AC: Yes, I feel like I've been growing a lot. It's the first time I've lived on my own and every time I have some kind of difficulty, trying to solve it has been great. Not only like teaching, but also in learning how to deal with problems in a language that I can't speak.

RFDG: And has that been easy?

AC: No. The first time I went to the supermarket I bought kefir instead of milk because I didn't know how to say milk in Russian. I learned how to say milk after that. Also, when I had to go to the optician and get new glasses it was very difficult. And talking to people. It's difficult to meet people outside of work.

RFDG: Do you think most teachers you work with encounter the same problems?

AC: Talking about where I am based, the only other non-Russian teacher has the same issues and it's why we got so close in such a short time. Not only are we from the same country, we have the same difficulties and it's been nice to have someone to speak to about that.

RFDG: Why is help with a visa so important?

AC: I'm quite impulsive and when I decided to leave I wanted something fast. I thought, if I can have help with this experience maybe one day I can go to another country where they would be willing to help, not only because they should but because they like my CV.

*

Nico Benger (NB)

Setting the scene: *It's a dusty afternoon in late spring at Chistye Prudy in the heart of Moscow. Nico and I have stepped into one of the rooms of a language school located close to the top floor. The glare of the sun bounces off one of the tables and occasionally into my eyes as it moves across the sky.*

Nico has a coffee and I have a plastic cup filled with water next to me as my phone records our interview. He's older than I am but he speaks with an exuberance to rival any teenager and produces such a volume of words that when I was typing I struggled to keep up. It's good, though, as it gives us a lot to work with and I don't hear North American accents very often so it's great practice.

NB: I was born in France. My father is Canadian and my mother is French. I moved to Canada when I was seven or eight. I grew up on the west coast in a village. It was a tiny island of about 1,000 people. I couldn't wait to get out of there but I got a bit stuck. I had a restaurant there which was quite successful and kept me there for years. I should have left sooner than I did.

RFDG: How did you get into teaching from there?

NB: Well, we ran the restaurant in the summer. Because it was in the north there weren't tourists in the winter and we were able to shut down for long periods and I had the opportunity to travel. One of the first places I went to was Japan. This was back in the 90s. You didn't need a degree, a CELTA or anything. You could

walk in and get a job teaching and that was what I did. I ended up in Japan, teaching as a way to make money. The first time I did it was a couple of months before going back to Canada. While I was there I met guys doing TEFL and they were making good money and I realised it was something to get into. It took a while but that was the start of it.

At some point I went back to university and started a degree. I did it over a decade because I'd already started teaching and I went to China. I was there for a year and got a TEFL. I was also in and out of Japan for a few years. After China I went to Kazakhstan and did my CELTA in Almaty. I got the job even before my CELTA so I could do it with my own classes. It was a dream situation. International House provided the accommodation while I was there doing my CELTA.

Then I went to Indonesia. It was a long process. I also went back to Canada in that time to finish my degree. Like I say, it was over a decade so I took my time.

RFDG: So, after your degree you came to Moscow?

NB: No. Actually, I've been teaching so long I can't quite remember the details (laughs). We were making a lot of money with the restaurant and I was back and forth a lot. It's quite complicated.

If I go back to when I was in Almaty, there was a really nice group of guys there. One of them was Canadian and he was a little bit – well people said he was a bit bi-polar – and he was the first one to mention Russia to me. I had always been

interested in Russia. When I was born, Russia was still part of the Soviet Union and it was always a place of fascination for lots of different reasons. Canada and Russia have hockey in common and the political system was interesting to me. The history was also interesting. It was very rich. So, I was always interested and he had been there and told me to go to any of the cities on the Volga, like Samara and Kazan.

I didn't go at that point, though. I went to Indonesia and then back to Canada. Then finally I decided to go to Russia and I went to Kazan. I spent two years there and it was really good. At that time – it was around 2012 – it was like going to the province. We were some of the first foreigners teaching there. It was where I met Edward Crabtree and he told me about BKC in Moscow.

At that time there were about six or seven of us there. It was really nice. A very cosy place and we had a lot of fun. Many of the Russians hadn't seen foreigners at that point and we got a great welcome wherever we went. They were very hospitable. We lived on a shoestring and there were plenty of places to hangout. Kazan was so small at that point. I lived near the Kremlin there. I was in the local newspaper because I could cycle in winter.

RFDG: And then you went to Moscow?

NB: Ha! No. Then I went back to Canada. Long story short, I went back and stayed for a year and hated it. I couldn't stand it. We had a great season that year. I paid off all my student loans and the business collapsed. That's when I went to Jakarta for two years. The first year was really good but the second wasn't and

Edward – who was working in Russia at the time – introduced me to BKC and that's how I ended up here. Kind of a long story, I know.

RFDG: You said people were welcoming. Was that a surprise?

NB: No. Back then, 10 years ago, it was rare to see foreigners. For the locals it was a novelty and I had a good relationship with the shop keepers. At that time there was a central market and I would go to the same vendors all the time. I knew all my neighbours in my building. It was great.

RFDG: Do you think the proliferation of ELT qualifications has been detrimental?

NB: No, it's been good. I remember some of the nut jobs who were teaching back then. They had no idea what they were doing and neither did I. When I was in Jakarta I saw the same thing. They were pulling kids off the street to teach as long as they were Caucasian. And they were unqualified or had some qualification, but it wasn't good. Having said that, in Indonesia the level of teaching in the public schools is super low so you can't expect too much. In Asia it's different to Russia. In Russia they demand a lot more. If you go and teach in Asia – depending on where you are – the expectations are different.

In Japan it was more of a social club. They weren't there to study grammar or get down to business. It's something to do.

In Indonesia – especially for the rich Indonesians or the Chinese there – they do it but they aren't serious and it's kind

of expected of them.

When I started teaching I'd never studied grammar and had no clue. I was looking at these tenses and wondering what they were and skipping over it. One time when I was teaching in Surabay and there was a new teacher in the teacher's room. He was looking at what he was teaching for the day and called out, "What's the present simple?"He hadn't a clue how to do it. I swear to God.

It was good for the industry that CELTA came along. It gave everyone a base to start from and gave people information about form and function and skills. I don't want to say it professionalised the industry, but it gave it some kind of standard that was very necessary. And good on them. Those first pioneers of the industry – the Brits who kind of started it all – I tip my hat to them, but I'm glad Cambridge got involved and gave it some legitimacy.

RFDG: How long have you been in Moscow?

NB: About three years. It's the longest I've been anywhere.

RFDG: Why have you stayed so long?

NB: I really like the city. It's great. I wish I'd been here in the 90s and the 2000s. I missed the anarchy of it. But even now there's a lot to offer. There's a lot of culture whether you're into sports or going to museums or ballet. Whatever you are into, Moscow has it and it's affordable. Everything is subsidised. Even on a teacher's salary. I was making more money in Asia, but my standard of living is probably higher here because everything is

subsidised. One of the reasons I have stuck around is the quality of life.

There are some things I miss, like riding my bicycle. I used to cycle everywhere. You can't do it in Moscow, it's too spread out. I'm running around the city a lot. On the other hand they have a phenomenal metro system. I have a scooter when I get off the metro.

RFDG: And you've spent the whole time with the school you are with now?

NB: Yeah, I have. To be honest with you, I've looked at other situations. For example, the private kindergartens but I realised that's not for me. Some of them aren't even in Moscow and the travel time is like an hour and a half each way. I like teaching kindergarten, but I don't know if I want to do it all day. Some kindergarten teachers are doing eight to twelve hours a day with that age group. I remember one of the directors talking to me about it being stressful and one of the teachers was shaking one of the kids. And I remembered how frustrating it can be.

The way we do it here, it's only an hour and a half maximum, but they wanted ten hours a day, day in and day out. I realised that no amount of money is going to make me want to do that. I like the variety of what we do here. That's what counts for me. I know I could be making more money teaching at private schools, but I don't know if I want to teach middle-class kids. I'm happy doing what we're doing. I teach adults, kids, exam classes, business English…

I looked at other language schools and I was a senior teacher at one of them, but it's not really teaching. It's more like delivering a product. Here we have a certain amount of freedom as long as there are no complaints. You can prepare and deliver your own classes and supplement or not as you see fit. It's up to the teacher. In other schools it's not what they do. They deliver prepared materials from the corporation. They say they get paid more, but by the time they pay for accommodation and other things I don't think they make that much more.

Right now, I'm OK with where I am.

*

Elena Kalkova (EK)

Setting the scene: *It's late summer in Rhode Island. I've spent the week visiting the local parks of Providence, the state capital, along with a million other places Lena wants me to see before I travel back to the UK after an interesting summer in America and England. We sit on Lena's couch in a sleepy suburb of the city while the crickets chirp outside.*

The husky puppy she and her husband have bought is nosing around for attention, not quite understanding the two humans are trying to concentrate on talking about teaching. Lena looks every bit the picture of health, backed up by an artistic mentality to complement the Russian manner of speech. In some ways I am sad about the occasion as Lena is the last teacher I will interview for this project.

EK: I was born in Tver in Russia and I did middle and high school there. Then I studied languages in my hometown. I started teaching when I was 18 when I was a first-year student and when I graduated I moved to Moscow.

RFDG: Why did you go into teaching?

EK: Oh, that's going to be a long story.

I went to middle and high school, and at the same time I was studying Art. Basically, in the morning it was regular high school and in the afternoon it was art high school. Then my dad passed away and someone told me – I don't remember who – that Art is

not a job and that I wasn't going to make enough money and that it's basically a bad job to have in Russia.

I also studied to be a web designer and a 3d designer at the same time and I got a summer job with a design company. Everyone there was an IT guy or a programmer and I got scared. I was like, "I'm not going to be an artist and I can't be a designer because I have to be a guy and I have to be basically a programmer."

I didn't know where to go for a major and I could speak English pretty well, so I picked languages. I didn't want to be a teacher at first. I thought I would be an interpreter. I don't remember how it started, but I think some people I knew who were my teachers when I was learning offered me a part-time job. I thought it would be temporary and I started with them and they loved it.

RFDG: And then you went from Tver to Moscow. Why there?

EK: I lived in Moscow when I was a third-year student and it was kind of a natural transition. I graduated and Tver was a small town. People usually moved to bigger cities like Moscow or St Petersburg and I moved to Moscow.

RFDG: Would your life be very different if you hadn't become a teacher?

EK: No. Because I think I'd still be doing what I ended up doing now.

RFDG: Would it be fair to say that for you teaching was a way

to get to where you wanted?

EK: I think it was. I still want to teach but it'll be a different subject and a different form.

*

Now we have met our interviewees and know a lot more about their backgrounds and how they got into the jobs they hold or held.

As I mentioned at the start of the chapter, English Teachers come from all walks of life and from all around the world. It seems difficult to discern any universal patterns from their answers to my questions.

That being said, it would be very lazy to just leave the commentary here and go straight into the next chapter. Instead, I invite readers to consider firstly how they would answer the questions asked of the interviewees.

If someone asked you to describe your background, what would be the things you would want to talk about the most? What would you want people to know about you?

Similarly, what would you want to tell people about how you came to be where you are today? This is regardless of whether you work in education or not. Was it a happy accident? Was it a back-up plan? What did you have to do to be where you are? If something happens by accident, does that make it less or more valuable than something planned?

Several teachers interviewed spoke about teaching not being their first choice, but eventually coming to enjoy it. Have you

ever felt held back by your initial fear or disdain for a position? Did you conquer those ill-feelings and come to enjoy what you do? Or did you turn to something more comfortable? Why did you do that? If you had a second chance, would you do it again?

By contrast, other interviewees spoke about the role of family traditions of teaching, encouragement to go into the profession, or described a strange sense of destiny as reasons why they got into it. Would the pressure/support of family and friends give you the strength to go for it? Or would you resist? Is it important to follow the dreams of childhood or to wake up and find something "grown-up" to do? Can family traditions be broken? Or should they?

Since all of the interviewees now work in education, regardless of their reasons, is it possible that some people are just born to teach regardless of how they finally arrive at that point?

There are no correct answers to these questions but the answers people give might say a lot about them, even to themselves.

Of course, you can't dwell on the past forever and so we look to the present to investigate what contexts our interviewees find or have found themselves in.

3

"Where are you now?" – Teaching Contexts

Most experienced language teachers know context is everything when it comes to teaching what things mean. The context of a word determines its meaning and appropriacy, among other aspects. The same is true of the context in which we teach. To an outsider it might all look the same, but in different places, different ways of teaching are practised, attempted, even enforced. By knowing more about different teaching contexts, the challenges they pose and opportunities they afford, we can see how they affect our beliefs, perceptions and ideas… and perhaps how we can affect them.

I started this part of the interview by asking all the participants to describe where they worked and left it open for them to answer. Some of them spoke directly about their schools first. Others chose instead to talk about the countries they worked in (or had worked in) to provide more information before starting to speak about where they worked.

When it came to discussing workplaces, I had a general pattern to the questions, rather than a specific set of categories

to divide answers into. It was important for participants to describe their workplaces free of any bias in the question. I wanted to know more about the positive and negative aspects of where they worked, aiming to highlight the various pros and cons of working in different environments. I hoped this would give a complete picture of various EFL working environments.

Some participants' answers were connected closely with what they said earlier in their interviews when talking about their backgrounds. Rather than waste time repeating myself, or trying in vain to disconnect what they said from its context, I opened this section of the interview with a different question. You will see this where I start with a question as opposed to participants answering the question "Can you describe where you work?"

*

John Shaw (JS)

JS: I work at a language school in Moscow. People can probably work out where.

RFDG: Why did you choose this one?

JS: It's where I started and I've developed here. Every year I get more and more responsibility and I feel like I'm part of the project. I also work at a summer camp and that's my main project. I've a wide variety of things that I do and I still feel like I'm developing here.

RFDG: How long have you been here?

JS: Six years.

RFDG: But you didn't initially become involved in having greater responsibility.

JS: No. That's happened in the last two or three years.

RFDG: What influenced that?

JS: When I started my career I don't think I was particularly good. It took me a long time to develop. I took plenty of courses when I started but I needed that experience. I guess I'm the kind of person who needs a bit of time to adapt, but once I do I think I do a pretty good job. The increase in responsibility came slowly and it suited me. I feel fine about it.

RFDG: Why do you keep working where you do?

JS: Like I said earlier, I feel like I'm part of things and that I'm developing. The school definitely puts an emphasis on

development as a teacher and as a manager.

RFDG: How have you developed?

JS: I understand methodology a lot better now and my language awareness has increased a lot. Also managerial responsibility. I'm learning how to deal with people. I've always been kind and considerate, but I've learned how to motivate people and show leadership.

RFDG: Has it always been possible to be kind and considerate to people?

He sighs like someone whose kindness and consideration may have been tested by reality.

JS: I think it's always possible, but it's not always the most effective way of working with people. You always need to try, but it doesn't always work with everyone. Sometimes people push their luck or take it as weakness and you need to remain polite and calm. But you need to tell people that they have responsibilities and to keep them.

RFDG: Is that a feature of working in Russia?

JS: No, I think that's a feature of life. No matter how kind and non-confrontational you are, you need to stand up for yourself and complete your duties. If you're a manager you need to fulfil what's expected and keep people in line to get the best from them.

RFDG: Why is that the best description of being a manager?

JS: It's probably not the best one, it's just one aspect of it. The main role is to motivate and guide people, but it's a key part of the contract to meet targets and part of that is up to you and

part of that is up to them. Basically, you have to be as supportive and helpful as possible, but there's another side where you have to remind people that they have a responsibility to meet their targets, too. And even though you'll help, they signed a contract to meet that responsibility.

RFDG: How much has your execution of your duties influenced your personal beliefs about how things should work, and how things are described in contracts, etc?

JS: I think in many ways they are both compatible, but if something was really against my beliefs I wouldn't sign to begin with. So, my beliefs are probably the primary thing. I just wouldn't sign something where I felt uncomfortable about doing something.

RFDG: Could you summarise your beliefs about work?

JS: First, it's important to help people achieve what they want to achieve while at the same time helping the company achieve its aims. To give advice, to always be able to listen. It's just to try and meet a common goal with the employee and the company at the same time.

RFDG: What are the good things about where you work?

JS: One of the best things is that the school trusts the teacher a lot. They aren't tied to any coursebook or anything very strict. There is a pacing schedule* but the teacher has the freedom to use their judgment and the student's needs and personality to execute the course. Also, there's a wide variety of classes. There's very young learners, adults, exams, business, summer

camp, so there's a big set of opportunities to develop and try new things. It's not always successful, but it's great for development.

*Note: pacing schedules map out what pages from certain textbooks should be covered per lesson. Some pacings are more flexible than others and teachers can be permitted to choose materials that best meet the needs of their students.

RFDG: Do other places have less academic freedom?

JS: I've heard other schools have their own coursebook and the teachers aren't allowed to supplement. There's a wide variety of schools. Some schools just want a native speaker and they can do what they like but that's not really teaching, that's more like being a babysitter. Out of the "real" schools I think some will have a similar level of freedom, others are stricter. Regarding observations, new teachers here are observed at least three times a year. After that you're given one formal observation and as long as there are no complaints you're free to teach how you like and try out new ideas. There are lots of seminars and workshops to try out these new ideas, so I'd say here is definitely a place you can develop.

RFDG: Are there any bad things about where you work?

JS: As a teacher, maybe the size of the company can lead to difficulties. There are so many locations and employees that communication can get lost down the lines. So, sometimes different managers are on different levels, projects sometimes work in some schools and not in others. Communication is the most difficult thing as a teacher.

RFDG: How do you compensate for that?

JS: I try to keep in contact with as many managers from as many different schools and areas as possible so I have an idea of what's going on in different parts of the school. Not just the teaching side, but also the other administrative side. That helps me have a wider understanding of the company, even though it's big. And it helps with teaching as well because I know what's going on in the background.

RFDG: Your status as a manager might give you some privileges. Is the same approach possible for other teachers?

JS: It's harder, but if they have a good manager that manager would pass on the information and always be there to support them. They are kind of dependent on how active and proactive their manager is.

RFDG: On balance, do most people have access to good managers?

JS: I think yes. Every manager has strengths and weaknesses, and that's where I come back to the biggest issue: the size of the company. Maybe one mentee has certain needs and their manager can't meet them because they specialise in something else. And the bigger the company is, the greater the chance of someone falling through the cracks.

RFDG: What advice would you give to teachers who are just starting to teach?

JS: My first piece of advice would be to research the school very well, especially what times the school teaches at because

you have to organise your work-life balance. Secondly, does your school offer any development? Are there opportunities for promotion or transfers? It really depends on your purpose for becoming an English teacher.

Do you want to travel or become a career teacher? So, it comes back to research. Does the school meet your needs? And the third one is to treat it like it's a "real" job. If you come in with the attitude that it's just a job, basically you're likely to fail because it is a demanding job and it has the potential to lead into many areas of education like material design, teaching at state schools… So, really treat it like a real job and it can lead to many opportunities.

RFDG: What would improve your workplace?

JS: I guess I'd go back to better communication. That's always going to be the issue. The bigger the school, the harder it is to keep everybody on the same wavelength. I'm not sure how to achieve that, but personally I try my best to talk to as many people as possible and keep them informed of my decisions and my plans.

I think if everyone took a similar tack communication would improve, but again it's not just the teaching side it's all departments. Sometimes there is a communication barrier between different departments. I'm lucky in that I can speak Russian. They don't understand me at Starbucks, but I can speak to everyone at the school I work at. So, yeah, overcoming the language barrier and finding enough time to keep in touch with everybody.

*

Ninha (N)

N: It's a branch of an international company. We're a language school with many departments doing many different things, which is what makes it interesting for me because I can be involved in a lot of different things. I guess every year has a specific focus, so I'm always trying something new.

RFDG: Are there other good things?

N: There is never a boring day, which is sometimes good and sometimes not. Since I came here I have developed a lot in many different areas which wouldn't have been possible in many other places. Schools are smaller and more specialised elsewhere. I got my current job almost by accident.

I was thinking about what to do but I didn't want to leave and there was a job opening so I applied. It was funny because it's teacher training in some ways, which I never thought I'd do because I hate being in front of people. I'm an introvert. I could never have imagined doing what I do now. But once my first presentation was done, I realised that I survived and actually I quite like it and I'm good at it.

RFDG: What about the bad things?

She sighs in a manner similar to John. Another person who has had their patience tested.

N: A lack of communication between different departments. Things are improving and we are working on it, but this is what

gets me down the most. Sometimes I wish some people would just do their jobs. Of course, we are a team and we need to realise that one department's actions do have an impact on my part of the school.

RFDG: Is this lack of communication a feature of your workplace or Russia in general?

N: I don't like generalisations, so no, I don't think it reflects the country or the city. I think it depends on who you work with. I don't know much about managing people or the corporate culture. I've seen similar things elsewhere.

RFDG: How about the people you like to work with – what are they like?

N: They are dedicated to what they do. To their students or subordinates. I like to work with people who care and there are enthusiastic people here, which is good to see. It's not only experienced teachers, every year we have different people and you can see everyone's progress. Also, when you meet a person who knows what they are doing or who is dedicated to it, it's always fun to talk with them.

*

ID

ID: It's a state university. The same one I graduated from. I teach students aged 18—20 something part-time. In my free time I teach privately.

RFDG: What are the good things about where you work?

ID: The schedule. I'm free to decide when and how many classes I'd like to have. It does have disadvantages, too, but I'm happy being in control of my time and this is the major advantage.

RFDG: Are there minor advantages?

ID: Yes. First of all, I really enjoy the academic environment I'm in. Working in private language centres, courses, schools – I did that but I was a bit bored. With students you are supposed to push for some sort of achievement, a higher level, and I can't do that anywhere else. I don't teach kids. I don't teach teens. I mostly teach adults, but with adults it's hard because you can't impose your own agenda on them because they know very well what they want.

With students I'm sort of in more control. Of course, I should comply with the government requirements and they are quite rigid. I have to deliver the programme in accordance with everything those in the Ministry of Education implemented in the programme. But I think I am more free to do what I want and there is less control compared to private language schools.

RFDG: Do you think the imposition of an agenda happens more frequently elsewhere?

ID: I would say this is a special trait of those public education establishments. When you are a teacher, just teaching groups or individuals, there isn't much that depends on you. You can't even choose your own coursebooks if you aren't happy. But in this environment, while I can't do exactly what I want, I am more independent in my choices as long as I have this agreement with the head of our department. She gives me the room for decisions, room for initiative, so I am quite independent in my choices and it's something I enjoy.

RFDG: Are there any bad things about where you work?

ID: Basically, I work at a state university and the state pays us to implement the programme to give the students the state diploma – the official paper that shows the standard set by the government. If you graduate from an unlicensed university, the diploma is considered to be less valuable.

The government knows this very well and they use this to implement their own agenda in their programmes. Right now our university is going though this accreditation process where the people from the Ministry of Education come to the university and check all the documents, check the teachers, check the classes and whether they really do what the government wants them to do. I found that they sometimes want really strange things.

For example, I teach a course of simple English language

practice. It's not translation, it's not something more academic. It's something like a general English course you would find in every school and they want us to teach students the etiquette of the country they are studying the language of. They want us to teach them some other things which I think are unrelated to language, like tolerance, cooperation and problem solving. Negotiation.

I could say, "Yes, of course I am teaching them the proper way to talk to English language partners" but I'm supposed to show that these competencies are being checked in the exams. So, I have to include a question or a task in the final exam so they can show they have mastered etiquette.

From my point of view I'm supposed to be testing skills and use of English, but "Etiquette"? "Tolerance?" How do I teach that? And this is really a problem and I don't find it convincing. So, when I'm considering whether I should make a new move next year this is really the point which concerns me the most. I don't really enjoy this idea that we have to teach something non-language related in classes.

RFDG: Some people would argue that language is bound in its context and culture. Would you disagree?

ID: I don't disagree with that. The problem is, how will you test it? How will you develop an exam to test these points reliably? Would I give them a situation and ask how they will react and give them marks in accordance to what they choose? It doesn't really make that much sense to me. This is what the

government wants… at least this year, because the standards keep being reviewed and developed and changed almost every year. So, this year I teach them one thing, next year maybe something different.

RFDG: What do you think has caused this policy?

ID: There is this trend of the government taking more and more control of whatever is being done at schools – the public ones, of course. It's very evident they really want to make sure they know exactly what's happening and they don't allow ANYTHING which is not in the programme into the classrooms. So, they have some rules about not bringing any literature which is not included in the programme. It mustn't be inside the university.

I was considering starting a book club because I have lots of literature I don't really need. I thought maybe we could put a bookcase in there with whatever books I like for the students to take on their own initiative. The department said I wasn't allowed to do that because it is something officially not allowed. As you know, Russia is a multinational country, hence this idea of tolerance; that you have to tolerate different nationalities. It's about nationalities and religion, it's not about… let's just say "sexual orientation". This is a problem and something I disagree with.

So, yes, they really want us to teach them how to behave "properly" with a person from another country. Etiquette. This it odd because we are supposed to prepare future diplomats and

if you're a diplomat and you don't know how to shake hands properly, or speak politely with someone, this cancels the whole point of this education. I don't think it contradicts the policy of the Russian government because we have the policy and we have other actions which don't correspond.

The problem I have is that the government wants to control EVERYTHING.

RFDG: Would you say this push for having these things in the curriculum is actually less about promoting the values and actually about controlling things?

ID: Exactly.

*

Nadezhda Boguk (NB)

NB: I would say it's a company that's passionate about teaching, about motivating and getting the results.

RFDG: So, it's like a private language school? Is that the best way to describe it?

NB: I would say "language centre".

RFDG: What's the difference between a language school and a language centre?

NB: For me, a language centre includes more opportunities. School is when you come and get the language, but in a centre you have different options. You learn the language and you can take exams and develop further. It's for students and for teachers, that's why it's not just a language school. I see it as an organisation that works for different groups of people. School is more for students.

RFDG: Why did you choose this specific language centre?

NB: I was looking for a job and I got an invitation.

RFDG: Why do you continue to work there?

NB: Because there are many options for me. Firstly, because I finally got the opportunity to work with the language properly. My previous experience in teaching was based a lot on subjects that are connected to English, but are not purely language teaching. For example, I taught IT in Linguistics. That was about how we use IT to teach and learn English.

There was also one on British Literature and English, so we discussed different authors and their books but it was not purely language. Or, Country Studies where we discussed different aspects of countries like their system of government. We did it in English but it wasn't about explaining the vocabulary. Here I finally came to the language itself. That is what my diploma says: that I am a teacher of English.

Secondly, because there is a great variety of contexts, from little kids to adults, and different levels of languages, which is also good for teachers so they aren't stuck only at the school level. We can also work in companies and discuss absolutely different topics.

RFDG: Are there other good things about where you work?

NB: Basically, it comes from the students who are from different backgrounds with different aims and different motivations. We tailor the classes to fit their interests, to fit their needs and this is also interesting. What I like about English teaching here in general is that we don't talk about grammar or vocabulary.

If I talk to a person who works in accounting we discuss talking about accounting, but the next day the same person can tell a story about travelling and we start talking about travelling and architecture. This variety is what appeals to me. We speak about absolutely different topics, from business to culture and personal things.

RFDG: What about the bad sides of where you work?

NB: Intensive weeks and late classes.

RFDG: What is an intensive week for you?

NB: For example, I have a day where there are four groups in a row. Three children's groups and one adult group and there are only 10-minute breaks in between. That is intensive.

RFDG: How do you cope with that?

NB: I start planning in advance and make sure I have the materials ready at the beginning of the week. So, for example, I don't have to think about copies and the breaks are not spent preparing for the next class but are spent relaxing.

RFDG: How much time do you spend preparing for each class?

NB: It depends on the groups, the course or topics. I can sometimes use materials I've used with other groups. If it is Intermediate and we are studying future tenses I already have some games. I have to modify them for different ages. If it's a new topic or we start something new or have new vocabulary, then it will take me more time.

RFDG: If you could think of ways to make your workplace better, what would be your top three?

NB: Speaking about the room, the availability of a screen could be nice but it is not a must. It's good to have it there but we can live without it. Another important thing is to have desks. It helps to discipline students. If we speak about a conversational group then chairs like these…

She gestures to the desk chairs arranged around the room.

NB: …they're fine. But for school children it is not appropriate because they feel too relaxed. For school ages it would be better to have desks.

As for other things, I am pretty happy with what the school is doing for us, like the whiteboards, the markers, the magnets, everything is there. It's all organised.

As for the centre, I'd say that everything is done so the teacher is comfortable. You can copy books in every school and all the materials are provided.

RFDG: If you could make suggestions for improvement what would they be?

NB: It's really hard to say on the spot because I don't feel the need for anything else.

*

Anastasia Dereviankina (AD)

RFDG: Why do you work where you do?

AD: At first it was just due to the position. Here I'm an ADOS. I've always wanted to be a manager. I like this, I like responsibility. I like the pressure, stress, making decisions and being in charge and helping people. I used to do the same job in another language school but I quit due to the working environment.

It contradicted my ideas about the world. So, I quit, did my DELTA and after that I was thinking of teaching. But it was not enough. Then I saw the job here being advertised and I thought, "Why not?" I can't say the school was super attractive but the position was.

RFDG: So, teaching and wanting to be a manager overlapped?

AD: Yeah. To be honest, when I moved to Moscow I applied here to be a teacher but the rate was low and they disregarded my years of previous experience. But then the ADOS position came up and I went for it. I like it because I have plenty of opportunities for professional development. I do what I like and I love it.

RFDG: Is that just in your capacity as a manager or would you be as creative as a teacher?

AD: As I said, after DELTA I was only a teacher and I had a lot of students and hours to teach, but it was not enough.

In general, I feel I have more opportunities here. I have only 12 teaching hours and some private students. It's enough for me since I like being a manager and teacher trainer more. Creating and designing new courses, talking to teachers, helping them, guiding them. I like that.

RFDG: More than teaching?

AD: Yes.

RFDG: What's good about where you work?

AD: I can teach a variety of classes and I meet so many different people on a daily basis. I like the changes. And it's an opportunity to get experience and teach in different environments.

RFDG: Given that teachers' books are so comprehensive, is having experience so important?

AD: To be a good teacher? Yes, of course it's important. If you are experienced but you haven't done any professional development, it's not enough. You can't just say, "I have been teaching for 10 years. I am experienced." No. It's not enough. Experience is not only about years of teaching and numbers of classes taught, it's also about professional development and what you have done.

RFDG: Can you tell me what's bad about where you work?

She lets out a little laugh at the question before explaining her reaction.

AD: Last year I had my performance review with the management. They asked me the same question. And I said,

"No." There was the same moment of silence as right now because it's hard for me to think about something like that. I love it here. Otherwise I wouldn't do it. I don't do what I don't like. When I was in my previous job I had a bigger salary, much better working conditions and hours, but I didn't like some other things so I wasn't going to do them. I'm here now and I like it.

*

Daniel Saraiva San Pedro (DSSP)

RFDG: Why did you decide to work with International House?

DSSP: Because I did my CELTA with IH and I thought they were much more professional than other places, even though the approach was similar. Also, IH is everywhere. It's in a lot of countries. And I liked my tutors and CELTA trainers, and the possibility of doing DELTA and developing professionally. I think it's a reputable school.

RFDG: How would you describe where you work?

DSSP: Basically, I like it. I like where I work mostly because of the people who work here. They are friendly and real professionals. Most of the people who stick around for longer than one year. After two or three years working here you can see how many people come and go, and because it's such a big company you don't get to know people personally. The ones who stick around longer, you see they are good people and they are ready to help. They took me in. The Russian staff as well are really nice.

It's not the only thing. Professional development is another reason. Maybe the main one. I've been developing a lot, even though I don't have a background in linguistics. We might complain that we have to go to mandatory training once in a while but they are useful. And there are discounts for DELTA and other courses.

RFDG: What's bad about where you work?

DSSP: It could be more organised in terms of communication and defining roles. Now I'm an ADOS and I feel like the role is not well-defined in my mind. It's been six months so I am more aware, but we have to deal with so many different people and departments, and schools, admins, students, parents, scheduling. Sometimes communication gets lost.

Teaching-wise, maybe when we have to work long hours with short breaks between long classes. And we have to round off classes and get ready for the next one, the logistics of going from one school to another. That's hard if you are always travelling. Short notice covers can be stressful.

RFDG: You mentioned the CPD opportunities. Are there any other opportunities here?

DSSP: I think if people see you have worked here and developed it will look good.

*

Heather Belgorodtseva (HB)

HB: It's a private language school in Moscow. It's not dissimilar to most language schools in that it's a profit-driven company where the issue is always how to maintain quality while also delivering a profit. I've worked in the state sector in the UK a bit as well and there is a different vibe. There's a lot more paperwork in the state sector and so in some ways in the private sector you do get a lot more flexibility.

In theory, you'd think it's a lot more rigid because they want to deliver profit, but actually teachers have a lot more autonomy than in the state sector where you have a lot more parameters. There are a lot more targets that you have to meet and a lot of fitting in with the other initiatives you're doing. And a heck of a lot of paperwork. They aren't lying about the paperwork, it's horrendous. So yeah, it's quite flexible in that sense.

RFDG: If it's so similar to other schools, why work here and not somewhere else?

HB: Well, I ended up specialising in teacher training and we have a big training department that allows me to do not just CELTA but other courses.

RFDG: Are there other good things about it?

HB: I like my colleagues. That's quite important.

RFDG: For different reasons or do they share common features?

HB: They're all quite enthusiastic. Working in a private language school the wages are not particularly impressive. People are here because they generally like teaching and they like to improve teaching and the quality of it. I work in teacher support rather than the straight end of teaching.

RFDG: Are there any downsides to where you work?

HB: It's not well-paid. Long-term security and a lot of the protections you would normally have from your working environment are not there, so it's inherently not very stable. It's inherently part of the gig economy which I don't really approve of. I mean TEFL has always been like that, so it's always funny to read and hear people talking about how dreadful the rise of the gig economy is because that's what TEFL has always been like, at least in the private sector.

I worked in the state sector side of things. In the UK there was a marked difference between what you can expect if you get a full-time job and a contract in that environment, and what it's like working in the private sector for TEFL.

RFDG: So, the low pay is more a feature of the broader context rather than the company you work for?

HB: Yes, because private language school teaching in London is not well paid.

RFDG: You mention there are more courses for you to teach here which is obviously good.

HB: More training courses that I'm interested in teaching.

We laugh. It's an important clarification.

RFDG: Are there other opportunities you've benefited from?

HB: Obviously, to live in Moscow. This is why we came back to be honest. It wasn't the job, it was to live in Moscow with my husband and children, and they can experience life in Russia.

RFDG: Is that more important than experiencing life in the UK?

HB: Yes.

RFDG: May I ask why?

She sighs theatrically.

HB: It's to do with the trials and tribulations of being stuck between two cultures and trying to decide which to prioritise and which aspects to deal with. For example, the language aspect and so on to work on with your children. I don't know yet if we made the right decision. We'll see.

She laughs.

RFDG: Hopefully, it'll pan out.

HB: Well, it's always a choice isn't it? There are issues to do with school and issues to do with minority language issues and bilingualism.

RFDG: And it's easier to do that here?

HB: Well, sort of, yes… ish. It's also connected to living in London. Personally, I don't like living in London very much. I like living in Moscow and my husband has family here.

*****

Christopher James Leckenby (CJL)

RFDG: Why did you choose the school you work in?

CJL: I had done an interview with another school in Moscow, they offered me a job and I accepted. This was pre-CELTA. This was just before I started doing CELTA. On the one hand I was thrilled, but I also had misgivings because I was not terribly impressed with the interview process. I had a lot of doubts in my mind and they weren't terribly reliable when it came to keeping in touch with me, when I had questions and stuff.

I remember finding this school's advertisement page on one of the ESL job websites and it looked, on the surface, a lot more organised than the one I had seen for my first choice. That was one thing that caught my eye and the fact that they required a higher level of training, and there were more standards in place for employment. I thought, "OK, well that's usually a good sign."

When I wrote to the school again, after I had finished CELTA, they remembered me. I was encouraged by that. I was not expecting anyone to remember my initial query before I did CELTA. The fact they had actually remembered and then going through the interview process, I just felt a lot more secure with this choice. It just seemed like a smarter decision. This school would be able to offer me more if I agreed and if I passed the selection process.

RFDG: If you could describe where you work now, very

briefly, what would you say?

CJL: The short answer is I love it. I think overall I tend to get pretty attached to where I work, regardless of where that is. When I first came over, I became ensconced quite quickly in a particular area of the city and a particular school. I was very, very devoted to that school and to those students, and just generally to that area. I'm still in that area generally, but circumstances forced me to change schools. (Chris's present school has multiple locations which are referred to as "schools.")

I'm even happier there because it's just such a nice place to work. It's a nice size of school. It's not as cramped as the previous school. It's a more comfortable environment to work in. It's more modern. The administrative staff are wonderful to work with – that's probably my favourite bit. I love my students. There are always resources on hand that I need, so it's always well stocked.

Because teachers are coming and going all the time, I'm the most senior teacher there. I'm really the only one who's there all the time, so that really gives me a sense of security that, assuming they're happy with my work, I can always sort of go back there and I will always have classes. I really, really like working there.

RFDG: Is that what makes you stay, despite the fact you have all these other places you'd like to visit and live?

CJL: That is a big reason. I think the people in general and the people I have met since I first arrived here, that is a big reason why I've wanted to stay. Part of it also is just the comfort of the

routine. As I said, I get attached to things easily. I tend to kind of fall into a routine and it's difficult to kind of break that once you accept it.

It is kind of refreshing, when I look at my entire experience of Russia. It started out positive and it's only become more positive in terms of the environment I work in; the people I work with, the quality of the work I think I do and that I'm enabled to do through the support networks. So, yeah, that is a big reason why I continue to come back.

RFDG: What's so good about the people you work with? Is there any common set of features, or is it different reasons?

CJL: I suppose as far as colleagues are concerned, as I said, the administrators are wonderful. They're very supportive and very helpful. You can see they actually invest themselves in their job, which makes it very easy to work with them. I know I can turn to them if I need help. I can rely on them in the event that I need to. They're both very good at what they do anyway and they have lots of other skills outside of administrating, which means they can manage the school well and it enables me to feel comfortable when I do my job.

I enjoy working with different people, generally. There have been a lot of new teachers who have arrived at the school and who have worked with me since I've been there. I've enjoyed working alongside them to help them when they've needed it, but also just kind of to feed off them. I've enjoyed that sort of symbiotic dynamic I've had with many of them. They've always been great.

And, just generally, the students in this country. I have grown quite attached to them everywhere, but in particular at my school because I admire that they're able to do as much as they are. I can see the similarities between them and kids their age back home. I can also see just how stark some of the differences are because there are expectations on their shoulders that I never had to deal with and that kids their age in my country don't have to deal with.

It's remarkable they're able to be who they are and that they're able to enjoy being young and generally go through the same life phases that I went through – albeit with 10 times the expectation, 10 times the uncertainty and 10 times the work. I enjoy being a part of that story. If I can give them something which will ultimately be useful and enjoyable for them in the future then I'm happy to do that.

RFDG: That's a long list of good things. Is there anything bad?

CJL: You mean about Russia, or about working here?

RFDG: Working here, in particular.

CJL: First of all, just on the most general level, it's hard to see people come and go all the time. And *everybody* comes and goes. I mean, students come and go, administrators come and go, co-workers come and go, ADOSes come and go, and that's hard.

I suppose I'm a bit more used to it now. But a couple of years ago we would have a real good sense of community. I'd get really close to various people and then they'd leave. It's a bit morbid, but it almost felt like a death in some ways because they move on and

you don't know if or when you're going to be seeing these people again. Then you have to start from ground zero with a new group of people which *maybe* you will have as good a relationship with, or maybe not. That's a hard thing to accept in this line of work, no matter where you are.

I did sort of expect this from Russia, but there are things that could be better organised here and that's putting it mildly. I'm not impressed with the general lack of organisation in terms of how the school as a whole does things. I think a lot of that, frankly, boils down to the fact that the business culture of this company does not mix well with an education culture. It's not just this company, I think I see it in companies everywhere, in Russia and around the world. I can see the priorities of the business trumping the priorities of the school and the people who make up the school, and it's just irritating. I would do things differently. It's very annoying to have to work in an environment where those are the priorities.

RFDG: This conflict of priorities between academia and business, do you think that contributes to the high turnover rate? Or is there something else as well?

CJL: I do think that's a big part of it. I think it's very clear the organisation, the company, the school, does not value people. People are seen only as a means to an end, regardless of whether they're employees or they're customers. And I *hate* that mentality. I hate it in a practical sense and I hate it because of my background in political science because that is something

that never ends well. And it's just a stupid organising principle and I do think that puts a lot of people off. It does put me off as well, but as I said I've been able to override that because of the positive things I told you about.

In some ways I think there's always going to a be high turnover because the type of people that are attracted to this line of work – and I think especially in Russia – are people who… I think I once described it to somebody as, "If you come and work here, you're either running to something or from something."

Because coming to teach English in Russia, I think for the vast majority of people I know, is not considered a step up. It's not something that you aspire to do when you're 10 years old. It's not something parents brag about to their friends and co-workers the same way they would about a child who's going to medical school, for instance.

So, if you find yourself in this part of the world and you find yourself doing this kind of work, it's usually because you're either reinventing yourself, or you're trying to get away from something that happened in the past which you want to sort of wipe clean.

Or, because you sort of want an adventure and are looking for a good time. You're going into it with eyes open and, come what may, you'll sort of deal with it.

A lot of people I've worked with here already have fixed goals in mind. They're not overly loyal to the company or the country. They come, they take what they need and then they move on to the next one. I think that would be the case no matter how well

run the school was.

RFDG: Do you think it's possible to balance academia and profit, or will they always be in conflict?

CJL: There's always going to be some tension because the goals of those two things are different. There's a lot that could be done to reconcile them. There are a lot of things which aren't being done now, which could be done and which should be done, to make life a lot easier. Certainly for the teachers, but also just a lot more pleasant in terms of a work culture. I would like to see that happen.

RFDG: Could you give some examples?

CJL: This is not unique to this company, but it's irritating to have to deal with lip service. For instance, when you get praise in the form of these very hollow platitudes that are given at the beginning and the end of the academic year. Then it's followed up with nothing substantial during the course of the academic year when you need that support and when it would be nice to actually have something tangible which shows that the school is genuinely invested in your work and your career – not to mention the customers you're supposedly responsible for.

In the most general sense, it would be nice to see more of an emphasis placed on people. I've seen a lot of good people come and go over the years, and a lot of really *good* teachers and administrators who have been dissuaded from staying on because they just get frustrated by the lack of attention or care that they seem to get from the organisation.

I think that's a shame. There's a problem if people are not willing to stick out tougher times. People, and especially experienced and talented people, should know they are in the best place when they get there. The fact I've seen so many go, and in some cases on not-so-great terms, that's a problem.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.