

Preface

This special issue of *Maribor International Review* is dedicated to reflection on the teaching experience and implications of the summer school carried out under the auspices of the Tempus SEEPALS Project (project 511116-2010) and held at the Faculty of Arts, Maribor in the summer of 2011.

Students from eight countries convened in Maribor Between June 26 and July 9th 2011. They had been selected from the partner universities in the SEEPALS project and thus represented the following countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Italy, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Slovenian students at the Faculty of Arts were also encouraged to join in, and many did so, making a total of 9 different countries of origin for the student body.

The instructors in the summer school also represented the partner universities in the project. At an initial meeting (March 17-19, 2011) in Banja Luka, the process of modernizing cultural and literary studies was initiated and proposals for the summer school were invited. As many as possible of the proposals were accommodated in the 2-week format of the summer school, since one of its foremost aims was the testing of content and approaches in the course of the modernization process. Overall, 16 academics taught at the Maribor summer school, originating from the following countries: Bosnia & Hercegovina, Albania, Italy, Germany, Slovenia, Montenegro, Serbia and Macedonia. As organizer of the summer school, I felt proud of the diversity among both instructors and students and confident that the experience would justify the effort needed to coordinate so many universities and faculties within this massive Tempus project (for more about the project itself, visit the website at www.seepals.net).

In retrospect, the summer school experience fulfilled our expectations. Evaluations by students showed that the attending students enjoyed themselves and felt empowered to critique, challenge and suggest improvements. Summer school has been a growth experience for its participants. What about for the teachers? There was a general impression that we had appreciated the event and benefited from it, especially on the part of those teacher participants who were able to spend a whole week in Maribor and attend classes given by their colleagues. Nevertheless, as an organizer, I felt the need to explore and document the teacher experience at the summer school. We had asked our students to write a short essay; why not ask the same of the instructors? So, as one outcome of the SEEPALS summer school, teachers were asked to write brief, reflective essays about their aims, experiences, doubts, observations and achievements arising from the Summer School. After all, the project aimed to change not just study curricula but the way in which such studies were carried out. In the process, the participating academics were being asked to update themselves as well as their curricula.

The results of this self-reflection and self-critique comprise this special issue of *MIR*. These are not research reports; most are not structured as academic essays usually are. There is little of the formal language of the critical establishment, for these are records of feelings more than of quantifiable outcomes. Nonetheless, these texts are deeply revealing of the challenge of this intercultural, international brand of teaching. These writers share their self-doubts, their obstacles, their deepest wishes for their classrooms and their students. These short texts show the range of approaches taken at the summer school, as well as the quality of the participating academics.

With participants like these, the SEEPALS project seems destined for success in its endeavor to improve and broaden the academic process and environment for language teaching in the universities of south-eastern Europe.

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