

**Vive le “inter”!**

"The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery."

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I was very excited about going to Maribor for the summer school for two reasons: first, this would be my second visit to Maribor after the wonderful time I spent there in September 2008 and, second, because this time I would be teaching classes for the SEEPALS Maribor Summer School. Although I have been teaching for a number of years now, I was still overwhelmed by the idea. It often happens that I start the new academic year with the belief that there is something I need to change in my previous year's teaching. Teaching is always a new experience because your teaching environment is often new, your students are new and therefore the start of each semester is like a new beginning. It is in this sense that I had such mixed feelings about this summer school, that is, a sense of *déjà-vu* mixed with the anxiety of the new.

With these preconceptions about teaching and with the belief that this summer school would prove a different experience and also with the happy discovery that the topic of this summer school was *Interdisciplinary Englishes: A Creative Mixing of Literature, Language and Culture*, I decided to teach a topic that would interrelate literary discussion with linguistic argumentation. In our discussions in Banja Luka, I was one of those who favoured the idea of making literary and cultural studies more interdisciplinary. And in many ways, I believe, this summer school was so “inter”-based that I am glad to say I was right about my feelings but at the same time to suggest that this was the very success behind it. This summer school proved to be an *intersection* of literature, culture, language, criticism, writing and education.

First and foremost, the summer school was an *international* event which gathered together teachers and students of various nationalities not only from the Balkans but also from EU countries. It was very rewarding to have a class of so many culturally, socially and religiously different students and teachers. There was always something to learn from everyone. It was extremely useful to attend classes because it helped one view not only his/her colleague's teaching, but also his/her own teaching critically. It made me think that teachers should do that more often in their own departments. We tried to practise something of the kind at our department three years ago, but this proved to be a failure because what was actually implied was that young/inexperienced teachers would attend older teachers' classes. This did not work, simply because in most cases teachers felt offended by the very idea behind it. In Maribor the whole thing was completely different, because the concept was different, and what is more there was peer spirit. It was also fun to attend your colleagues' classes. On the one hand, you were a colleague sitting behind to attend your fellows' classes, but at the same time you felt part of the audience wishing to answer the questions and participate in the discussion.

In any case, internationalism worked best for the students, I think. These were among the best in their classes at their home universities. This summer school gathered together intelligent and resourceful students whom it was a pleasure to teach. Unfortunately, this is not often the case in our classes back home. Putting together students from different nationalities, backgrounds and interests proved very beneficial because it made them more competitive and classes more interesting, involving and therefore more productive. This sort of competition is almost absent in our classes nowadays, and I found myself thinking hard after this experience about how to make our classes and students more competitive. I believe we should try to find some sort of “inter” idea to make things work.

Along with these positive effects of competition, still above it there was *interaction*. The teachers in most cases tried to find ways of interacting with their students and of making them interact with each other. It was also an excellent idea to organize social activities after classes and competitions of various kinds. It made them interact and compete at the same time.

Although the summer school was intended to test what we believed and concluded at the Banja Luka conference regarding literary and cultural studies, the summer school was built upon the idea of making foreign language studies, to use a more general perspective, more *interdisciplinary*. I tend to maintain that students love discussing literature when it is embedded in a more interdisciplinary framework. So, apart from intersecting topics together, the summer school set into *interplay* students' literary, cultural, linguistic and also social points of view. In many ways, this proved my belief that the approach in literature classes should move towards the interdisciplinary.

There was a sort of "inter" spirit, so to speak, that characterized the atmosphere of the summer school classes. By this "inter" spirit, I sum up some of the above and more. The class atmosphere was defined by considerable interest, interpretation, integration and interplay. Students and teachers alike were engaged not only in an integrated process of interpreting literature from different perspectives but also in an attempt to set into interplay personal experience with literary experience, thus making interpretation itself an interpersonal undertaking.

These "inter" aspects of the summer school that I have pointed out here are no new things in the teaching process, but we as teachers often take them for granted and fail to see them for what they are. The summer school was an invaluable opportunity to view one's own teaching in relation to other people's teaching, on the one hand; on the other, it proved useful in helping us to discover these *inter* aspects I mentioned above and which I celebrated in the title cry "Vive le 'inter'!". The more of these one discovers in one's own teaching or in the others' teaching, the more one is likely to develop a more inclusive and integrated perspective in his/her own teaching.

#### **Works Cited**

Forman, David C. "Eleven Common-Sense Learning Principles: Lessons from Experience, Sages, and Each Other." *T&D* Sept. 2003: 39+.