

BOOK REVIEWS

A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory. Penny Ur. (1996).
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 375 pp.

By M. Martha Lengeling, Universidad de Guanajuato

A number of years ago there were few options of materials for teacher training on the market but now there are more. I remember vividly scurrying around trying to find anything that would help me put together and understand what was needed for input sessions. To my delight one of the few books that I came across was Penny Ur's *A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory*. Because I was a fan of the author's earlier books such as *Grammar Practice Activities*, *Teaching Listening Comprehension*, *Discussions that Work*, and *Five-Minute Activities*, I eagerly snatched up this book and have not let go of it yet. In short, this is one of my all time favorites and frequently consulted books in the area of teacher training.

This book is intended for the trainee or inexperienced teacher (p.xi), but it is also useful for the seasoned teacher. This book is ideal for in-service and pre-service training, and for those who are on their own agenda of self-study. A basic teacher training course of approximately 60 to 80 hours can be used with a large majority of the information marked exclusively in this book. One module can stand-alone or indicated modules can be used consecutively as a basic training course. In my experience I have used a number of modules individually.

Ur begins the book with a brief explanation of the book and an introduction that maps out the content of her book, her rationale and thoughts about the book. Also unfolded are how theory and practice are intertwined and how the 'reflective model' is a foundation for her book. I would strongly recommend that the reader pay attention to this section to understand the author's point of view and the goals she has in mind.

This book is organized in 7 parts ("The Teaching Process", "Teaching the Language (1): The What", "Teaching the Language (2): The How", "Course Content", "Lessons", "Learner Differences", "And Beyond") which include a total of 22 modules covering a vast number of topics that are part of any teacher training curriculum. These 22 modules are then divided into units of subtopics. Each module is approximately 6 hours of input. The topics are fundamental issues such as lesson planning, teaching the four skills, presentations, materials, feedback, tests, etc., but also included are teaching young learners, large classes, and discipline. Background information (input) on each topic along with experiential work and tasks for the trainees to do in order for them to understand the topic better are part of a module. Each module ends with two sections ("Notes" and "Further Reading") which give more helpful references.

The author recommends that this book not be read from beginning to end but rather suggests that the reader skim through until a topic of interest is found. My favorite topics include testing (Module 3), vocabulary (Module 5) and large classes (Module 21).

Trainer's Notes at the end of the book include valuable comments from the author who gives you her suggestions as a teacher along with estimated time necessary for the presentation of each unit. An extensive bibliography and index conclude the book.

The topics that are covered are presented as basic, as stated by the author, and she specifically notes that there is no separate discussion of language learning. Some relevant topics seem to be missing, like second language acquisition and the history of language learning. While the title mentions theory and practice, I for one feel that these are topics that should have been included.

After using this book for a number of years I have found that I mostly adapt the information in this book. I began doing each module exactly as presented but with experience and confidence I tend to now adapt the topics according to what my needs are and the needs of the trainees. After I had experimented with some of these modules, the book gave me the necessary confidence as a teacher trainer. I especially enjoy the reproducible boxes that give information about a topic or questions to consider.

It is often the case that one begins blindly as a teacher trainer and this book gives you the secureness needed to succeed in the task of teacher training. This book has proved valuable to me as a teacher and is a welcomed addition to my collection of teacher training books. Ur's practical book serves best to guide people in a basic teaching training course with thought provoking activities and advice.