

## A personal view by Erika Schwindt

A few years back the topic of complacency came up in a faculty meeting, reminding us that this was a teacher's greatest sin. The situation was such that I could only agree; after all this word did not even exist in my vocabulary. Not because I was so conceited as to think I could not be complacent, but because former textbook phrases, vocabulary exercises and even Macbeth's medieval English had failed to acquaint me - a non-native speaker of English - with this particular word, and now I was too embarrassed to ask for a definition.

**"we all become students again when we enrol in the masters programme"**

This gap closed and that much the wiser, I wholeheartedly agree with the above statement, especially when thinking of a multinational classroom with students displaying various levels of language proficiency. Mortification at having to ask for explanations in a foreign language distresses young students just as it afflicts the older generation, and complacency might be equally as harmful for the pupil as for the colleague.

What does this have to do with CEIC? Obviously, we all become students again when we enrol in the masters programme and sign up for Summer School in Bath. Most of us are not used to being glued to a seat for hours, listening to a lecturer, taking notes, giving sensible answers, digesting criticism and least of all, doing homework. Conferring with the unit tutor on the intended topic, starting to collect notes for the assignment and slaving away in the huge library on campus are some of the regular evening occupations of the Summer School experience. Some of us even have to perform all these tasks in a second (or third) language and surely do not understand every word. The eyes get heavy, the mind refuses to take up any more information, and after three



Erika Schwindt lived for several years in the USA working as a language instructor and technical translator for a private language school, and then in Korea she started her career as an educator at an international school. Since her return to Germany she has been teaching various subjects at an international school.

days of this unaccustomed treatment the body feels as if run over by a truck.

The first reaction I shared with my fellow participants was a sudden recognition of what we put our own students through every single school day: Good-bye, complacency! Native English speakers suddenly faced the need to look up special terminology in the dictionary to find that the definition did nothing for their comprehension, let alone explaining it to the foreign speaker. Welcome, empathy!

At this point the adult student, already overwhelmed by such alien impressions of being thrown back into the position of a student, becomes aware of the invaluable effect of international-mindedness, exemplified by internationally experienced, amiable lecturers and professors during the courses. Thus being subjected to role models while becoming familiar with the contents of specific units, the members of such a course subconsciously develop a readiness to mirror this international mindset once they switch hats again and are in front of a class.

Independent of unit topics, this development is expressed in lively discussions going on during sessions, outside on the university Parade, over a cup of coffee or in the relaxed atmosphere of the Sunday and Thursday evening get-togethers: a natural way to practise global understanding. The open exchange of teaching experiences in the many different contexts of the course participants, their life stories and knowledge as more or less advanced CEIC students could be considered world peace in action.

Such conversations reveal that some mature students' major apprehensions before enrolment focused on being expected to re-learn basic teaching strategies they had already applied for years in their classrooms. Far from it! The boundless resources of diverse teaching experiences and ideas inherent to course participants from various countries are solicited, underpinning or refuting the theories relevant to the subject of the particular unit and extending the volume far beyond

# A personal view by Erika Schwindt

what can be found in print. It seems that no two courses will ever be identical with such variety of input. Students as well as lecturers feed on this abundance and more often than not detect new fields of possible future research. When this happens the adult student might undergo the gratifying experience of becoming part of a pulsing research world.

At the end of a week's course, saturated with new knowledge, impressions, ideas and resolutions, the CEIC student parts, a bit tired and quite emotionally, from lecturers, peers and new friends to transform back into a teacher. But no matter which unit of study was covered,

## "I am coming back next year!"

flashbacks of recent life as a student will influence the teaching attitude towards greater empathy and international-mindedness, and certainly no complacency.

If eavesdropping on students parting after one or two weeks of summer courses one might think the masters programme a lifelong affair, as all of us keep reassuring each other: 'I am coming back next year!'

Erika has also penned the following short poem:

### Reflections of a Part-Time Student

Two years ago I knew nothing of Bath.  
In subjects like German, English and maths  
I was considered an experienced teacher  
with flexibility a most welcome feature.  
Skimming the pamphlet from Bath made me wary.  
The demand of the programme looked utterly scary  
and six unit assignments of 4000 words  
were surely intended for younger nerds!  
A dissertation to finish the master  
seemed out of my reach – a sure disaster.  
But when I tried to express my fears  
objections encountered only deaf ears.  
Yet once decided I started yearning  
and quickly signed up for distance learning.  
Having no clue about outline or draft  
made writing assignments a mysterious craft;

literature review and reference pages –  
it all looked as if it would take me ages  
to come up with something decent on paper.  
It certainly was not an easy caper!  
Critical reading seemed unsettling news,  
for who am I to doubt expert views?  
But feedback from tutors was perfectly great,  
inviting to question without being afraid.  
Vast reassurance evolved from disclosure  
that teaching experience with international exposure  
was not only welcome but actually desired,  
as hint where research in this field was required.  
No matter whether per distance or taught  
all units provided much food for thought.  
An abundance to study, to write and to read,  
which all could be done at my very own speed.  
The schedule was tough, but I never regretted  
to have my academic appetite whetted.  
Instead of quitting or taking vacation  
I rode my momentum to start dissertation.  
A research topic was easy to find  
because it developed inside my mind  
and surfaced as if released from confinement  
while working on my fourth assignment.  
Methodology chapter, questionnaire design,  
enlisting respondents in person – online.  
Asking colleagues for overseas support  
made finding new friends an additional sport.  
I was overwhelmed by the numbers responding  
and the obvious display of international bonding.  
This must be credit to CEIC's account,  
where borderless friendship can be found.  
While collecting, screening and analysing data  
the study's volume grew constantly greater.  
20,000 words, inconceivable before,  
were suddenly written, and even some more.  
Dare I admit it? This was absolute fun!  
I almost feel sorry the dissertation is done.  
Two years ago I knew nothing of Bath –  
how lucky the option did come to pass!  
At this point it is hard to make a prediction,  
but study for me has turned to addiction  
so that I might, out of current elation,  
continue to research international education.