

Jungle Path Teaching? Assessing the Value of Dogme ELT

Workshop outline - Daniel Xerri

A. Icebreaker

1. Is it possible to sacrifice a lesson plan if a student has a good story to tell?
2. Is it possible to go to the lesson completely unprepared?
3. Is it possible to plan a lesson with no materials?

After each question teachers go to one of three corners:

- It's possible
- It's impossible
- I'm not sure

Teachers discuss why they think so with the other people in their corner and then engage in a brief open discussion.

The aim is to show that all three are possible.

[Adapted from: Ania Rolinska, 2011, *Post Dogme ELT Workshop Brochure*, <http://www.slideshare.net/anzbau/dogme-workshop>]

B. Introduction to Dogme ELT

Show participants the first minute from the trailer of *The Idiots*:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-lnIUuImbU>

Explain that the clip is in Danish, without subtitles and contains some nudity. Ask:

- How is this film different from Hollywood cinema?
- What seems to be the focus of this film?

Allow the participants to discuss the film clip with a partner and then engage them in an open discussion. The aim is to allow them to realise that the film emphasises the human rather than the technical. Link this with the student-centred approach at the very heart of Dogme ELT.

Briefly discuss the following points:

- Dogme ELT was inspired by the **Dogme 95** film movement in Denmark whose main filmmaker was Lars von Trier. The movement was disillusioned with cinema's obsessive concern with technique and wanted to foreground the story and the inner life of the characters. The filmmakers signed a vow of chastity.

- 1963: *Teacher* by **Sylvia Ashton-Warner** describes the roaring in the chimney and the importance of emphasising conversation as the basis for learning.
- 1994: *Learning Teaching* by **Jim Scrivener** describes how jungle path teaching means not predicting and preparing the lesson in detail but allowing it to unfold moment by moment in class. An activity acts as a starting point but what emerges from it will remain unknown until the activity takes place. The students and the teacher journey through the jungle towards new learning experiences. Both the students and the teacher may take the lead. The lesson's aims are discovered at the end of the lesson.
- 2000: 'A Dogma for EFL' by **Scott Thornbury** talks about how he and Neil Forrest at IH Barcelona felt disillusioned with lessons that were being hijacked by materials overload and/or Obsessive Grammar Syndrome (OGS). Thornbury and Forrest wanted to restore teaching to its "pre-method state of grace... Learning is jointly constructed out of the talk that evolved in the classroom".
- Thornbury's **vow of chastity (10 principles)**. Some of the most salient issues: language lesson has to include plenty of real language use; photocopies and technology are proscribed; grammar presentations should not be longer than 5 minutes; real talk has to form the core of the lesson; teaching uses resources in class; the source of all listening should be teachers and students; learning takes place in the here and now.
- **Neil Forrest** found a mismatch between teachers' attitudes and student expectations.

Ask teachers to think about this question and then discuss it with a partner:

Which teacher role is most important?

- Social
- Educational
- Organisational

In Forrest's experiment with a group of CELTA trainees, teachers couldn't decide between the educational and the organisational roles as the most important but they believed that they are more important than the social. However, a group of Advanced students unanimously agreed that the social is the most important.

- "A Dogme lesson is grounded in the experience, beliefs, desires and knowledge of the people in the room. It is a lesson that is language-rich but where language is not used for display but for **meaningful exchange**" (Thornbury, 2002, p. 18).
- Dogme was further developed by Luke Meddings and Thornbury in *Teaching Unplugged* (2009). **Teaching unplugged** is not to be reliant on technology, to be unplugged from a pre-set and pre-determined linear approach; it means to embrace a pedagogy of

bare essentials. Teachers are encouraged to explore unplugged teaching moments alongside coursebook-oriented activities.

- **3 basic principles:** materials-light; conversation-driven; emphasis on emergent language.
- **Further reading:** www.freeslmaterials.com/dogme.html

C. Activities

Discuss the following activities and allow teachers to try some of them:

1. What's in my pocket? (Thornbury & Meddings, 2009)
2. Guess what? (Thornbury, <http://www.onestopenglish.com/support/minimal-resources/the-world-around-you/minimal-resources-the-immediate-environment/146562.article>)
3. Circular syllabus (Thornbury & Meddings, 2009)
4. I wish... (Thornbury & Meddings, 2009)
5. Lost property (Thornbury, <http://www.onestopenglish.com/support/minimal-resources/the-world-around-you/minimal-resources-the-immediate-environment/146562.article>)
6. Headlines (Thornbury & Meddings, 2009)
7. Newspaper post-its (Sketchley, 2011, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/75495693/Dogme-ELT-Lesson-Ideas>)
8. Agreeing to disagree (Sketchley, 2011, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/75495693/Dogme-ELT-Lesson-Ideas>)
9. Interview (Thornbury, <http://www.onestopenglish.com/support/minimal-resources/the-world-around-you/minimal-resources-the-immediate-environment/146562.article>)

Ask teachers to design a Dogme activity in a small group and share it with the others.