

Teaching Unplugged – Book Review

“*Teaching Unplugged*”, written by Scott Thornbury and Luke Meddings, published by DELTA Publishing and part of the DELTA Teacher Development Series. The blurb on the back describes the book as “the first book to deal comprehensively with the approach in English Language Teaching known as Dogme ELT”. As with the previous book review, [“Teaching Online” by Nicky Hockly and Lindsay Clandfield](#), “*Teaching Unplugged*” contains three individual parts; Part A, Part B and Part C.

A

Part A introduces the reader to ‘Dogme ELT’, particularly the belief and philosophy that drives Dogme. The underlying principal which supports ‘Dogme ELT’ is that education is predetermined by communication and that the dialogue between educator and learner is not transferred knowledge. The authors write in an easy to understand manner and introduce ten key principles of ‘Dogme ELT’ each related to keywords. The keywords are listed below:

- ***Interactivity***
- ***Engage***
- ***Dialogic***
- ***Scaffolded***
- ***Emerges***
- ***Affordances***
- ***Voice***
- ***Empowers***
- ***Relevance***
- ***Critical***

From these keywords, the book then discusses the three core rules that:

- Dogme is about teaching that is *conversation driven*.
- Dogme is about teaching that is *materials-light*.
- Dogme is about teaching that *focuses on emergent language*.

The next section of Part A, seeks to clarify in greater detail each of these three core rules; conversation driven, materials-light and emergent language. There are several invaluable areas written about in these sub-categories which is reflective, thought provoking and pushes the boundaries of English Language Teaching and current widely respected methodologies. One conversation driven example illustrated by Meddings & Thornbury is demonstrated with an extract from a classroom in Mexico.

T: well then, Jorge ... did you have a good weekend?

S: yes

T: what did you do?

S: I got married.

T: [smiling] you got married. (0.7) you certainly had a good weekend then. (0.5) [laughter and buzz of conversation]

“Teaching Unplugged” (2009) by Meddings and Thornbury (pg. 11)

The materials light sub-category focuses upon the use of coursebooks and texts within the classroom. The book is quick to highlight that ELT materials “threaten to stifle the opportunities for conversation”. However, the objective of a Dogme approach is to focus on the learners and not the material. Meddings and Thornbury suggest that the Dogme techniques “*don’t in themselves constitute a fixed ‘method’ or a ‘one-size-fits-all’*” prescriptive approach for effective English Language Teaching.

The final sub-category for **Part A** looks at the focus on emergent language. The main emphasis for this section is dedicated on the fact that language, instead of being acquired, emerges within the classroom “*out of interpersonal classroom activity*”. The authors suggest a list of ten strategies to support learners to engage in emergent language:

- **Reward**
- **Retrieve**
- **Repeat**
- **Recast**
- **Report**
- **Recycle**
- **Record**
- **Research**
- **Reference**
- **Review**

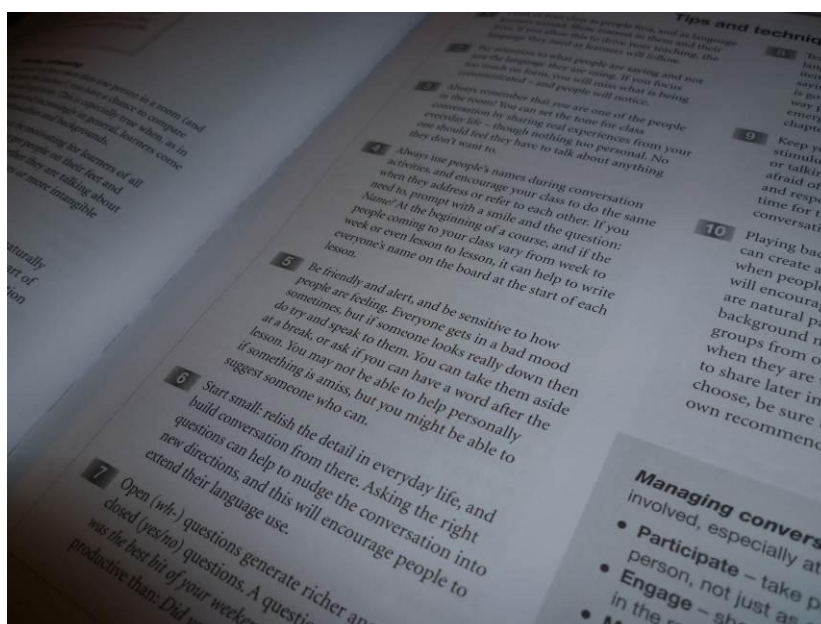
These strategies are echoed in **Part B** of the book.

B

As with [“Teaching Online”](#), Part B of *“Teaching Unplugged”* shares ideas and lessons that complement and support the underlying theories of ‘Dogme ELT’ in the classroom. The unplugged activities are ready to use straight away as there are *“no worksheets to photocopy”*. The activities cover five chapters:

- **Creating the right conditions**
- **Managing conversation**
- **Selecting stimulus to share**
- **Focusing on form**
- **Learning from lesson to lesson**

Each lesson provided, breaks down a lesson plan with different areas to consider prior to the lesson (**Think about it** and **Get it ready**), during the lesson (**Set it up**, **Let it run** and **Round it off**) and after the lesson (**Follow-up**). As with each lesson chapter in **Part B**, there are tips and techniques to assist the teacher. In total there are 97 lessons provided over the five chapters in this Part, which is plenty for the teacher to start practising with.



“Teaching Unplugged” (2009) by Meddings and Thornbury (pg. 34 & 35)

C

The final part of the book considers who is able to teach ‘Dogme ELT’. Some areas that are considered in this chapter include; **Teaching as a non-native speaker**, **Teaching with a coursebook**,

Teaching young learners, Teaching specialised English, etc. With each section, there is a provision of additional information, for example with ***Teaching young learners***, there are ***issues*** raised such as the edutainment of English Language Teaching or the cramming of learning for state examinations where children are spoon fed mechanical drills, the ***implications*** of a ‘Dogme ELT’ approach for young learners as well as helpful ***indications*** for the teaching of an unplugged approach for children.

“Teaching Unplugged” is a book that really pushes the current concepts of teaching methodology, supports teachers that are willing to experiment with an unplugged approach and provides some key lessons to put to practice. Furthermore, the tips and techniques provided are so invaluable that it should be on every teacher’s bookshelf. I recommend this book for teachers that are willing to develop professionally and improve their own knowledge of teaching methodology. The book provides a good summary; “Teaching Unplugged represents an exciting new chapter in alternative and progressive educational theory”.