

Serendipity in Austria

Report on a course for new trainers

Heather Crabtree
University of Worcester

I would like to sing the praises of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz, Austria. I have to confess that, until recently, I was totally unaware of the existence of this institution. However, in the early part of the Autumn term last year I received an e-mail, offering an all-expenses paid five-day course in Austria at the ECML. The requirements were that the participants were all to be new or inexperienced teacher trainers as the aim of the course was to try out some training material which was being written by a group of very experienced trainers. I was fortunate enough to get a place and what followed was an unforgettable experience.

The trainers were inspirational. They put us through our paces, encouraging us to participate in activities which we then deconstructed to work out what had been done and why. They also acknowledged our experience, albeit rather limited in my case, and encouraged us to share our ideas both in pairs, small groups and as a whole group. We worked through the hows and whys of training and covered everything – from pre-course planning and preparation, through presentation and activities during a course to feedback and evaluation of the experience.

We were given time to work in small groups to prepare something of our own to share with the group at the end of the course. This was nerve-racking but also extremely enlightening. One of the areas we had discussed was group work and when settling down to try and work as a group, we all became much more

aware of the processes at work in group dynamics and the pitfalls and advantages of this type of situation.

We also discussed the role of the tutor during lesson observation and different strategies were shared and dissected. One of the things which was opened up for me was the idea that the trainee can be encouraged to use the observer as part of the starter for the lesson or as a resource during the class and that the trainer does not have to be a stuffy, silent and sometimes ominous Ofsted-like persona.

I went to Graz expecting to learn a lot about what it means to be a teacher trainer and I hoped to come away with some strategies on how to become a better trainer. My expectations were fulfilled several times over thanks to Gabi, Tony, Mercè, Uwe and Frank.

However, as I knew nothing of the scope of the work of the ECML, I had no idea that one of the other positive outcomes of my stay in Austria would be that I now have contacts in 29 European countries as far apart as Iceland and Armenia. One of the social highlights was our 'multi-culti' evening. All participants were asked to bring something from their country to share with the others. As a result, we had large quantities of incredibly different food, moderate amounts of wine and liquor, but also a variety of stories and songs in different languages. It was the perfect evening, truly multicultural and hugely enjoyable.

So, if you are new to the profession, keep your eyes open for the training kit to be published by ECML early in

2007, as it contains a vast array of all the things you ever need to know about starting out as a trainer and includes CD-ROM. If you can't wait that long, I'm more than happy to share my experiences in more detail, if you wish to contact me by e-mail.

I would also recommend that you log on to www.ecml.at to see what else they have to offer.

CILT, the National Centre for Languages is the UK nominating authority for ECML workshops.

If you would like to register an interest in attending a future workshop for which you are eligible, please go to www.cilt.org.uk/europe/ecml.htm.