

Teaching Unplugged: Dogme in English Language Teaching

by Luke Meddings and Scott Thornbury Delta Publishing 2009
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The Dogme ELT movement has grown over the last decade into a methodology which aims to return English language teaching to its roots. Built on a groundbreaking IATEFL Voices article in which Scott Thornbury called for a 'Vow of Chastity' for ELT, Dogme teaching is stripped-down, learner-centred and materials-light. Now Thornbury and Luke Meddings have produced this handbook for Dogme.

Teaching Unplugged divides into three sections. In Part A the authors set out the core principles of Dogme, discuss its beliefs and practices, and explore its foundations in both ELT and broader educational theory. The methodology described is conversation driven, where conversation is an 'interactive, dialogic and communicative' process in which language is scaffolded and socialisation is promoted. Dogme methodology is also 'materials-light'; however, Meddings and Thornbury point out that while Dogme proponents may have gained a reputation for rejecting the use of imported materials in the classroom, this is not a fundamental tenet of Dogme theory; in a later section they explain how coursebook content can be subverted and remixed to match learners' 'real' needs.

Their final principle, which draws on Second Language Acquisition theory, is that a Dogme approach focuses on emergent language; teaching is not a question of imposing an external language syllabus, but of nurturing the students' inbuilt language learning mechanisms and language acquisition agenda.

Dogme teaching is thus strongly learner-focused, building its input around the student's emergent and developing needs and abilities. At the end of this section, the authors suggest that an approach based on the three Dogme principles – conversation-driven, materials-light and focused on emergent language – implies both 'another way of teaching' and 'another way of being a teacher'. Part B, the longest section, describes activities Meddings and Thornbury feel appropriate to Dogme-based teaching practice. There are nearly 100 activities here, varying from short warmers to extendible tasks that will cover several lessons. All follow the Dogme materials light principle, although this does not mean that they require little or no thought and preparation on behalf of the teacher. While some activities will be familiar, all are set in the context of the 'unplugged' lesson.

In Part C, the authors examine the practical implications of taking a Dogme approach to language teaching at both the classroom and the syllabus level.

This section examines some of the concerns critics of Dogme raise: Can the methodology be used by non-native teachers, or with young learners? Can (indeed, should?) an exam class be based on Dogme principles? Is it possible to unplug an entire school? In each case, the authors suggest that with care and planning, experienced teachers can enhance their practice through using Dogme methods over a range of teaching situations, and that Dogme ideas are applicable across the wider context of the syllabus and school. However, they make the point that the ability to 'fly by wire', which a Dogme approach implies, is not usually suitable for recently qualified and inexperienced teachers.

Teaching Unplugged provides a definitive statement of Dogme principles and a cogent and persuasive argument for their use. Meddings and Thornbury understand that teaching theory needs to be grounded in the real world, and teachers and course planners who wish to take a Dogme-based approach will find plenty of practical ideas here to use at both the individual classroom lesson level and in wider curriculum planning contexts. This inspirational book will be of interest to anyone who wants to understand how Dogme may allow them to take a fresh look at their teaching and focus on how, what and why they teach.

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