ALISON SHAW

Ralph Russell and Teaching Urdu To English-Speaking Adults in the Community

> Mushtaq Hussain dons dark glasses and takes a seat beside Bashir Ahmad. They smile cryptically and begin a comic dialogue in Urdu. Words like "Pakistan," "Lahore" and "Manchester" are the only clues to a completely uncrackable code. The other international touch is when a £10 note changes hands. Everyone laughs at *that*. But most of the students confess they missed the punchline.
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> This mystifying entertainment, taking place on a flagstoned roof garden in the centre of Oxford, is the light relief in a whole day of Urdu classes. (New vocabulary from the jokes is handed out at the next class.) This weekend session marks the start of a new term for second and third year Urdu students.

These were the opening paragraphs of an article by journalist Adriana Caudrey published in the magazine *New Society* on 31 October 1986.[1] Adriana had just visited a weekend intensive course in Oxford. As she went on to say,

> Oxford's Asian Language Development Project is the only one of its kind in the country. What distinguishes it from any others is that all its teachers are members of the local Asian community—they include factory workers, a city clerk and an assistant in an old people's home—none of whom have formal teaching qualifications.

Oxford's "Urdu Project," as it was locally known, was funded by an Urban Aid grant and was based at the Oxfordshire Council for Community Relations (OCCR). I had been employed since January 1984 as the

[1]"Urdu for Beginners," 78 (31 Oct. 1986):25. All other quotations are from unpublished sources and personal communications.

project's director. We had secured funding from the Department of the Environment, via the Oxford City Council, by demonstrating that it was possible to train local Urdu-speakers as teachers. The project had three main aims: to train local Urdu-speakers to teach Urdu to adults, to hold classes in liaison with the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), and to develop teaching materials. The idea behind the project's official title was that our program for teaching Urdu would provide a model for teaching other South Asian languages, such as Punjabi and Bengali.

The Oxford project was probably unique in enabling local Urdu-speakers without formal teaching qualifications to teach, but it was also part of a wider movement that Ralph Russell initiated to teach Urdu to adults "in the community." The students included school teachers, teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL), and health professionals whose work brought them into contact with Urdu-speakers. The courses were held in venues such as private homes, adult education establishments, schools, and other workplaces. This movement gathered momentum throughout the 1980s, involving hundreds of people, and was to have a significant impact on the relationships between people in different communities.

A key factor in the success of this movement was that Ralph Russell had developed a method of teaching that was highly effective for learners with little time to study. He also encouraged others to use his methods and materials. Initially, he enlisted former students such as myself as co-teachers, but he was also keen that Urdu-speakers should learn to teach using his methods and materials. The Oxford project was the most significant example of this. In what follows I describe how this movement began, its scope, and some of the ways in which teaching Urdu to adults transformed "community relations."

Creating and Refining a Course for Adult Learners

Families from Punjab and Mirpur had begun to settle in Britain in significant numbers from the 1960s. They settled mainly in the midlands, the north, and parts of London, joining men who had come to Britain for work during the era of postwar economic reconstruction. Also since the 1960s, Ralph had been teaching courses on the social and cultural background of Britain's newly-settled South Asian minorities in response to requests from school teachers wanting information to help them respond to the needs of their new South Asian pupils. These courses were organized through the extramural division of the School of Oriental and

African Studies (SOAS). By 1972, Ralph had begun to discuss with SOAS the possibility of holding short intensive courses in Urdu during the first two weeks of each autumn term. These would be for his undergraduate students—there were about two each year—and for extramural learners. In the summer of 1974, Ralph taught the first intensive course for adults in Bradford. In the autumn of the same year he taught the first ten-day intensive course at SOAS.

Other courses soon followed. Word spread that Ralph was available for such teaching, providing his fare was paid and accommodation provided. He began teaching Urdu to adults in Burton-on-Trent in 1976 and was invited to teach ESL tutors in Blackburn in 1979. Around this time, the SOAS authorities agreed to finance Ralph's travel costs for teaching short courses outside London. In the late 1970s, Ralph taught these courses whenever he could take time from his university teaching. Then in 1981 he took early retirement to devote more time to this work.

I was a student in the fifth intensive course at SOAS in September 1979. I had contacted Ralph because I was starting graduate studies in Social Anthropology and needed to learn to speak Urdu to do my research. Urdu was not taught in Oxford, neither at the University nor elsewhere in the city. Ralph's response was immediately positive and decisive: "I have a ten-day intensive course starting on Monday," he said, "Get yourself down to London and I'll cut through the red tape!" To me, this course was a revelation and an inspiration. With great energy and enthusiasm, Ralph got each of us talking Urdu right from the start. We learned to say our names, what we do, where we live, and so on. We were also encouraged to ask each other these questions, which gave us lots of speaking practice and enabled us to initiate conversations as well as to reply. Ralph's method was radically different from the teaching I was used to. Rather than passively writing down what the lecturer said, each of us was actively involved in learning to talk, mostly without the help of any English translation. Over ten days, Ralph taught us the language necessary for talking with Urdu-speakers on everyday topics. At the same time, he provided a systematic introduction to Urdu grammar. After each unit, Ralph gave us written summaries of the sentences and phrases we had learned. He explained that he had not wanted us to write anything down earlier because he wanted us to use a consistent transliteration system to enable us to record new words quickly and accurately. These summaries were in fact drafts of materials later published in Part 1 of Ralph's *A New Course in Hindustani* (1980–1982), and subsequently, in revised form, in Part 1 of *A New Course in Urdu and Spoken Hindi for Learners in Britain* (1986).

A key feature of this course was that, unlike full-time undergraduate courses, it was devised to meet the needs of learners who wanted to become fluent in speaking and understanding but had only limited time for study. Part 1 introduces the spoken language as efficiently as possible, providing materials for around 35–40 hours of classroom teaching. Parts 2, 3 and 4 allow students to extend their learning beyond the key structures introduced in Part 1. Part 2, *An Outline of Grammar and Common Usage*, and Part 3, *Rapid Readings*, are intended to be used together. Part 2 sets out the grammatical structures of the language using examples from Part 3, which consists mainly of passages written on everyday themes and extends students' vocabulary. Part 4, *The Urdu Script,* teaches students to read and write mainly using words and sentences in Part 1, showing students how to form the letters and words in the Urdu Nastaʿlīq script. Students can therefore develop literacy by studying Part 4 alongside or after studying Part 1.

Unlike Ralph's previous university teaching, which was usually in very small classes or on a one-to-one basis, he was now teaching large classes, sometimes of up to twenty or thirty students. There were about twelve students in the course I attended. Yet Ralph managed to keep each of us involved. He wrote later that the ideal number of students for learning the spoken language by direct methods is somewhere between eight and twelve. With too many students it is difficult to give each person sufficient speaking practice, but with too few it is hard to provide enough opportunities for students to ask each other questions, to hear and speak the sentences being taught. Richard Harris, one of Ralph's undergraduate students at SOAS from 1969–1975, says that Ralph brought an understanding of the importance of repetition in language learning into his teaching of adults outside academia.

> Ralph had hit upon a fundamental truth of language learning. With the exception of those who have been blessed with the aural equivalent of a photographic memory, the patterns of any language can really only be internalized by endless repetition. By the end of the second term, I could recite many hours of useful Urdu, all short sentences and all with some daily application or relevance to the background culture.

In all of Ralph's teaching of adult learners, as in Part 1 itself, there is emphasis on repetition—on getting students to say and repeat over and over again simple everyday phrases, and to ask questions, all of them relevant to learning to talk with Urdu-speakers on ordinary topics. I would guess that even if they forgot everything else, every student who has taken a beginner's course based on Part 1 would remember for the

rest of their lives, "*Mērā nām Rālf haĩ*" and be able to ask, "*Āp kā nām kyā haĩ?*"

Another characteristic of Ralph's teaching style was his willingness to revise and improve his methods and materials in the light of comments from students and other teachers. The 1980 edition of *A New Course* was the product of Ralph trying and testing materials since at least 1974. Ralph then proceeded to re-write and refine Part 1 for the revised edition published in 1986. This time, Ralph drew on the experience of others, myself included, who had begun to teach using his methods and materials. The revised edition contains some rearranged and some new materials, but the main change, decided after discussions with other teachers, was that Ralph removed the advice to teachers. This was used instead to form the basis of a separate *Teachers Guide*, which I prepared. This was published under my name in 1991.

Developing a Cadre of Teachers

Between 1974 and 1980 Ralph had already begun teaching in many of the main centers of South Asian settlement in Britain, but the demand for courses exceeded the supply of instructors able to teach using his methods and materials. Most Urdu teachers working with children in community language classes were using traditional materials and methods that begin with teaching the Urdu Nastaʿlīq script and are not designed for adult British learners.

To meet the need for co-teachers, Ralph initially recruited from among his current and former students. Two of Ralph's undergraduate students taught with Ralph during the first course in Bradford in 1974. One of them, Richard Harris, continued to be involved in teaching similar courses over the next few years. Ralph's son Ian Russell had been a student in the 1974 Bradford intensive course. Soon afterwards, Ian began to teach with Ralph and to organize and teach courses in London at the Urdu Markaz and from 1979 to 1987 at Tower Hamlets Adult Education Institute, where up to sixty students enrolled for intensive courses several times a year. Ralph also encouraged Jill Matthews, a student in the first SOAS extramural intensive course, to start teaching. This led to the first course in Blackburn in 1979, and subsequently to courses at Chorley College in Lancashire.

I too was drawn into teaching, not because I felt competent to do so but because Ralph insisted I could! By 1982 I had been to Pakistan, was finishing my fieldwork, knew many Pakistani families in Oxford and was

beginning to write my doctoral thesis. My Urdu was far from fluent and I had a strong Punjabi accent. Nonetheless, I could "get by" with people who did not know English well. Women I knew sometimes asked me to accompany them to medical appointments to interpret for them. On one of these occasions a midwife asked me how I had learned Urdu and suggested I invite Ralph to teach an intensive course in Oxford.

This idea took hold. I, along with Phil Fryer at the WEA and Mary Ditchburn at the OCCR, organized a weekend intensive course expecting about ten students that Ralph would teach. To our surprise twenty people enrolled, and to my initial dismay Ralph said he would not teach this course but that I would along with Ian. "It does not matter," he told me, "that you are not a fluent speaker; the important thing is to keep to the materials in Part 1." If I remember correctly, Ian, whom I had not met before, arrived on a motorbike from London. Students were directed to the class with signs that, we only realized afterwards, said "URUD THIS WAY," but twenty-three students actually turned up and Ian and I taught them in two groups, alternating between them after each ninety-minute session.

That autumn of 1982 we taught 63 students in total. We held a weekend intensive course, evening classes for English-speaking adults, and an evening of written Urdu, using Part 4, for young Pakistani adults. Akbar Ali Khan and Fozia Tanvir, two locally-resident Urdu-speakers, co-taught with me using Ralph's methods and materials. Given the interest in the classes, more teachers were clearly needed. We therefore made training local Urdu-speakers to serve as teachers using Ralph's methods and materials a key feature of our successful application for an Urban Aid grant. The Asian Language Development Project ran from January 1984 to June 1987. In this time, over a dozen local Urdu-speakers, with either Urdu or Punjabi as their mother tongue, learned to teach adults using Ralph's methods and materials. Ralph was an advisor for this project. He came to Oxford at regular intervals to meet with the students and talk with the teachers, observing some of their classes. Some of the Urdu project teachers also taught courses outside Oxford organized by Ralph, Ian and others.

By this time, Sughra Choudhry and Marion Molteno had also joined Ralph's cadre of co-teachers. Sughra had been an undergraduate student of Ralph's at SOAS and was now a qualified Urdu teacher in secondary schools in London. Marion had, like me, been an intensive course student of Ralph's, not at SOAS, but in the first residential course Ralph taught at the Adult Education College in Chorley in 1982. Within a few months of taking that course, Ralph had persuaded Marion to start teaching—first at

the Urdu Markaz in London in May 1983 and then with him on residential courses at Chorley several time a year from 1984 to 1987. In London, from around 1986 to 1991, there were also weekend courses in Waltham Forest organized through the Adult Education Centre and taught by Mussarat Sayed. Wherever Urdu was taught regularly, there were usually opportunities for Urdu-speakers to gain experience teaching Ralph's course. With teacher training in mind, Ralph arranged video recordings of Urdu courses in Sheffield and similar videos were later made in Oxford.

With Ralph's influence and encouragement, the members of this growing group of teachers worked with tremendous energy and enthusiasm teaching Urdu in a range of different places around Britain during the 1980s—sometimes with Ralph and sometimes independently. I first taught with Ralph in September 1982, in the London borough of Waltham Forest for an in-service course for teachers, and again, for the same students, in January, June, and July 1983. In the evaluations they wrote in 1983, one student who worked with the English Language Service said that "Among the people present [...] there was a strong feeling that this was the first useful in-service training for a long time." Another felt that understanding Urdu now meant she could appreciate her pupils' difficulties learning English, exclaiming, "Oh that's why they always confuse yesterday/tomorrow." A third student commented that

> struggling to remember words and phrases has given me more understanding of the E2L [English as a 2nd language] beginner's difficulties. In the same way, I have experienced the beginner's shyness, lack of confidence and gradual feelings of pride and achievement.

For the other courses I taught with Ralph in Yorkshire—in Dewsbury, Rotherham, Huddersfield and Sheffield, where intensive in-service courses for ESL tutors ran for several years—the students were again mainly teachers. My recollection of this period is that the trips to Yorkshire were a bit like being sent on a mission: you would be met by someone at a railway station, you would be able to identify them by the fact that they were carrying Part 1, and they would welcome you into their homes for the duration of the course. Unless they were learning Urdu as part of their professional in-service training, students in these courses gave up their weekends to attend. One of my favorite memories is of the weekend I spent with Ralph in Yorkshire teaching the entire staff of a primary school in which ninety percent of the pupils were of Pakistani Punjabi or Kashmiri origin.

Ralph himself did not routinely teach during all of these courses, though he taught regularly in Chorley and taught several courses for spe-

cial groups, notably for the South Yorkshire Police and for Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs). Two of the inspectors, Joy Saunders and Christopher Wightwick, recently (January 2009) described themselves in an email to Ian Russell as

> among the lucky ones chosen in the mid-80s to learn Urdu with Ralph Russell. What fun it was! We used Ralph's excellent books, but worked mainly on oral work, sitting in a circle. When we needed to write the language, we used a transcription into modified Roman known to us as the Ralphabet. There was much laughter as we struggled with vocabulary, verbs and grammar. All of us soon became proficient at simple communication, greetings and everyday language, although we suspected that the linguists among us were at a real advantage in grasping the structure. This was teaching at its best—lively, and involving us all. We had visits from a number of native speakers, and Marion Molteno, fluent in Urdu from having been a pupil of Ralph's, joined us to help with the group work.

During this time, Ralph was also an advisor and mentor to the growing number of people involved in teaching and learning Urdu. In Oxford, he would visit to observe the classes from time to time—"to test us," as one of the tutors, Bashir Ahmed, put it. Ralph would also always make time to comment on any teaching materials being developed. His visits to Oxford were always special occasions for he was tremendously admired for his fluency in Urdu and the depth of his knowledge of Urdu language and literature and of Pakistani Muslim society. For Mushtaq Hussain, one particular visit of Ralph's is etched in his memory. He told me,

> When we used to teach the days of the week, Kaniz (another Oxford tutor, who has Punjabi as her mother tongue) always pronounced the word for Sunday wrong. She used to say *atvaar*. This used to annoy me because it is wrong. The correct word is *ytvaar*. Then, when we were making the recording of the sentences in Part 1, Kaniz said *atvaar* again. Then, perhaps because my mind was on it, when it was my turn I also said *atvaar*. I had never said this in my life before and I was upset because it was wrong and now it was recorded. Later Ralph came to see us and he had listened to the tape. He turned to me and said, "You know, the word for Sunday is '*ytvaar*' not '*atvaar*'." I felt very bad.
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> (30 January 2009)

Bashir Ahmed particularly remembers a conversation he had with Ralph about a passage in the Urdu O-level examination that he and I took in 1985 (we had entered for the exam through a local secondary school and sat in a hall with Pakistani schoolgirls to write the exam):

> One question was to translate into English a story about a girl engaged to

> be married who was ill, and whose family did not want her in-laws to know about her illness in case the marriage might be called off. I said to myself as I read the passage, "My God, this is written by someone who really understands Muslim marriage customs; it shows how careful parents are about their daughters; they don't want any rumour to get out." I told Ralph about it and he said he wrote that passage himself!
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> (February 2009)

Urdu in the Community: The Oxford Project

When I started work as director of the Urdu project, my first priority had been to recruit and train teachers. I advertised locally in shops and newspapers for people willing to learn how to use direct methods for teaching Urdu to English-speaking adults. As Mushtaq Hussain, a worker at the Cowley car factory, told Adriana Caudrey, "I was sitting in my brother's shop. I saw the paper that comes free from door to door and I noticed an advertisement saying Urdu-speaker wanted" (*ibid.*). Mushtaq then became one of the five people who attended the first training course on five consecutive Sunday afternoons. I began by giving the trainees an experience of learning Russian by two different methods—one that was direct, getting people talking right away; the other traditional, starting with the alphabet—and asking them to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each. I also introduced the trainees to using the phonetic roman script in which Ralph's materials are written.

By September 1984 five local Urdu-speakers were teaching with direct methods using Part 1. We held classes for a third cohort of beginners and for continuers at two levels: those who had started learning during the project's pilot phase in 1982 and those who had started in the summer of 1984. I met regularly with the tutors so that together we could evaluate our teaching, respond to suggestions and comments from students and plan our lessons. We agreed that the best arrangement was for tutors to alternate with each other after each half-hour or hourly session. This way, any two-hour evening class would have two tutors and during a whole day of teaching any one class would be taught by several tutors in turn. Rotating the tutors gave students the advantage of hearing different voices and accents. It also meant that all students met all teachers and that the teachers worked effectively as a team. By this time, the continuers had covered most of the material in Part 1. With the emphasis still on the spoken language, we began to devise activities and role-playing exercises suitable for class work, some based on passages in Part 3, others utilizing our own ideas. Adriana recalled one of these sessions:

> Nafisa Mirza, one of the teachers, a full-time assistant in an old people's home, stands behind a mock counter with groceries around her and goes round the class asking students what they would like to buy. Luckily, the Urdu for "spoon" sounds rather like *jam jar* and "sugar" sounds like *genie*. So, when, unexpectedly, my turn comes, I have a way of remembering two things to buy.
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> (*ibid.*)

By December 1984, 76 students had attended classes, six tutors were trained and one of them, Farida Sekha, had also co-taught three intensive courses in Sheffield with me. During the summer term of 1987, 67 students were continuing at four levels, in intensive courses and in evening classes. By then I had also trained two tutors from Aylesbury. Over the three years that the project ran (1984 to 1987), twelve tutors were trained, sixty or more students attended courses each term, and about three hundred people had attended regular weekend and evening courses. Some of the project's tutors had also taught special courses for National Health Service (NHS) staff in Oxford as well as courses organized outside Oxford. Nafisa Mirza and I had taught in-service courses for NHS staff in Oxfordshire and I had taught NHS staff in Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire. Kaniz Fatima, Bashir Ahmed, Mushtaq Hussain and others had taught courses for ESL tutors in Aylesbury and had taught in Banbury. Nighat Qureshi had also taught in London, in Tower Hamlets, and in Ralph's courses for HMIs.

Our Oxford and Banbury courses were organized in liaison with the WEA, which paid the tutors. The WEA also required the students to evaluate each class for the quality of teaching and the pace of learning. Regularly, these evaluations testified to their enjoyment and satisfaction. A weekend student in 1984 wrote that "the consensus was the course had been first-class … the whole of my two-day course group is re-registering this term." Other students wrote that the classes were "very worthwhile and also enjoyable; we do manage quite a few laughs" and that they had "very friendly tutors." And one student said that this was "the first course I haven't wanted to give up after a week."

Independently of the WEA assessment, I also routinely elicited feedback from students on the personal and professional value of learning Urdu to see if our project was contributing toward improving relationships between the local indigenous and South Asian communities. Typically our students were white middle-class professionals who worked in east Oxford where there is a large South Asian population, mainly from Pakistan, and they wanted to be able to speak to clients and neighbors in Urdu. These students included: teachers, health visitors, midwives, doc-

tors, an optician, housing officials, welfare rights officers, a community relations office, youth workers, a police superintendent who was head of the community liaison department, social workers, several students (one married to an Urdu-speaker, one doing voluntary work with South Asian children), academics (several studying South Asian history, society or languages and one lecturer in multicultural education), and a priest whose church was located in multi-ethnic east Oxford. Teachers of ESL and teachers working in mainstream schools (nursery, primary and secondary level) with a significant proportion of South Asian pupils comprised the largest category of students. This was probably also the case nationally.

The ESL teachers felt that learning Urdu helped them appreciate how it feels to learn another language and understand the mistakes Urdu-speakers often make when learning English. "Now I know why they often get 'he' and 'she' mixed up; Urdu does not have separate pronouns, gender is shown in the verb," one teacher commented. School teachers reported on the positive effects their efforts to learn Urdu had on their South Asian pupils. Typically their pupils were at first amazed and amused and then very pleased. One pupil in a London school initially reacted to her teacher's use of Urdu by saying, "How can you speak Urdu, you're not brown."

The fact that teachers were learning Urdu seemed to boost the status of Urdu, empowering children to use it in school. One teacher wrote that "some children have started to write their own stories in Urdu. They are also less shy about speaking their mother tongue in school." A teacher in Sheffield reported that since she had been learning Urdu, two schools are "to have some mother tongue classes (Urdu) this term … I like to think what I have said has had some influence on the decision." Two of the HMIs who learned Urdu with Ralph in the late 1980s went on to make use of their knowledge when inspecting community languages, reporting that "pupils (and their teachers!) were surprised and delighted that we could talk to them in Urdu or Hindi, and many rather shy and silent students opened up at once."

Teachers also described positive effects on their relationships with South Asian parents. An Oxford teacher wrote in 1986 that her faltering use of Urdu was "a real ice-breaker" that had

> helped parents feel more involved in the school. It is also useful to me when registering new parents and on making home visits. And twice, it helped in a direct, practical way when I needed to take a child and her mother to accident and emergency. And we have realised there is a need for bilingual letters, notices and story books.

The professional mix among the Oxford Project's students also had unexpected benefits. Terry Anley, the police superintendent, learned from talking with nursery and primary school teachers that there were many South Asian pupils in Oxfordshire schools who understood very little English. He realized that the local police were therefore using inadequate methods to communicate with the local South Asian population. The road safety materials used in nursery and primary schools were all in English, for example, so the road safety messages were not reaching the Urdu- and Punjabi-speaking children. In his role as head of the Community Liaison Department, Terry arranged for Punjabi and Urdu voice-overs for the road safety videos. From talking with the Urdu project tutors he also learned about the many pitfalls of translating into Urdu the official or technical English in which formal letters are usually written, so he put in place a system for checking translations with members of our teaching team before they were published and distributed.

Learning Urdu also enabled insights into the cultural background of Urdu-speakers "because of the way culture is woven into the language," as one of our Oxford students put it. Students commented on how they now had a better appreciation of South Asian family life and of the importance of status in South Asian culture, illustrated, for example, by the distinction between addressing someone as either "*āp*" or "*tum*." In the Oxford Project, these cultural insights often came directly from the fact that students now had personal contacts and friendships, marked by mutual respect, with the members of the local South Asian community who were their teachers. In fact, I think that the Project's single most significant achievement was that it enabled these friendships between English-speakers and members of the local South Asian community to evolve. There were opportunities for this in conversations during tea and lunch breaks during the courses and at the meal we organized at the end of each teaching term, serving locally-prepared South Asian food to all of our students in the main hall of the OCCR. As Terry Anley commented at the end of a course in 1986:

> Local Urdu/Hindi-speakers are so much closer to the community than those from some distance away, and I have benefited a good deal from conversations, meals and discussions from a joint perspective, which have helped my understanding.

Yet the idea of teaching Urdu to English adults also generated some hostility from people outside the Project. Professionals such as health workers sometimes criticized my efforts to interpret for my Pakistani friends by saying I should be teaching them English, not learning Urdu. A

few of our students reported similar reactions. One of them, a teacher, wrote that "although colleagues thought it an excellent idea, friends and family have been a bit more negative, saying it should be the Asian children making the effort, not me." These reactions were not exclusive to the white population. After an OCCR committee meeting in which I had reported on the Urdu Project, which had by then been running successfully for some time, a Pakistani committee member told me, "I don't think this is a good idea; you should be teaching English to Asians, not Urdu to English people." I gave an example of how English people learning Urdu could actually help South Asians feel more confident about using English. One of our students, a midwife, had greeted a Pakistani patient in Urdu; the patient, who had never spoken in English before, replied in English. Somehow, a communication barrier had been broken; the Urdu-speaking patient had realized that her English was better than the English midwife's faltering Urdu. Unfortunately, this example did not convince him.

The Project's reversal of the dominant expectation that Urdu-speakers should learn English was, I think, unsettling for several reasons. For a few of the South Asians involved in providing multicultural education locally, which, at that time, included mother-tongue teaching, the Project must have been something of a threat. We were using methods that challenged the traditional methods used by South Asian teachers in schools and community classes. Many local teachers connected with the multicultural education service were also our students. The Project's aim to involve local Urdu-speakers who were working people, and not necessarily highly educated, may also have challenged the monopoly of some at the OCCR regarding the use of funds for OCCR projects. The Project had the effect of giving people like Bashir, Nafisa and Mushtaq a confidence boost for it showed that Urdu was valued and that they had skills their students appreciated. As they told Adriana Caudrey in 1986, "People like us can teach. You don't have to be highly educated to teach!"

The fact that the Project was based in a community relations council also made it vulnerable. The OCCR's activities were controlled by a chairman and an executive committee drawn from various local ethnic communities, and through which often intense local political and factional struggles were conducted, largely to do with the control of funds received from the City Council and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). There was also some jealousy related to the success of the Project and a feeling that a mother-tongue Urdu-speaker rather than a young English woman should be running it. In 1987 one new tutor with the project who perhaps hoped to become its director, launched an attack on me and on the Project's "offensive" teaching in a letter of complaint—

referring in particular to a sentence in a passage in *A New Course*, Part 3 about Pakistani food and drink that says some Pakistanis drink alcohol! She persuaded several of the other tutors to support her and her complaint was carefully timed to coincide with the birth of my first child. Later we held a meeting with the tutors and members of the OCCR and the WEA to resolve the complaint. During the meeting Ralph made it clear that he thought those who had complained were very wrong to do so behind my back. I was personally devastated by the attack and its timing, and Ralph was surprised I had not fought back more strongly, telling me, "You could have wiped the floor with them." Significantly, no one else in a position of authority in the WEA or the OCCR was prepared to be critical of the tutors' behavior—perhaps, given the current climate of political correctness, for fear of being called racist.

As it happened, the matter was never properly resolved because just as I went on maternity leave, the CRE withdrew its funding from the OCCR over allegations that the executive committee had been misusing funds. All OCCR operations—including the Urdu Project—were suspended and that was effectively the end of the Project.

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In Oxford as well as all the other places where it was taught, learning Urdu was much more than just a matter of learning a language. It enabled insights, offered understanding and provided a tool for improving communication between people from different communities. It also led to some significant changes in policy and provision that had direct implications for families and communities, particularly within the police and the education service. Some local authorities committed funds to introductory language courses as in-service training for teachers; this in turn enabled teachers who now appreciated the status of Urdu as a modern language to argue for its inclusion in the school curriculum. Many former students who had taken courses taught with Ralph's materials and methods went on to change the way education was provided within multiethnic communities. And in a few places the model from Urdu was used to run smaller programs teaching languages such as Bengali and Turkish.

Learning Urdu also enabled all sorts of more personal changes to take place in the lives of the hundreds of people who became fluent in simple everyday Urdu. They sometimes found that this gave them confidence to learn another language. In all cases, they found they now had a means of forming friendships with people from South Asian communities and in so doing were able to alter the dynamics of the relationships between peo-

ple from different cultural backgrounds. Joy Saunders, one of the HMIs who studied with Ralph, later had the opportunity to study Urdu at SOAS for a term.

> I was taught by a lovely Ph.D. student, Amir Zehra, with whom I am still in touch. We often had our lessons in the canteen over a cup of coffee and I taped all our conversations. In the end it became a general chat about families, food, India, our religions, and the problems of bringing up teenagers! I remember some lovely parties, where poets read their works, and the food was quite wonderful. We read children's books and poetry together, but I struggled a lot with the script. How does one cope with a language where most of the vowels are missing? And reading from right to left?

The experience of learning Urdu often also resulted in long-term friendships between students and teachers. Ralph himself had a phenomenal capacity to maintain friendships with fellow-teachers and former students. Christopher Wightwick benefited further from living close to Ralph.

> He used to come and see us about every six weeks. We would spend an hour talking, after which my wife would give us supper. Ralph of course spoke very fluently on subjects ranging from Urdu poetry to academic politics, while I responded as best I could and stumbled along on much more mundane subjects. Although I would not count myself an industrious student, often hastily preparing like a naughty schoolboy just before his visit, the effect has been to embed Hindi (as I call it, because I can read the script) firmly in my subconscious. And then there was the pleasure of hearing Ralph talk over supper on every aspect of Urdu culture, always expressing himself with his usual frankness!

Something of the same kind of spirit and quality of relationship continued to be a defining feature of the many friendships formed among and between hundreds of students and teachers of Urdu all around the country. In Oxford, as elsewhere, the movement to teach Urdu in the community introduced people from very diverse walks of life and from different cultural backgrounds living in the same city who might otherwise not have met, and who have in the vast majority of cases remained friends since. ❑