

Book Review

The Lazy Teacher Trainer's Handbook

Magnus Coney
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Reviewed by

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Magnus Coney's first book, *The Lazy Teacher Trainer's Handbook (LTTH)*, is a collection of practical sessions for English language teaching (ELT) teacher trainers which can be used as part of continuing professional development (CPD) programs. Easily accessible online in e-book format and affordable at \$5.99 US, *LTTH* is a valuable resource for teacher trainers seeking new ideas for material-light workshops which promote communication and reflection.

LTTH is relatively short at 21,780 words, divided into an introduction and five "chapters" with different overarching themes. And yet, within this space, there are 52 stand-alone workshop ideas, each with a brief description of any necessary preparation, groups the session may suit, step-by-step procedures, and possible variations. Prior to the sessions in the introduction, Coney provides a succinct rationale for what is to follow, and he offers concrete steps that trainers can take for maximizing the impact of the sessions before, while, and after they take place. It is also here that Coney's writing style becomes apparent: clear, concise, and very approachable, in the tone of one experienced colleague talking to another.

Overall, the theoretical background of the book is clearly inspired by Dogme ELT, adhering to the same core precepts that teaching be conversation-driven, materials-light, and focused on emergent language (or in this case emergent needs) (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009). Through the application of these principles, Coney advocates for teachers and trainers to co-construct knowledge together, in the vein of sociocultural learning theory, whereby the trainer provides "scaffolding" in the session to allow for learning to be mediated (Thornbury, 2006). Ultimately, it is proposed that by giving greater agency to participants, the sessions are more likely to be motivating and impactful. Given the combined wealth of experience and expertise of teachers in many professional development sessions, such an approach seems well-suited to maximizing this human resource, in-line with Meddings and Thornbury's (2009) belief that Dogme's emphasis on "learner-centred, experiential learning, applies equally to teacher training" (p. 101).

The first chapter, "Sharing and collaboration," naturally focuses on highly-interactive sessions designed to develop new practices or insights. These sessions cover a range of topics, from different methodologies, to types of classes, and specific classroom situations. Chapter 2, "Feedback and reflection," then offers ideas for sessions which prompt teacher reflection on their existing beliefs and practices, as well as sessions related to reflective practice tools like student

questionnaires. In Chapter 3, “Lessons and planning,” the focus shifts to having participants plan parts of lessons, thereby combining professional development with actual planning for their upcoming lessons. Similarly, Chapter 4, “Materials and resources,” includes elements of real material creation, but also looks at how teachers can assess and critically analyze existing materials themselves so as to maximize their usefulness. Finally, in Chapter 5, “Planning and reflecting on CPD,” the sessions focus on promoting teacher autonomy in terms of their own professional development, with ideas relating to action research, lesson observations, and self-analysis.

Across all five chapters, what stands out is the breadth and originality of the session ideas. Some of the sessions, it is true, are based on more traditional (but still useful) task types like consideration of case studies, role plays, and creating/using checklists. However, at least to me, there were a number of session ideas I had not previously considered, for example tasks for increasing lesson planning speed, creating evidence-based review activities, or having teachers create tips for teacher trainers.

To see for myself one of these sessions in action, I selected a half dozen I thought might be useful for the teachers I was working with, who were Certificate in English Language Training to Adults (CELTA) trainees in the last week of a four-week pre-service course in Vancouver, Canada. After giving them a brief description of each session, they voted on one entitled “Devil’s advocate” from the “Sharing and Collaboration” section of the book. In this session, “teachers are encouraged to question some of [the] received wisdoms” (Loc 687), the kind of “wisdom” which are often dispensed on initial teacher training courses.

Essentially a reflective session, trainees collaborated to compile slips of papers with teacher practices, both widespread and controversial. These practices were then hotly debated in groups, forcing trainees to consider possible underlying beliefs and justifications for their inclusion in the classroom. Despite many of the trainees having only started teaching three weeks prior, based on their limited teaching experience and extensive learning experiences, a natural and lively debate ensued, easily taking up the allotted 75 minutes. As the trainer, my role was essentially one of moderator, getting the task started, monitoring and providing support, and managing the final class feedback. During this final stage, there was greater trainer input, as I touched on what research has suggested in relation to the points made.

What was most apparent from this experiment was the flexible nature of the suggested session; in other contexts, with other participants or trainers, the output would have likely been drastically different. While some may see this unpredictability as a shortcoming, I appreciated the truly personalized and communicative nature of the session’s primary task which promoted real trainee interaction with the material and opportunities for responsive trainer input. Based on the unanimously positive reaction from the participants, I will be sure to include both this, and other, sessions in future courses.

Considering possible readers of *LTTH*, it may be true that these particular sessions are not ideal for trainers seeking detailed materials, extensive background theory, or convenient answer keys. Likewise, the word “lazy” in the title should not be taken literally; though no material design or preparation in advance is needed, once in the classroom the trainer must be engaged

and an active participant to successfully facilitate the session. With that said, for trainers interested in expanding their repertoire of ideas and delivering participant-centred sessions, *LTTT* is a highly worthwhile investment. Based on both the wide variety of session types as well as my own experience in testing one in the classroom, I would recommend teacher trainers to investigate *LTTT* for themselves, regardless of whether for in-service or pre-service training contexts. My one suggestion for *LTTT* would be that a hard copy option be made available, convenient for staffroom libraries and sharing amongst trainers.

References

- Meddings, L., & Thornbury, S. (2009). *Teaching unplugged: Dogme in English language teaching*. Surrey: Delta.
- Thornbury, S. (2006). *An A-Z of ELT*. Oxford: Macmillan Education.



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