

From the authors

Scott's story

In 2000 I was working as a teacher trainer in Spain. My colleagues and I were becoming increasingly frustrated with what appeared to be the prevailing orthodoxy in second language teaching, one in which the people in the room were somehow incidental to the process of teaching, where the learners were simply frogmarched down a one-way grammar street, or where the lesson space was filled to overflowing with *activities*, at the expense of the learning *opportunities*. And this was despite the lip-service paid by their teachers to a 'communicative' approach.

To a large extent, the problem seemed to stem from an over-reliance on materials and technological aids. Classroom interactions were being mediated almost entirely through 'imported' texts. Lack of engagement with such texts, and the activities they generated, meant that learners were interacting at the lowest level of involvement – like car engines that are 'idling' but not going anywhere.

Accordingly, we instituted a rather draconian policy whereby materials were to be used minimally and judiciously. On our training courses, we recorded segments of lesson talk and analysed them from the perspective of the communication displayed. The improvement in the quality of the teaching was dramatic.

When, around the same time and by chance, I went to see a Dogme film and read the Dogme 95 manifesto, I found a metaphor for the kind of teaching that we were aiming at. The first 'vow' of a Dogme film-maker is:

Shooting should be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in (if a particular prop is necessary for the story, a location must be chosen where the prop is to be found).

I then wrote an article suggesting that ELT needed a similar 'rescue action'. I called it Dogme ELT, the first commandment of which began:

Teaching should be done using only the resources that teachers and students bring to the classroom – ie themselves – and whatever happens to be in the classroom.

The uptake was instant, surprising and gratifying. Before long, enough people (including Luke) had got in touch to justify starting a web-based discussion group.



Luke's story

Around the time Scott and his colleagues were re-evaluating their teacher training course in Barcelona, I was helping to set up an experimental language school in London.

Working as a journalist in ELT, I had grown tired of hearing about 'optimum course delivery', as if language were a 'product' and learning a 'package'. My years as a teacher suggested that that a worthwhile lesson was an *experience*: vital, unrepeatable, and brought to life by the spontaneous interaction between learners and teacher. I was determined that the new school should reflect this, and took with me two books that had set me thinking.

One was the Common European Framework of Reference for Modern Languages. I liked its summary of what language learning should be for:

'to satisfy ... communicative needs', enabling learners to 'exchange information and ideas ... and communicate their thoughts and feelings'.

To communicate thoughts and feelings! By the 1990s one might have been forgiven for thinking that language learning was all about grammar and accuracy. Coursebooks were colourful and full of pictures of celebrities, but it was as if we had regressed to the era of grammar translation.

The second book was a copy of *The Future of English?* by David Graddol. I was particularly struck by his prediction of a bilingual future, in which 'authority' would pass from mono-lingual to bi-lingual or multi-lingual speakers of English.

Our new students were coming to us with their English, not coming to us *for* English. They belonged to a world in which English was being used and taught more widely than ever before: they were Graddol's new generation, for whom English was simply *there*, in one form or another, *in the world*.

What they wanted was to engage with it. Our first courses were conversation-based and used no coursebook. Bring your English, we said, and we'll build on it together.

It proved hard to sustain this simple model as the school grew. I felt isolated, which is why Scott's article in *IATEFL Issues* made such an impact. Like many others reading it, or subsequently joining the discussion group, I realised I wasn't alone.

