



An Experiment in Pedagogy and Social Life

Tania Reytan-Marincheshka

Association on Refugees & Migrants-BG & Plovdiv University (Bulgaria)

treytan26@gmail.com

The International Summer School on Religion and Public Life provides a laboratory for the practical pedagogy of tolerance and living with difference in a global society. Its goals are to produce new practices and understandings for living together in a world populated by people with very different political ideas, moral beliefs and communal loyalties. Its focus is on religion, as our religious identities are our most exclusive and our religious communities are those to which we devote our greatest loyalties. In our diverse but increasingly interconnected world, we need to find ways to live together. *The school takes these very real, critical and defining differences, especially communal and religious differences between people, as the starting point of a publically shared life.*

School fellows come from all over the world and from all walks of life. These may include; high-school teachers and principles, civic leaders, rabbis, imams, priests, professors, attorneys, graduate students and members of the business community. Together, we seek to define and explicate those new capacities, skills and attitudes necessary for sharing a life among those who do not share the same ideology, religion or communal identities and loyalties. Together, fellows define those skill-sets necessary to implement change in their home countries and develop programs towards this end. The school offers a venue to discuss the design and implementation of projects in the fellows' home communities as well as support for those carrying out these programs.

In its own way the school is an experiment in both pedagogy and social life. Combining academic lectures with group reflections, visits to historical sites, shared meals, witnessing the worship services of multiple faith traditions, and conversations with multiple local religious leaders the school is an exercise in experiential and embodied learning. The learning that comes from theoretical lectures from some of the leading scholars in the world in the field of religion and public life is combined with the learning that comes from being physically present in the worship service of another faith which is also combined with the personal stories of people from around the world. During this time fellows and faculty learn together, dance together, argue with one another, and eventually depart from one another with more questions than when they first arrived. However, connections are made that may not have been able to be made in any other way.

The idea behind pedagogy at the International Summer School on Religion and Public Life (ISSRPL) is that knowledge is embodied. It is no doubt true that there can be no knowledge without some degree of generalization. Abstraction as such is built into the very use of words. Yet, there is also always a loss of certain types or modes of knowledge in this very generalization—even in the use of words. One of the ISSRPL's aims is to minimize this process of abstraction and to convey certain "bits" of information as purely experiential data. This is why practicums, site visits, and the relocation of the school each year are such important parts of what we do. For ultimately we believe that our knowledge base is a mixture of what can and cannot be abstracted and generalized and even of what can and cannot be translated into language.

The paper will also draw on the practical implications of the school experience for its fellows, looking for examples in different parts of the world and in different cultural, socio-political and religious environments.