

TEACHING ADULT LANGUAGE LEARNERS



YOURE
Education & Training Centre

International University of Sarajevo

Preface

I started my foreign language teaching career as a tutor to a senior Turkish college professor in Istanbul. I was a junior undergraduate student, and he was an established scholar and businessman. The reason why he hired me was his trip to a conference in Australia. The professor learned English when he was young but did not actively use it. He felt that a few weeks with an English teacher would help him refresh his speaking skills. At that point I had a few ideas about what our lessons should be like, but my planning was falsely based on the premise that I could lead the instructional process. The professor did not need me to be in charge. He had a few strong expectations that he gently conveyed. Basically he wanted our two weekly lessons delivered in the headquarters of his company to revolve around graded readers adapted from literary classics.

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No matter how hard I tried to introduce alternative resources, the professor always found a way to have us both disregard them. The lessons took place in his office during working hours, so we were often interrupted or had to cancel our meetings. It took me some time to accept our teaching and learning conditions and respond adequately to the professor's need to have an English speaking friend who can explain lexical or grammatical rules when necessary. I cannot recall precisely how effective the collaboration was. He enjoyed the process, and I made some money and gained a valuable experience which significantly helped me later in a non-compulsory language school for adults.

When I started teaching adult groups, I embraced a methodology resting on context-based teaching solutions. However, I often felt insecure when I ignored the prescribed curricula and textbooks.

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It also seemed that I was not flexible enough to respond to all the heterogeneity of adult profiles who attended my classes. The students would occasionally drop out. Many of them who could keep up with the tempo would stay in my classes and continue with the upper levels of instruction. It seemed to me that I made many right and wrong decisions, and I held myself accountable for both good and bad outcomes. The experience motivated me to write an MA thesis about foreign language instructors' teaching styles in noncompulsory adult settings. I felt that such a project could help other adult educators make effective teaching decisions. Unfortunately, only one portion of the study was published in conference proceedings and did not attract any significant attention. What I learned during those teaching and researching experiences I integrated in my personal teaching methodology and kept utilizing with adolescent and adult learners.

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A few years ago I had a chance to participate in developing under- and post-graduate English language programs at the International University of Sarajevo. I used the opportunity to introduce the course titled Lifelong Learning and English Language Teaching. I have taught the course for three semesters using my MA project, notes, and recently published articles. In the meantime, I looked for a textbook that could fully reflect my positions about teaching adults but I never found one. So I decided to accept the challenge of writing a textbook for this particular course. It is supposed to help novice foreign language instructors embrace the challenges of uncertainty and heterogeneity characterizing adult education settings.

I would like to thank everyone who assisted me in writing this textbook.

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My sincere gratitude goes to Sally Heier and Professor Kenan Zekić who saw its early drafts and suggested areas for improvement. I am extremely grateful to the reviewers Professor Radmila Bodrič and Professor Tatjana Glušac who provided such valuable feedback. I would like to thank my Rector Ahmet Yıldırım and Vice Dean Muhammed Yasir Göz who encouraged me to work on the textbook regularly and spared me some administrative responsibilities. I am thankful to all of my colleagues, friends and family members who were very supportive over the past year. And of course, it would not be possible to meet the deadlines and commit to this book if my wife Vildana and my son Emir were not there for me. I thank them both for giving me strength and will to write.

— Ervin Kovačević

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THANK YOU FOR READING!

Ervin Kovačević