A Course in Language Teaching

CAMBRIDGE TEACHER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Series Editors: Marion Williams and Tony Wright

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A Course in Language Teaching

Practice and Theory

Penny Ur

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Units with a ▶ symbol are components of the 'core' course; those with a ▷ symbol are 'optional'.

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Cambridge University Press
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Acknowledgements

I should like to thank all those who have contributed in different ways to this book:

- To editor Marion Williams, who criticised, suggested and generally supported me throughout the writing process;
- To Cambridge University Press editors Elizabeth Serocold and Alison Sharpe, who kept in touch and often contributed helpful criticism;
- To Catherine Walter, who read the typescript at a late stage and made practical and very useful suggestions for change;
- To my teachers at Oranim, with whom I have over the years developed the teacher-training methodology on which this book is based;
- And last but not least to my students, the teacher-trainees, in past and present pre-service and in-service courses, to whom much of this material must be familiar. To you, above anyone else, this book is dedicated; with the heartfelt wish that you may find the fulfilment and excitement in teaching that I have; that you may succeed in your chosen careers, and may continue teaching and learning all your lives.

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Read this first

▶ To the (trainee) teacher

This book is a course in foreign language teaching, addressed mainly to the
trainee or novice teacher, but some of its material may also be found interesting
by experienced practitioners.

If it is your coursebook in a trainer-led programme of study, then your trainer
will tell you how to use it. If, however, you are using it on your own for
independent study, I suggest you glance through the following guidelines before
starting to read.

How to use the book

1. Skim through, get to know the 'shape' of the book
Before starting any systematic study, have a look at the topics as laid out in the
Contents, leaf through the book looking at headings, read one or two of the
tasks or boxes.

The chapters are called 'modules' because each can be used independently;
you do not have to have done an earlier one in order to approach a later. On the
whole, however, they are ordered systematically, with the more basic topics
first.

2. Do not try to read it all!
This book is rather long, treating many topics fairly fully and densely. It is not
intended to be read cover-to-cover. Some of the units in each module are 'core'
units, marked with a black arrowhead in the margin next to the heading; you
should find that these give you adequate basic coverage of the topic, and you
can skip the rest. However, glance at the 'optional' units, and if you find
anything that interests you, use it.

3. Using the tasks
The tasks are headed *Task*, *Question*, *Inquiry,* etc., and are printed in bold.
They often refer you to material provided within a rectangular frame labelled
Box: for example in Module 1, Unit One there is a task in which you are asked
to consider a series of classroom scenarios in Box 1.1, and discuss how the
teacher presents new material in each.

The objective of the tasks is to help you understand the material and study it
thoughtfully and critically – but they are rather time-consuming. Those that are
clearly meant to be done by a group of teachers working together are obviously
impractical if you are working alone, but others you may find quite feasible and
rewarding to do on your own. Some you may prefer simply to read through

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Read this first

without trying them yourself. In any case, possible solutions or comments usually follow immediately after the task itself, or are provided in the Notes section at the end of each module.

If you are interested in more detailed information about the material in this book and the theory behind it, go on to read the Introduction on pages 1–9.

To the trainer

This book presents a systematic programme of study intended primarily for pre-service or novice teachers of foreign languages.

Structure

It is composed of 22 chapters which I have called 'modules', since they are intended to be free-standing. Each module is divided into units of study; a unit usually takes between one and two hours to do.

A foundation course is provided by the core units (labelled with black arrowheads in the margin where they occur in the book, and in the Contents); such a course would take about 60–80 hours of class time if you do not supplement it in any way. Some of the optional units may be substituted for core units where you feel it appropriate for your own context, or simply added for further enrichment. An even shorter course may be based on the core units of only the first eleven modules.

Individual modules may be used as bases for short in-service courses; a single module, studied in its entirety, should take about one study day (about six hours) to get through.

Content

The material in the modules includes information, tasks and study based on practice teaching and observation.

The information sections can furnish either a basis for your own input sessions or reading for trainees. There are often brief tasks (questions, checks on understanding) interspersed within these sections, which may be used for short discussions or home writing assignments.

Tasks are usually based on responses to material laid out in the boxes: for example a box may display a short scenario of classroom interaction, and the reader asked to criticize the way the teacher is eliciting student responses. Where appropriate, possible solutions or my own ideas on the issues are given immediately below the task. This close juxtaposition of questions and answers is intended to save the reader from leafing back and forth looking for the answers elsewhere, but the disadvantage is that trainees may be tempted to look on to the answers without engaging properly with the task themselves first. The most practical solution to this problem is probably to make copies of the relevant box (which should be marked © Cambridge University Press) and hand them out separately, giving any necessary instructions yourself, so that trainees

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do not need to open the book at all in order to do the task; they may later be referred to the possible solutions in the book for comparison or further discussion.

How much you use the tasks involving teaching practice and observation depends, of course, on whether your trainees are actually teaching or have easy access to active language-learning classes. Peer-teaching and the viewing of video recordings of lessons (for example, *Looking at Language Classrooms* (1996) Cambridge University Press) may be substituted if necessary.

The Trainer's notes at the end of the book add some suggestions for variations on the presentation of the different units, and occasionally comment on the background, objectives and possible results of certain tasks. They also include estimates of the timing of the units, based on my experience when doing them with my own trainees; however, this is, of course, only a very rough approximation, and varies a great deal, mainly depending on the need felt by you and the trainees to develop or cut down on discussions.

The following Introduction provides more details on the content and layout of the book and its underlying theory and educational approach.