

**Dorothy Kelly (2005) *A Handbook for Translator Trainers*
Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, Translation Practices
Explained: Volume 10, second edition. Pp. 200 £18.00 Paperback
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Were my lord so, his ignorance were wise,
Where now his knowledge must prove ignorance.
I hear your grace hath sworn out house-keeping:
Tis deadly sin to keep that oath, my lord,
And sin to break it.
But pardon me. I am too sudden-bold:
To teach a teacher ill beseemeth me.
Vouchsafe to read the purpose of my coming,
And suddenly resolve me in my suit.

William Shakespeare, *Loves Labours Lost*, Act 2, Scene 1,

The famous ancient Greek playwright, Sophocles, once said, "One must learn by doing things; for though you think you know it, you have no certainty until you try". To train others in what a trainer knows assumes knowledge on the part of the trainer in what they know and what they are supposed to train. Not only that, it assumes that the trainer has tried and mastered what they are supposed to train. To teach a back somersault or a triple axel for example, a trainer is expected to have tried it although contrary to Sophocles' wisdom there are those who strongly believe you can teach anything without having tried it at all. All you need to know is the theory and techniques of how it is done.

In translation and interpreting today, there is a general assumption in various educational institutions that training translators is a matter that can be handed over to anyone who has completed a translation course. Certainly, this is the case in certain institutions in Australia, and the situation is probably identical elsewhere in the world. More often, freshly graduated translation students are hired as teachers, and one could only imagine the quality of teaching and the insight and controversies these budding teachers bring to the classroom. There is no question that fresh knowledge is important, but training is certainly a more complex task and too important to be handed over to inexperienced teachers or "clones" of teachers who have gone through the same process. But this growing trend highlights the urgent need for focused and structured approaches to *train the trainer* programs and handbooks and manuals that provide structured methodologies to guide and support those entrusted with training others. Dorothy Kelly's new book, *A Handbook for Translator Trainers*, is one such rich handbook that offers a sound methodic framework to deal with theoretical and pragmatic aspects of training translators in response to varying needs and situations. The book provides a clear curricular design process consisting of the following ten steps.

1. Identifying social and market needs
2. Formulating aims and intended outcomes
3. Identifying student profile and needs
4. Designing overall course content and structure (including sequencing)
5. Identifying resources available and acquisition of those needed (including trainer training)
6. Designing teaching and learning activities
7. Designing assessment activities
8. Designing course evaluation instruments
9. Implementing and evaluating course
10. Quality enhancement

The book itself is composed of a preface and nine chapters describing aspects of the process.

How to Use This Book

Chapter 1. Setting the Scene

Chapter 2. Planning and writing objectives/outcomes

Chapter 3. Participants in the training process: trainees and trainers

Chapter 4. Curricular content

Chapter 5. Resources, old and new

Chapter 6. Method: teaching and learning activities

Chapter 7. Sequencing

Chapter 8. Assessment

Chapter 9. Training the trainers

Appendix: Glossary

References

Each chapter attempts to map the curricular design process by situating the discussion within each of the ten steps in the process. Each chapter opens with a flowchart with shaded boxes indicating where the discussion is at within the process, with feedback loops to other steps within the process itself. This visual aid, while very basic, given the tools used to draw flowcharts, is effective in providing a frame of reference for the reader. However, one of the major failings of the way information is presented in this handbook lies in the fact that the chapters do not correspond to the steps in the process, and having the flowchart at the beginning of each chapter raises the expectations on the part of the reader to follow this cognitive roadmap, only to discover a mismatch between the process and the chapters purporting to describe the process. A quick glance at the ten steps and the book outline above immediately reveals this problem, which diminishes the structured approach which is said to be advanced in the handbook. In *How to Use this Book*, the author clearly states that it "proceeds according to a systematic approach to curricular and syllabus design. It has thus been organised in chapters dealing with individual aspects of translator training from the most general to the most specific, an in the order in which most curricular decision-

making processes are carried out... The text may therefore be read chronologically, from beginning to end, but it has also been planned so that chapters may be read as self-contained units." (2). In the latter sense, the book lives up to the definition of *handbook* as a "hold-all" repository of related yet disjointed chapters. For example, it mixes the business aspects of education and training (identifying social and market needs) with the curricular design process without defining the actors and decision makers involved in the process or their roles and responsibilities, and it is unfortunate that this very approach, while laudable for its intentions and goals, renders the book inhospitable, and uncongenial to student-teachers.

There is a long-standing, deeply entrenched taboo in academic writing that thou shall not repeat the same idea in exactly the same way in a different part of your work as such would indicate that you have not submitted your writing to the rigours of critical thinking and scholarly engagement. Paraphrasing your own ideas or somebody else's is seen as a sign of such enlightened thinking since reformulation of ideas reveals the degree of understanding of such ideas. While one could take issue with this academic malaise—writing is after all an act of communication and whatever is effective and efficient to achieve this goal should be regarded as favourable—this modular technique is crucial in reinforcing the frame of reference in professional and technical writing. So in all fairness, while the chapters of this handbook in essence cover these steps in almost the same sequence, not using identical labels and descriptors as access points to refer to these steps in the chapter titles weakens the frame of reference and obfuscates the connection. Undoubtedly, not connecting the discussion in each chapter to the steps in the process in such a modular and programmatic manner severely impedes accessibility. Many Translation Studies¹ books produced in the last twenty-five years have had their origins in doctoral dissertations or academic research and have not quite made the cut into professionally targeted books (See Darwish, 2005:105). Traditionally, these sources are submitted to a repurposing process that turns research into a usable product. With rationalisation of the publishing industry, this process has been curtailed in recent years and many a good academic publication has not made the transition. In my opinion, for the reasons cited, the present book falls into this category.

Perhaps sensing this weakness in the creative chaos of the book, the author proclaims that chapter 2 marks the beginning of "our actual curricular or syllabus design process, as it deals with outcomes of the training process" (4). Considered from what we know about process mapping and process engineering, this is where the process starts and unfortunately this is where it ends. The rest of the chapters deal with topics that are generous and insightful on *the what* but abysmally poor on *the how*. It is not a mystery for teachers for example that "the most important element in any training process is the trainee or learner" (43),

and knowing about the learner's prior knowledge, personal characteristics, expectations and motivations and so on is a crucial aspect of curricular design, and the author shines in putting her ideas across very clearly in an elegant and unpretending style. However, the analysis of these topics remains largely theoretical and academic. How to assess learners' prior knowledge, for example, beyond knowing their secondary or university level of education, in order to tailor the curriculum to their needs is what a trainer really expects to find in a train the trainer handbook. Instead, the book is endemically focused on a high level discussion of what the object of inquiry is rather than on the mechanisms by which the object of inquiry may be utilised to achieve the goals of curricular design. In various parts, the book states the obvious without providing solid answers and synthesised solutions. For example, under a two-page section titled *Teaching Styles*, the author confirms "[j]ust as students have learning styles, teachers have teaching styles or approaches, which they have learned, acquired or developed through experience or from models (often teachers from their own time as students) of what to do, or what not to do" (56) and provides a two-column table adopted from Cannon and Newble (2000) and Villa (2004), with no attempt at providing scientific categories of teaching styles and approaches or descriptors that encapsulate such styles and approaches that the readers can incorporate into their own system of classification and knowledge mapping.

Each chapter includes inter-textual shaded boxes with questions relevant to the discussion. These extras are designed as a form of exercise, with the seeming assumption that the reader will read them as an integral part of the main text. Technical writing experience with these text-dependent visual aide-mémoires shows that not every reader will read them as part of reading the text and depending on their reading styles and habits some readers might skip them altogether or go back to them later. In some instances, these boxes, which are expected to be self-contained independent blurbs, contain questions that continue from the preceding main body of text and characteristically place the onus of answering them on the reader. For those seeking answers not questions, this approach is a major disappointment. Moreover, linking the discussion in the main body of text in this manner jars the reading experience of the intended readers and raises valid questions about the intended reading environment (classroom, etc).

Another serious failing of this book is its discussion and presentation of ideas by other writers in a vertical fashion, and many a good idea by the author herself is lost in the jungle of quotations and citations without much synthesis. *Chapter 2 Planning and Writing Objectives/Outcomes* is a typical example, especially the section on disciplinary considerations. In this chapter, the author presents the ideas of at least six hand-picked authors in a desultory manner and towards the end she presents her own list of suggestions. When looking for a handbook on translator training, one's primary concern is with ready-made, synthesised and clean

solutions, and a clear roadmap—the weakness of this book lies in its thesis-oriented, egregiously academic and peer-preening approach to the discussion. In practical terms, a handbook is not usually the place for this kind of *Who Said What* approach to information presentation. Readers interested in other people's work may easily consult the "Further Readings" section provided by the author instead of reading a watered down, selective version of who said what.

As a side note, the indeterminacy in the title of this chapter (*Objectives/Outcomes*) further frustrates the reader. Is it objectives and/or outcomes? How can this degree of "flexibility" be effective in mapping out the curricular design process? Without running the risk of being pedantic, one can make a valid observation about these double references and conceptual couplets and the interchangeability of terms such as "curriculum" and "syllabus", "objectives" and "outcomes", "teachers" and "trainers", strewn across the handbook, which often contribute to unnecessary confusion and to a weak cognitive anchor. A good example of this perplexity is found in *Chapter 4. Curricular Content*, under section *Unitization/Networking*, pages 77-79, which talks about the danger of compartmentalization through subdivision of competences into presumably more easily accessible units. There is only one mention of the word "networking" in the body text, without offering a crisp and clear definition of "networking" in this context. "...inflexible bureaucratic [university] systems have given rise to a sadly impermeable set of separate compartments of knowledge which are rarely approached from the coordinated networking perspective which is so necessary for full development of translation competence" (78).

Echoing other authors, Kelly rejects the "long standing stereotype of the lonely translator at home surrounded by books" asserting that "it is nowadays quite unrepresentative of most translators' professional environments" (114). "Sadly however, many translation educators and scholars still [...] see the translator as depicted on the front cover of Peter Newmark's book *About Translation* — some lonely, "black and white" figure buried behind stacks of books, burning the midnight oil, seeking the ultimate, absolute truth from a muse, in a time-forgotten backroom" (Darwish, 1999:5). In most situations and countries, translations are carried out by freelancers, off site and mostly from home. With globalised networking, the situation is getting even worse.

On all accounts, this is an ambitious book in its content and intentions and certainly in its global outreach. The richness of its content is seriously undermined by the framework in which the content is presented and which works against the objectives of design. The bipolarity of debate on what comes first: theory or practice is quickly losing significance in designing translation training curricula and to perpetuate this watertight, absolutist dichotomy between theory and practice refuels the misconception that practice-based learning is not informed by theory. This

presupposition, which cuts deep into the definition of theory and practice, undermines the role of metacognition and critical analysis in the learning process.

Dorothy Kelly advocates direct cultural contact with the other language and culture through student exchange as an essential means of acquiring cultural knowledge. Reminiscing the elitist lifestyle of erudite aristocrats of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, and their Grand Tour of neighboring countries as a means of acquiring knowledge firsthand, Kelly affirms, under the heading *Mobility Programmes*, "[t]here is no doubt that an extended stay in another country is an important learning experience for *any* future graduate, *which in the field of translation becomes practically essential*" (89) [emphasis added]. While this is a commendable advice, it stands defiant of two facts:

- 1) Not every translator or aspiring translator can afford or have the luxury or travel freedom to live abroad for a length of time to become "acculturated"—a fact which Kelly later acknowledges: "in many countries, financial constraints limited the extent to which these programmes were made available and taken up by students [...]. These problems were precisely those addressed by institutional programmes to promote mobility, especially from the eighties on" (89).
- 2) The translation profession is still at the lower rungs of remuneration in most countries of the world. In most situations translation is only an occupation, a means for earning a living, and such sybaritic experiences are very limited. In this respect, her global outreach falls short on the shores of the European Union. By a great measure, it is not a practical proposition.

Today elsewhere in the world, the translation profession is struggling for real recognition as a profession and harsh economic, political and social realities have turned it into an open field. It is no longer, neither should it be, the pastime occupation or vocation of the elite, and to my mind, the purpose of the handbook is to break away from these inherited views of translation and learning in general. "The way that teachers are trained, the way that schools are organised, the way that educational hierarchy operates and the way that education is treated by political decision-making results in a system that is more likely to retain the status quo than to change" (Fullan, 1993:3). Perhaps it is in this innovative approach to learning that the book's greatest contribution lies.

To this end, despite these serious flaws and controversial views, the book remains powerful in the extent to which it combines the academic and vocational perspectives, which are often tackled separately or as a monolith elsewhere. Many academic translation courses seem to be out of touch with reality and Kelly's handbook succeeds in restoring the

connection between what goes on in the classroom and what is really out there. Perhaps it is in this ambitious undertaking to cater for both that neither has been done full justice.

As American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807 – 1882), once put it: “We judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing, while others judge us by what we have already done”. Most trainers in translation judge themselves by what they think they know. After reading Dorothy Kelly’s book, many a translator trainer would no doubt think long and hard about their approaches to translator training. Kahlil Gibran (1923) once said, “If he [the teacher] is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind” (67). In many ways in this thought-provoking book, Dorothy Kelly does exactly that.

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¹ The problem is by no means restricted to Translation Studies. It is an all-encompassing phenomenon across disciplines and domains in an economically driven globalised environment.