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Minimalizing the role of literacy in English Language

Teaching: Dogme teaching

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Abstract

The following theoretical writing discusses the minimalized role of literacy in English language teaching focusing on a method called “Dogme” teaching that deliberately dismisses the textbook and printed materials, thereby foregrounding oral communication over literacy. Reasons that account for an interest in Dogme are discussed before the methodology is investigated in light of the learner-centered approach to evaluate the similarities and differences that spring from its dedication to a conversational learning style. Finally, the challenges inherent to Dogme are addressed through a review of reactions to Dogme from the ELT profession, indicating both concerns and recognized potentials that characterize Dogme teaching.

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1. Introducing Dogme

The term ‘Dogme’ was coined by a group of Danish film-makers in 1995 when they decided to take a “vow of chastity” in their work in an attempt to rid movies of their obsession with technique and return to a film-making that is centered on the story and the characters. The term was first applied to language teaching by Scott Thornbury in his article “A Dogma for EFL” that appeared in print in 2000, where he related the tenets of Dogme movies and cinematography to the classroom. Dogme is a communicative approach that focuses on conversational communication between teacher and students instead of published textbooks. The current work on ELT theory will have Dogme teaching in its focal point in order to investigate the role of literacy narrowed down to the printed text: the course book and other printed materials in ELT and their role and influence on the teacher, the learner and the learning process.

First, Dogme will be differentiated from other ‘alternative’ trends in ELT, and then the perceived need for Dogme accounted for. Dogme teaching will then be analyzed in light of the expectations of a ‘student-centered teaching’ as well as critically, identifying the necessary challenges of Dogme.

‘Dogme’ which is more of a movement than a method, has been selected as a point of reference for a number of reasons: first, it is quite recent, so it lends itself easily as a current ideology in ELT to discuss certain key issues, one that reflects critically on the current mainstream practices of ELT. Such reflections can only benefit the profession. Second, Dogme is considered to represent an extreme stand on language teaching, one that encourages a most drastic break away from prevailing classroom practice. For this reason Dogme can be interpreted as a challenge to the ELT profession and community that aspires to prompt teachers and applied linguists

alike to revisit their most fundamental beliefs about language teaching with the probing eyes of the critic.

2. Reasons to find alternative ways to ELT

The incentive to an invigorated search for alternative methods, techniques and solutions in ELT is an important factor in discussing them, as the motivation will define the results to a great extent. It is important to know the disease to recognize a cure. For this purpose a few of the motivating factors are to be identified, highlighting those that seem relevant to the discussion of Dogme teaching. These issues are only raised to serve as a backdrop to the methodology of Dogme and to hint at the bigger picture that frames ELT, while recognizing that the scope of the current piece of writing does not allow for an in-depth analysis of the questions touched upon here.

2.1 Financial reasons

The lack of funds for materials and equipment may not be an attractive motivation to start looking for alternative ways to ELT, yet it is a dominant and unavoidable question in the language teaching profession. Financial restraints have to be considered and dealt with in most, if not all, teaching scenarios and in today's economic climate the situation is unlikely to improve. A language teaching that is reliant on expensive publications and /or incessant photocopying makes for very expensive learning that not many will be able to afford. This inevitable result that is only further emphasized by costly private schools in both children and adult education raises another issue beyond affordability: that of social injustice. If language education is a privilege of those who can afford it, language learning will only reaffirm social and economic contrasts. Without taking the question as far as critical pedagogy, for ELT to become affordable and thus more accessible on all social levels

is a request that may add momentum to and increase the intensity of the search for alternative ways to ELT.

2.2 Large classes

The field of English language teaching is as diverse as it is extensive. Talking about the “typical” or “average” classroom for this reason seems useless and misleading, however, keeping traditional ELT methods in mind, it would seem like a safe claim that class size does make a difference. It is for a good reason that student-teacher ratio is an important data in ranking institutions in education. If the teacher’s attention is distributed among students of a bigger group, each student will receive less than in a smaller group. Bigger groups also show different dynamics than smaller ones. Psychology tells us that the dividing line is somewhere around 15 people in a group. Groups bigger than that will act will move and interact very differently than smaller groups. Meanwhile in language education, the size of the groups vary greatly, which means that teachers all over the world will have to deal with the potential challenges and problems caused by the size of the class. Besides those fortunate teachers working with small classes somewhere in Europe, North America or Australia, there are millions of teachers for whom the problems caused by large classes are clear and present. There is less time for students, monitoring activities is challenging, the general level of noise is higher making pair and group work difficult and easily leading to discipline issues. The most simple solution would be to lower the number of students in a class, which many educational policy makers, school administrations and board members are setting as a high priority goal to achieve.

Many places, however, it is simply not feasible. For these schools methods that can build on large classes are of vital importance.

2.3 Different script

Another issue that often goes neglected is that of script. While many nationalities have no trouble with the use of Arabic numbers and the Latin alphabet many others will be struggling with letters before they could even begin to learn a new language and long after. For them, tremendous extra effort is needed right at the very beginning, and throughout their learning. The fact that much of the world's population uses a script different from the one the English language, books and teaching materials are based on often goes neglected.

Not only is it just a different script that one has to deal with, it may be a whole different way of thinking and communicating. For example Thai language, which has its very own unique script, is a tonal language, built on the changes in tone and pitch, which is used to differentiate between words that would sound “the same” to the untrained ear of a western speaker. Chinese language, with its five “basic” tones follows a similar pattern. Learners of English of these ethnic backgrounds would have tremendous difficulty not only with pronunciation and comprehension, but also understanding a structure of language fundamentally alien to their mother tongue. These setbacks are further increased by the large percentage of material “unfit” for their classrooms, as it does not take into consideration such differences. A method that would focus on oral production and input may provide for a more accessible language methodology that would be applicable in these settings as well.

2.4 Cultural differences

Beyond differences of script, there is the greater, and perhaps less tangible, issue of cultural differences. Perhaps because this is a challenge that would surface not only in specific cases but by-and-large in any EFL teaching situation, it gets more attention and acknowledgement than the concerns of script. After all, an Italian learner of English, too, will encounter a measure of cultural alienation from the Anglo-Saxon culture pouring out of most textbooks, despite the fact that he is a European citizen with a shared cultural-historic background. This issue has been addressed and discussed at length by various experts of the field, and many of those authors present a line of thought similar to the one of Luke Prodromou in his article “What culture? Which culture? Cross-cultural factors in language learning.”

No-one involved in teaching English is likely to argue for cross-cultural mis-understanding, but some may question the relative emphasis to be given to cross-cultural as opposed to target or local culture components in course design. Robinson (1985) believes in the importance of developing cultural versatility to help learners meet the demands of an increasingly multicultural world; the ‘cultural background’ approach is criticized for its implicitly alienating effect on the learner: ‘Cultural instruction does not usually build bridges between the home and target culture... students are asked to role-play and imitate the target behavior rather than synthesise it with their own experience’ (Robinson, 1985:100). Robinson therefore proposes a multilingual/multicultural model of education rather than a bilingual/bicultural one (Prodromou, 41-42).

How the classroom can provide such a cross-cultural experience is a question that continues to inspire ideas and spark debate among ELT professionals. It seems desirable that the classroom should provide the opportunity for cultures to interact in a

manner that seeks to recognize value and appreciate diversity, instead of contrasting cultures, which will increase alienation and tension, and allow for the possibility of one culture dominating the other or undermining its value system.

2.5 Low motivation

Arguably one of the most important factors in language learning, motivation is likely to play an ever increasing role in the future of education. Motivation is proven to be a key factor in learner success therefore the lack of it is bound to result in under-achievement. Teachers today are struggling to find ways to ignite motivation in their students for language learning – or simply to participate actively in today’s class. Joan Rubin names motivation as one of the three variables language learning depends on, besides aptitude and opportunity in “What the ‘Good Language Learner’ Can Teach Us” (p.42). The importance of motivation in ELT seems to go unchallenged, whereas amotivation and demotivation are seen as the great threats, as they take away the energy and direction that motivation could provide (Dörnyei, 1994).

Dan Pink, a career analyst, in his talk “The puzzle of motivation” argues for the importance of intrinsic motivation in business, which has been viewed as a cornerstone of language learning as well. Pink goes on to name three features that can spark and fuel intrinsic motivation: autonomy, mastery and purpose. The latter two have been long regarded as important factors in language learning, and the third, autonomy is gaining ground, with the “student-centered” approach, that is advocated by authors such as David Nunan, Ian Tudor and Colin Campbell. Pink lists many examples from the business world, where autonomy has been a great motivator for tasks that required creativity and problem-solving skills, whereas the “carrots-and-

sticks” method worked best with mechanical tasks. How does that translate to the field of ELT? With the dawn of popular ideologies and trends in language teaching like CLT, techniques have been designed to create situations of real and meaningful communication where students can be involved actively, yet how this is to be accomplished is not self-evident, neither is how or why students would be motivated to put in all the energy and creativity that such a method requires of them. There was a time that saw an abundance of methods, approaches and models appear on the horizon of English language teaching. The Silent Way, TPR, CLL and many other approaches that advocated alternative ways of language learning appeared to be the next step in the evolution of ELT, until an essay by Michael Swan called for solid evidence to prove the efficacy of Communicative Language Teaching. These methods, though not completely abandoned, evolved into options to pick and choose from, instead of being surefire ways of teaching. Today, the tendency is more leaning towards incorporating different methods to fit different classrooms. Keeping what is worth keeping from a variety of methods, Dogme suggests just that. Providing students with a greater amount of autonomy, as suggested by learner-centered approaches, is preserved in Dogme to help students gain the motivation to become the active agents teachers so desire to see in their classrooms and more importantly that students have the potential to be.

In their study “The use of Motivation Strategies in Language Instruction: the Case of EFL Teaching in Taiwan” (2007) Dörnyei and Cheng list learner autonomy among the 10 most important elements linked to intrinsic motivation. The authors claim that the connection between autonomy and motivation is clearly supported by research.

Deci and Ryan's (1985) work on self-determination theory has highlighted the fact that an autonomy-supporting environment leads to increased intrinsic motivation. The link between autonomy and motivation has also been recognized in the L2 field (e.g. Ushioda, 2003), and an interesting line of relevant research involves exploring the motivational impact of the language teachers' communicative style (autonomy-supporting versus controlling) on learner motivation (e.g. Dam, 1995; Noels, 2001; Wu, 2003) (p.164).

The fact that autonomy and motivation go hand-in-hand seems widely acknowledged, yet the application of this principle to classroom practice is yet to take hold of the profession.

2.6 Factors behind Dogme

To briefly introduce the issues, problems and lacks in current ELT that are visible behind and reflect upon Dogme teaching a number of concerns have been raised. There is the apparently ever-present financial issue that is most likely to continue to impact the everyday reality of teaching practice which prompts teachers to look for alternative solutions that do not require expensive materials or constant photocopying and thus may lighten the financial burden on students. With more affordable teaching and learning comes a more responsible approach towards the socio-economic differences between groups of learners – and potential learners, for whom financial aspects can have a crippling effect on language learning.

Similar in nature is the issue of large classes, in that the problem calls for alternative, creative solutions that may help make up for an inherent disadvantage of certain learning communities. Learners may be disadvantaged in other aspects as well: if their language uses an alphabet or writing system different from the Latin alphabet,

they will be forced to struggle with literacy from the start. Cultural differences and a dominant Anglo-Saxon culture can have an alienating effect on learners, and there appears to be a need for classrooms that allow cultural diversity to flourish and provide room for a variety of cultural values to co-exist and interact as equals.

Finally, low motivation among students calls for an increased attention to learner involvement on all levels, increasing student autonomy, and a personal investment into the learning process. All these manifest problems can be linked to Dogme teaching and reveal an important segment of the ELT continuum that has been and continues to be searching for innovative ideas to solve these issues.

3. Dogme and the student-centered approach

3.1 The Dogme tenets

Scott Thornbury, in his article “Dogme: Dancing in the Dark?” identifies 10 key principles of Dogme: interactivity, engagement, the dialogic process of learning, scaffolded conversations, the emergence of language and grammar, affordances, recognizing the learner’s voice, the empowerment of students and teachers, the relevance of materials and the critical use of published materials and textbooks. These principles show a moderation of the original Dogme method that was a lot more adamant about not using anything beyond what can be found in the classroom, i.e. the learners and the teacher themselves. Interactivity should take place both between the teacher and the students and among the students. Content most likely to engage the students, Thornbury claims, is the one supplied by the “people in the room” as well.

The author sees learning as a dialogic process where instead of being “transmitted” or “imported” from the teacher or a book, knowledge is co-constructed by the teacher and the students. It is the teacher’s task to “scaffold” learning: to provide support and shape the interaction, as well as to encourage the students to interact with the new language they encounter, so as to ensure learning takes place. The emergence of language, including grammar, is dependent on creating the right conditions, thus it is seen as an organic process. The teacher is present as a conductor of emerging language and it is her task to promote learning affordances. Language focus should emerge from the communicative needs of learners. The learners’ voice is regarded highly for his “beliefs, knowledge, experiences, concerns and desires” are recognized as “valid content in the language classroom” (p.3). Dogme rids the

classroom of third-party materials in an attempt to empower both teacher and students. Unlike before the author does allow for a homework book to be used focusing on the essential grammar, vocabulary and text-types. The use of texts should be limited, and when they are used, they should have relevance to the learners, who are to become, along with their teacher, critical users of texts, with an awareness of their cultural and ideological biases.

Thornbury places a very heavy emphasis on the classroom and the characters found there: students and the teacher. His idea is that learning takes place in the here-and-now, and thus materials produced outside the world of the specific classroom are inadequate and unnecessary. In his view language is an organic process that needs nourishing, not weighing down with heavy textbooks and gadgets. The three main precepts of Dogme are a conversation-driven teaching, a “materials-light” approach and a belief in emergent language. Dogme takes a discourse-level approach to language, where the whole of the interaction is of greater importance than analyzing individual utterances, interaction instead of transaction is the key to successful communication, which is at the heart of language learning in the Dogme method. Materials to be produced in the classroom and by the students is considered superior to imported materials, both as a method and also as an attempt to address the issue of the availability and affordability of materials, as well as to tackle the problem of culturally biased materials. Finally, language is seen as emergent rather than acquired, a view shared by a task-based teaching approach.

3.2 Dogme in light of a learner-centered approach

Learner-centeredness in language education has grown since the mid-nineties from one of many approaches into what appears to be an ideology that dominates

theoretical thinking in the field – though its application in classroom practice seems far less preponderant. It is, however an unavoidable presence in ELT today, thus it can serve as a valid point of reference in evaluating a relatively new method like Dogme. For this purpose, the main claims or concerns of the learner-centered approach will be examined and compared to the creeds of Dogme teaching.

Ian Tudor begins to define learner-centeredness as “a broadly-based endeavor designed to gear language teaching, in terms of both the content and the form of instruction, around the needs and characteristics of learners” (Preface IX). Such a definition reveals a deep-running common theme of Dogme and student-centered teaching in that they both hold the learner in high esteem and wish to build up language teaching on what the learners bring with them to the classroom. Dogme in this sense is itself a “learner-centered” approach. The two will be interpreted and treated as separate entities and analyzed in a contrastive manner to highlight the similarities as well as the differences between the two approaches. These latter stem from their attitude towards materials used in the classroom and the teacher’s role, and how much autonomy they see necessary or desirable for students to have. These three issues are also the main expectations of a student-centered teaching: increased learner autonomy, the authenticity of materials, tasks and communication, and the changes these bring about in the teacher’s role. Therefore the differences become apparent through the discussion of these three issues.

3.2.1. Learner autonomy

The arguments for a more accentuated learner autonomy are threefold: there are ideological, psychological and economic considerations (Tudor, p.18). The ideological is perhaps the simplest: learners have the right to their own choices. No

one really has the right to make all these decisions for the learners. The psychological aspect suggests that we learn better if we are in charge of our own learning, when we are more invested personally not only as learners, but also as co-constructors of the learning process, as decision makers, even materials designers. Our learning will be more our own, if it is not spoon-fed to us, but is in itself a product created through our own efforts. The third argument in favor of learner autonomy is the economic concern: the resources we have do not allow for everyone's personal instruction, therefore learners must come to provide for their own needs. Learners are therefore called upon to exercise their right and ability to an amplified level of self-governance in making choices about their learning.

The learner-centered approach calls for an increased autonomy in the decisions concerning both content specification and methodology. According to David Nunan, within the learner-centered approach “the curriculum is a collaborative effort between teachers and learners, since learners are closely involved in the decision-making process regarding the content of the curriculum and how it is taught (2)”, which ties in with the tenets of Dogme, claiming that the most engaging content is supplied by the people in the room, making students and teacher the sole decision makers regarding content. In this sense, both methods view content as the result of a cooperation between teacher and students. The learner-centered approach sees curriculum development activities as ongoing processes in the course of learning. The planning, presenting and evaluating of learning outcomes is to be a construct of “joint consultation and negotiation between teachers and students” (Nunan, p.20). Dogme however, advocates an even greater measure of autonomy than suggested by learner-centered teaching, as in Dogme, there is no pre-set syllabus to be followed, rather leaves students and teacher free to make decisions regarding content as they progress,

and allow language content to emerge naturally. Bradbury and Meddings write in their article “Dogme and the course book” (2002, p.40) regarding the syllabus:

Remember: if the students are engaged in a range of life-like **tasks** about a range of real life **topics** and using/producing a range of real life **text** types, they will be “covering” all the grammar they need. Your job is to “uncover” this natural syllabus - i.e. let it emerge, shape it, before letting it submerge again, in the interests of automaticity and fluency. (words in bold original)

Learner-centered teaching does propose a syllabus to be laid out at the beginning of the course that teacher and students will follow during the course of learning, yet Nunan allows for the fact that this syllabus may need to be altered in the process, thus cannot be set in stone. Nunan (1988, p.5) believes that content will be subject to alterations as the learning progresses. As learners encounter a variety of learning activities and their subjective needs are revealed to the teacher, including their affective needs, expectations and their preferences regarding learning style, the decisions regarding content made previously will have to be revisited. The continuing dialogue between teacher and students will thus determine content and learning objectives.

Nunan does make a claim for content and objectives to be shaped and refined during the initial stages of the learning arrangement, yet he allows that these cannot be fully pre-determined. It is a crucial difference between traditional and learner-centered curriculum development that for the latter no decision is binding. Nunan takes the humanistic approach and emphasizes the importance of a personal relationship to be established between teacher and students, which can help the teacher obtain the most valuable learner data informally. In this way, curriculum

development changes from a linear model to a cyclical one: modifying aims, goals and objectives after each round of evaluation, as opposed to an ends-means model, that focuses on product instead of the process of learning. Dogme teaching takes this idea a step further, and claims that as learning emerges through conversation, a pre-set syllabus is rather counter-productive as it stifles real communication and limits the number of options. Also, it is difficult to know even just a few months or weeks in advance what issue will be important or fascinating to the group that it could spark a conversation. Nunan quotes David Stenhouse in saying “it is the unpredictable rather than the predictable outcomes of student behavior which make education worthwhile”(p.16), which statement reaffirms Dogme principles that wish to build the entire learning process on the conversation that goes on in the classroom, by definition an unpredictable venture.

Dogme also differs from a learner-centered approach in that it does not place the burden for all aspects of curriculum development on the teacher. Nunan claims that it is unrealistic to expect inexperienced learners with little familiarity with language learning to participate significantly in curriculum planning thus it will often be left to the teacher to make most decisions (p.3-4). Dogme, on the other builds up learning on conversation, and allocates decision making to all the people present in the classroom – the teacher being only one of these. As decisions are made on the spot, curriculums are left rather un-planned, and yet Dogme claims, learning will take place, and all the content necessary will be covered following this natural syllabus.

Learners are empowered to make decisions about methodology as well, both in a learner-centered approach and Dogme. Both approaches allow students to make choices regarding the method of learning, to pick and choose between different

activities and working methods. This freedom, however is only made possible by the expertise and flexibility of the teacher, therefore both methods rely heavily on teacher preparation, the importance of which will be discussed later on.

3.2.2 Materials and the textbook

Both the learner-centered approach and Dogme take a critical view of the traditional textbook, which is still considered to be and serves as the backbone of language teaching in most teaching and learning arrangements. In this sense, both methods urge the profession to reconsider the most fundamental questions of ELT. Eccentric as the idea of leaving textbooks behind may be, it is well worth our while to consider it, as such an investigation is bound to unearth some of the most important issues in language teaching where our answers may be fossilized already and could use a fresh start. First, the view of the learner-centered approach on materials will be discussed, including the problems and concerns it highlights regarding textbooks. Then the reactions of learner-centered and Dogme teaching will be examined and how these reflect on the issue of literacy in language teaching.

R.L. Allwright's provocatively titled article "What do we want teaching materials for" has become a point of reference for many theoretical works to come, although it is a lot more moderate in its approach towards printed materials than the title suggests. The author's main concern is what we expect teaching materials to do, what function we wish to see them fulfill. Allwright suggests in his article that there were two main views on materials at the time, one he calls the deficiency-view, the other the difference-view. The first one supposed that the primary function of materials was to save learners from the deficiencies of teachers. This claim implies that the best teachers do not need teaching materials and also that there may be some

‘teacher-proof’ materials that would work even in the hands of the most incompetent teacher. The difference view, on the other hand indicated that teaching materials are “carriers of decisions” that are built in to aid the classroom teacher, whose expertise is completely different from that of the materials writer. Allwright states that both have an element of truth in them, and arrives at the conclusion that although materials may contribute in some way, they cannot determine either goals (p.133) or content (p.134) of teaching and learning. Having investigated the issue in detail, Allwright concludes that it served to “reinforce [Allwright’s] contention that not too much can be expected of teaching materials” (p.134).

The content found in teaching materials has also been under attack by learner-centered theorists like Luke Prodromou, declaring in “English as Cultural Action” (1990) that the content of EFL textbooks is mostly imaginary rather than real. Prodromou brings up the question of culture and cultural domination, claiming that globally designed textbooks remain Anglo-centric (p.31) and in an effort to include materials authentic in this culture, materials are loaded with situations that are imaginary and empty of life. At one point the author exclaims “textbooks where language is safe and innocent and does not *say* or *do* anything. Our modern books are full of speech acts that don’t *act*, don’t mean anything to [the learner]” (p.35). (Italics original) The author explains that most textbooks will have students work with speech acts and functions based on situations which most students will never have to function in, like “finding a flat in London, talking to landladies in Bristol, rowing on the river in Cambridge” (p.36) Prodromou believes that although these situations may be “authentic” in one culture, they are completely alien to the culture of the learners, which they cannot relate to, therefore it will not involve them in learning.

Ian Tudor voices a similar concern pressing for authenticity and a more active role of learners in the learning process in his work titled “Learner-Centeredness as Language Education.” The author beckons language teaching professionals to “acknowledge and work constructively with the diversity and richness of human experience that learners bring with them - which leaves little scope for neat, pre-packaged solutions to language teaching problems” (Preface IX). Tudor perceives this diversity in learning goals, subjective needs and culturally based traditions of teaching and learning as well. In other words, the teaching and learning process is expected to become increasingly dependent on the learners themselves, on what they bring with them to class, leading the author to the realization that condensed goods will not be sufficient to cater to their needs.

Allwright also arrives at a similar conclusion, after considering the nature of the learning process. He asserts that the management of language learning is too intricate to be suitably provided for by a “pre-packaged set of decisions embodied in teaching materials” (p.136). Allwright takes a levelheaded approach to learning and what can and cannot be achieved through learning materials. He believes “we can neither predict nor determine learning processes, and therefore perhaps should not try as hard to do so as we usually do in our teaching materials” (p.135). His views are very close in nature to the idea of “organic growth” advocated by Dogme, which cannot be designated in advance.

Another difference brought about by the learner-centered approach is that it no longer perceives ‘local features’ as constraints to be battled with, rather as a source of riches (Tudor, p.133). Diversity is valued not only individually but also in sociocultural terms along with the existing differences in pragmatic and

organizational aspects of various learning contexts. Such variety of the learners and learning frameworks “implies that teaching programmes cannot be constructed via the more or less automatic implementation of any one set of teaching procedures. Teaching decisions, both at the strictly pedagogical level and in terms of course structures, need therefore to be made *locally*” (Preface xiii). Local decision-making means a locally created syllabus, which will logically lead to different expectations towards learning materials.

The learner-centered approach has thus come to challenge traditional teaching methods and inspired a whole different take on what could be expected to happen in the classroom both regarding content and method. From these changes surfaced the realization that materials development was part of the process that will affect all other elements, therefore it cannot be left unaltered. The learner-centered approach demanded materials that could be versatile enough to be exploited in a diverse manner, altered to fit local needs and different levels of difficulty to accommodate and encourage teacher resourcefulness. Bearing in mind for instance the Hungarian language teaching and learning scene, it is easy to see the validity of David Nunan’s words:

[Recognizing] the inevitability of mixed groups of learners (both in terms of proficiency and also in terms of learning styles) materials should be designed so that they are capable of being used in a variety of ways and also at different proficiency levels (p.99).

Mixed groups creating a constant challenge for the teacher that often hinders the teaching-learning process characterize most learning scenarios. Nunan advocates that materials need to be “suggestive rather than definitive” to model for teachers how to develop their own variations. Materials should also reflect the sociocultural context

they will be used in, Nunan claims, in order to be accessible to learners. In response to all these new demands on teaching materials, the learner-centered approach has come up with different solutions, like instructional materials, project-work and experimental teaching methods like the oral communication course of Montgomery and Eisenstein. Instructional materials are to replace the textbook, serving as resources for the teacher and the students, like ‘ideas books’ filled with activities, communication games and ever-so-handly ‘filler’ activities. Allwright admits that these books will only flourish, if teachers are willing to use them in preference to fully worked out course books (p.143). That process has apparently begun, as resource materials are infiltrating the profession. Alan Maley talks of the decline of the textbook as a form of necessary evolution in materials production making way for new forms of publication.

There is a tendency for the ‘monolithic’ textbook to give way to less rigid forms of instructional materials. These range from various types of supplementary materials which now surround the central core of many courses or exist independently to inventories of ideas for teachers and to so-called ‘modular’ materials (1990, p.126).

Beside printed resources, learner-centered theory has come to the realization that materials development is a part of the process of a course design model that is built up of consecutive cycles of a needs analysis, goal identification, objective setting, learning activities and evaluation (Nunan, 17). This cyclical model demands for materials to be developed as an integral part of the learning process by the teacher and the learners themselves. This goal can be achieved through project work, where students are working to create an end product: a chart, booklet, video, display or oral presentation to name a few. These products then can be tailored to the needs of the individual group, or one group may produce materials for another group. This way a deep involvement of students will be realized that Allwright called ‘investment’ that

relates to the whole person (p.137), materials will be authentic, and students will acquire a sense of responsibility for their learning. Carl Rogers states in his book *Freedom to Learn for the 80's* that in this way learners receive a greater amount of autonomy empowering them to become active agents in their learning (p.219). By taking a holistic approach to the person, the learner-centered approach makes for more relevant and adaptable materials.

Along with new breeds of instructional materials and project-work, the learner-centered approach has encouraged experimental teaching methods that focused on oral communication, like the Oral Communication Course of Montgomery and Eisenstein. Their aim was to link classroom language work to the use of language outside the classroom. The course was based on field trips, where language had to be used for communication. Literacy was de-emphasized, only oral production and input were stressed, yet in the evaluation phase the OCC group outscored the control group on all measures, including grammatical accuracy, despite the fact that they received no formal teaching of grammar (Nunan, p.107). A 'literacy-light' approach has thus proved to be a valid and successful alternative to traditional teaching methods.

Compared to the learner-centered approach, Dogme responded to the question of classroom materials more decidedly. In his first article, Bradbury argued for a complete abandonment of the textbook as well as technology. The author invited teachers to 'take a vow of chastity' and strip the classroom of everything but the essentials: the people in the room. Following the arguments of the learner-centered philosophy, he concluded that learning must be based on locally produced materials, and very little of that, as the core of learning, as in the case of OCC, should be conversation, but with the difference that Bradbury would not have any imported

materials made by a third party. In a later, more moderate version, Dogme conformed to the expectations and accepted textbooks to be used, however sparingly and with caution, calling upon teachers and students alike to become critical users of textbooks.

The author also proposes that the shortcomings of textbooks are not to be ‘patched-up’ with photocopied exercises; rather the textbook should be used only as a prop found in the classroom. This ‘materials light’ approach results in unavoidable de-emphasizing of literacy and placing the emphasis on oral communication. This is in line with the author’s declared intentions, as Dogme is seen as deeply rooted in CLT, in fact, Bradbury told in an interview for Delta Publishing, that his desire to re-animate Communicative Language Teaching gave birth to Dogme.

This grew out of a frustration with the way the so-called communicative approach seemed to have been betrayed and hi-jacked by globalised ELT publishing initiatives, such as the extraordinarily successful Headway series (1986).

It is thus an intention of Dogme to return to the ideology of CLT and ‘clean the slate’ to re-establish it in classroom practice. In its moderate version, Dogme would allow for the possibility of a ‘Dogme book’ or as Bradbury calls it, “Dogway” that would have to conform to the tenets of Dogme, and allow as much freedom to students and teacher as possible. Bradbury expects the book to be high on activity and low on text, including only a minimum of texts that would be exploited in depth, and linguistic means treated as tools. The book should be reflective and ‘grammar-lite’, posing problems instead to raise awareness, self-sufficient and cheap with a design that invites teacher and students to open the book and start anywhere. The book that is beginning to take shape here is one resembling the learner-centered proposition of the ‘ideas book’, revealing Dogme to be moving towards a more mainstream learner-

centered ideology.

In summary, learner-centeredness has come to view the pre-packaged solutions of course books unfit for the role expected of them and recognized materials development as an integral part of a cyclical curriculum development, that called for a repeated evaluation of progress and re-consideration of goals. Materials were to adhere to the organic growth of language acquisition and have the flexibility to be used in a variety of ways to fit different levels of difficulty as well as the individual and socio-cultural diversity of classrooms. For this purpose, locally produced materials were prioritized, the focus shifting to less rigid forms of learning and the materials supporting these. Montgomery and Eisenstein's Oral Communication Course established that a method based on oral communication is a reliable alternative to a traditional method built on literacy. The Dogme method grew out of this fertile soil in an attempt to return to the basic principles of CLT and responded to the issues raised by the learner-centered approach by taking their ideas a step further, advocating the exclusive use of locally produced materials and barring the classroom of the excessive use of technology to make teachers and learners the focal point of the learning process.

3.2.3 The Dogme teacher

Critics of the learner-centered approach have pointed out a number of reasons why this method places a heavy burden on the already sagging shoulders of the classroom teacher. This approach does bring about a number of changes for the teacher: makes new demands on her, acknowledges and highlights her role in the classroom and underlines the importance of teacher training. Dogme teaching is similar to the

learner-centered approach in that it alters the teacher's traditional role in the classroom, and creates a learning situation that will not function without a well-trained teacher, yet Dogme does not increase the burden on the teachers to an equal measure as tasks and responsibilities are more evenly distributed among teacher and students.

Péter Medgyes calls the communicative teacher a “wizard-of-Oz” like ‘superperson’ (p.104), and indeed, with all the expectations a teacher faces in CLT, some wizardry would come real handy. The learner-centered approach is no different in ‘raising the bar’ for teachers, demanding more of their time and energy and expecting them to become active theory makers preferably overnight. Tudor lists the following demands learner-centered teaching will have on teachers: needs analysis, course planning and educational skills, flexibility and adaptability and the ability to reconcile classroom and organizational methodologies. Pit Corder adds that there will be an increase in responsibility as well for the teacher of the learner-centered classroom. “Teachers are going to have a much more responsible role, because they’re going to have to make decisions about what is right for their group of learners at that time, instead of simply working through a book” (p.115). The learner-centered approach expects teachers to develop an array of skills that lets them fulfill their new tasks: that of curriculum development, accommodating learner preferences, educating learners to acquire a higher degree of autonomy in their learning and making use of unfit textbooks. Out of these new roles, there are at least two, that Dogme teachers do not have to fulfill: they do not have to waste time and energy developing a curriculum, as it will emerge as a result of classroom work and a true-bred Dogme teacher will not have to deal with dysfunctional textbooks. These two would indeed place a heavy burden on a teacher, yet Dogme teachers are spared the trouble.

Accommodating learner preferences will be a part of the daily routine of the classroom, without an externally set syllabus to administer to, rendering it a lot less difficult to realize. What the Dogme teacher, too is going to need is a broad spectrum of pedagogical skills to enable a great amount of flexibility, making teacher preparedness a central issue not only in the learner-centered approach but also for Dogme. However, the overall toll of Dogme teaching on the teacher will be significantly less than that of the combined effect of adopting the learner-centered method.

The second change relating to the teacher's role in student-centered teaching that also characterizes Dogme is the emphasis it inevitably places on the teacher's person and preparedness. Whereas on the one hand, a student-centered method puts students in the limelight, it also relies heavily on the part played by the teacher. In a learner-centered classroom and even more so with Dogme where everything is built on conversations and the decisions made in the classroom, the teacher's behavior will have a greater impact on the learning process than in traditional classroom situations. Teachers' behaviors, as Tudor claims, "tend to be consistent with their underlying belief system" (p.239), and their "operational principles" rather than "the precepts of any externally defined method" (p.239). Thus teachers' beliefs and principles will influence the teaching-learning process to a great extent in Dogme, a method based on classroom conversation, where students and teachers alike are expected to participate as persons with their own belief systems. This teaching-learning arrangement is highly conducive of the kind of facilitative learning that theory makers like Carl Rogers have been advocating since the '70s. In his book *Freedom to Learn for the '80s* (1983), the author stresses the importance of interpersonal relationships in the classroom, and names the facilitation of learning as the primary goal of education,

achievable by transforming a group into a community of learners and freeing students' curiosity (Rogers, 1983, p.121). Dogme sets out to achieve similar goals by making authentic classroom conversations among students the backbone of learning. As the authenticity of such conversations and a climate of understanding and acceptance is a crucial element of Dogme, it emphasizes interpersonal relationships, and the kind of teacher that can facilitate such an atmosphere. The Dogme teacher will have to be a person who can withdraw and accept a position in the classroom that makes her an equal of her students instead of an authority figure. Unless the teacher can identify with such a role she will not be able to become the facilitator she needs to be for the Dogme classroom to achieve its goals.

The teacher's person is also important because of the emphasis placed on interpersonal relationships in the classroom. Rogers (1983) believes that whereas traditional methods focused on imparting knowledge, the student-centered approach adapts to an ever-changing environment and cease to focus on information that may soon become outdated and consequently will depend not on the teaching skills of the teacher, but "certain attitudinal qualities that exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner" (p.121). Facilitative learning will require genuineness, empathy and a prizing, accepting, trusting quality in the teacher/facilitator to create a climate that is conducive of this type of learning. Dogme, as it will have learning emerge through genuine conversation cannot do without such a teacher. This method may be seen as a realization of many ideas presented in Rogers's student-centered classroom, and has the potential to bring about the same results that have been proven to take place through meticulous research conducted in relation to learner-centered teaching. Rogers has shown that this type of learning entails many advantages for the student, not only in relation to personal growth, but also in academic achievement. It

will be the task of further research to prove that the same outcomes characterize Dogme teaching; however, the extent of similarities between the two methods suggests that Dogme has similar potential.

Teacher preparedness is another important factor in both methods. According to Tudor, it is the teacher who needs to consider student preferences and guide them to a higher level of autonomy and learn to incorporate it into their learning. Tudor believes the appropriate pedagogical behavior is to “accommodate the learner’s current preferences” (p.247) while getting teachers acquainted with alternative forms of learning within a reflective structure that is constructed to aid teachers in evaluating the assets of the various options available to them and in doing so, help them cultivate their self-directive competences. Teachers need to be ready to play a key role in the process of broadening students’ horizons regarding their options and advocate a change in their perception of their own part in the learning process. To achieve this, both the learner-centered approach and Dogme demand a highly prepared teacher with a great amount of flexibility in her everyday work. Tudor admits that the expectations of learner-centeredness may go beyond what a teacher is accustomed to or ready for.

[If] the teacher acknowledges the need to modify or diversify her approach to teaching in response to learner preferences, she will have to master a range of materials and pedagogical procedures which may go beyond her habitual (or preferred) mode of teaching. This calls for flexibility and possession of a broad pedagogical repertoire (p.247).

Pedagogical skills and preparedness thus take central stage in learner-centeredness and Dogme, but whereas in the former, advance planning also plays a part, with Dogme, teachers are constantly “kept on their toes,” and expected to keep all their

pedagogical tools sharp and ready to apply. The novelty here is that unlike in traditional teaching situations and even with certain alternative methods, there are no ‘props’ in Dogme: learning depends on the teacher to a much greater extent. So much so, that Tudor calls teacher preparedness “a key enabling condition within a learner-centered approach” (p.248) – by definition just as true, or even more so, regarding Dogme.

As other participatory learning methods, Dogme re-defines the role of the teacher and calls for teachers to become skilled in areas that were not expected of them before, or not to an equal extent. As student-centered learning, Dogme builds on the teacher’s communication, group-work and interpersonal skills as well as conflict-management and assertiveness. Donna Brandes and Paul Ginnis (1986) claim that these skills, however, can be learned, and suggest that in-service training in communication and group work skills should be an integral part of teacher training. The authors believe that “self-awareness, interpersonal skills, assertiveness training and basic counseling skills ought to be components of teacher preparation” (p.45) as these are skills to be learned not innate qualities that would make some teachers capable and some unable to adopt a student-centered approach. As the method relies not on the printed text but on genuine oral communication, it is even more crucial for the Dogme teacher to be skilled in these areas that are at the heart of the learning process. Dogme would also call for a high level of creativity, allowing the teacher to respond to the demands of the classroom on the spot. Creativity is also known to be a skill that can be enhanced in a person through training.

From the former it follows that teacher education, formation and continuing development are essential to both methods. Not only do they need to be trained and

practiced in using a wide variety of procedures, teachers are expected to have both the skills and the professional resourcefulness to apply them adequately. Classroom teachers today may not have had the opportunity to develop the necessary skills and competences as the focus of teacher training programs tends to be on “the implementation of a discrete set of pedagogical or classroom management procedures” thus catering for an ongoing teacher development and support is understood to be a vital component of implementing the learner-centered approach (Tudor, p.252) and the Dogme method. This aspect, however, only serves to acknowledge the teacher’s importance in the learning process and make this method’s prerogative the need to equip teachers with all the tools necessary to providing high quality support and guidance to students throughout the learning process which would, in fact, benefit any learning situation. Dogme demands a high quality and professional dedication from both teachers and training programs, as it is bound to reveal inadequacies.

The teacher’s role shows differences from traditional teaching methods in both learner-centered and Dogme teaching with regard to three aspects: the demands it puts on teachers, the increased importance of the teacher’s person and the training necessary to equip her with all the skills and professional expertise to allow for a highly flexible way of teaching. Unlike other learner-centered approaches, Dogme does not ask for extensive curriculum development skills, or expect the teacher to make up for the shortcomings of a textbook and the problems it creates in the classroom. Teachers as well as students are invited to be present and involved with their entire person and strip the classroom of third-party materials and de-humanizing technology. Dogme teaching promotes a higher level of autonomy and thus, inevitably, places greater responsibility on both learners and teachers, which learners

need to be prepared for so that this freedom can be exercised conductively. Dogme's emphasis on oral communication results in a much different image of the teacher than that of the traditional classroom who shares many qualities with the learner-centered teacher, but has a bit less of a burden on her shoulders. This aspect of Dogme has been called into question and will be discussed later on.

4. Challenges and reflections

Dogme teaching, being a relatively novel approach, has received little recognition from the ELT profession and even less dedicated critical scrutiny. Torkil Christensen devoted an article to the subject in “Dogme in language teaching in Japan” investigating the applicability of Dogme in Japanese culture and the local teaching scene. Christensen calls for moderation regarding some Dogme principles, among them the treatment of pronunciation and abandoning set texts. The author states that the latter “seems a sound enough principle whenever practical” (p.16) yet it would be a challenge to a large portion of instructors in Japan who are “testing the waters” and cause much fluctuation in the profession. These people, lacking the training and practice necessary to be confident doing without the traditional textbook, should have a place in the profession, according to the author (2005, p.17) who suggests that teachers remain flexible regarding this issue.

Christensen also lists a number of pre-requisites for Dogme to be successfully initiated in the Japanese classroom, highlighting teacher preparedness, including the necessary skills, a willingness to step back and to learn to overcome the resistance to change. The author believes that the lessened demand for textbooks will be balanced by an increased need for reference books and compendia to solve problems in the classroom, allowing the publishing industry to get involved in new ways. Provided that there is flexibility in its application, the author views Dogme as a method that “makes sense for Japan” (p.17).

It is interesting to note that the one important qualm of the author has to do with abandoning the textbook. Christensen does not suggest that the textbook is a

necessity of the classroom, only that it is impractical to ban it for the large number of inexperienced teachers “floating in and out of the profession” (pp.16-17). Once again, it is recognized that Dogme demands a high level of teacher preparedness that is bound to be a long-term investment.

Another article that speaks critically of Dogme is by Simon Gill, who lists six reasons why he disagrees with Thornbury’s ideas. The author suggests that the ‘chaste’ approach of Dogme may be unsuitable in some cases, and teachers should opt for a versatile approach instead, finding the right method for their class, as well as adopting to the particular learning situation that might call for a different teaching style. Gill doubts the connection between the use of materials and the distance between teacher and learners, arguing that it has more to do with the teacher’s personality than the kind of materials she brings to the classroom. The author also believes that trainee and beginner teachers should have the opportunity to experiment with different methods, tools and resources, assess their value and set up their own principles instead of casting them away. Gill, however, has reviewed his writing since its first appearance, and at the end of his piece acknowledges the positive traits of Dogme and states that a “soft” approach he finds acceptable, meaning the moderate version of Dogme that allows for some use of textbooks as “objects” common to language classrooms. Gill also admits that some of his earlier objections were the result of misunderstandings about the nature of Dogme, while at the same time he retains some of his doubts about the method.

Gill raises the issue of circumstance relating to teaching, claiming that Dogme may not be applicable to all arrangements. One such situation is that of developing countries where there is a lack of funds, technology and materials to cope with. Bill

Templer (2004), with experience gained in Lao, PDR, reflects on Dogme favorably:

Especially on low-resourced peripheries, the stress of the post-method deconstructive pedagogy known as DOGME transforms that lack of ELT paraphernalia almost into a blessing in disguise, making a pedagogical virtue of necessity.

For this reason and for its general anti-establishment approach, Dogme may be interpreted as critical pedagogy, though that is not among Thornbury's declared purposes with Dogme. Admittedly Dogme carries the promise of a solution to some of the problems of language teaching in financially deprived areas.

Overall, Dogme receives a mixed response. Some see it as a solution to challenging situations and the means of reviving their teaching and giving it new zest. Others, however, remain doubtful on a number of counts, mainly concerning teachers with little experience adopting Dogme and losing their footing without the textbook. This concern reaffirms the idea that Dogme presses for well-trained and prepared teachers.

5. Conclusions

The role of literacy in English language teaching is a topic too broad to tackle within the framework of the current theoretical writing. To shed some light on its significance, the Dogme approach has been analyzed to reveal what are the visible results of cutting back on literacy in favor of oral communication. Dogme has been selected for this purpose for its focus on putting a ban on or restricting the use of technology and printed materials and relying on in-class conversations between teacher and students to make up the core of its structure. Dogme, by definition, will reduce the importance of literacy and place emphasis on oral work.

From its onset, Dogme has aimed at reviving Communicative Language Teaching and placing a great amount of freedom in students' hands – along with an equal amount of responsibility. Instead of comparing and contrasting Dogme with traditional teaching methods, it promised more rewarding to use a student-centered approach to highlight similarities and differences. This comparison proved to be valuable, as the similarities between the two methods could endow Dogme with the kind of backing that it has yet to acquire through research conducted specifically on this method.

The differences between the two also reflected on the nature of Dogme in many ways. It is the nature of conversation to be free flowing, making curriculum development unnecessary and possibly harmful for this method, one of the main differences between student-centered and Dogme teaching. As conversation is the only truly necessary element in a Dogme classroom, no third party materials or textbooks are necessary, freeing teachers from the burden of spending time and

energy on making up for an inadequate textbook. Though literacy has its place in this context as well, it is impeding taking over the class and becoming the “tail that wags the dog.”

Through a juxtaposing of the two methodologies the constraints Dogme puts on teachers and students has become apparent. For teachers, the main stress is on a thorough training, that will include acquiring some skills that traditionally receive less attention in teacher training, like that of conflict management or counseling. Overall, Dogme requires a well-prepared professional, and thus, it may present a bigger challenge to beginner or trainee teachers. This method will not work without time and effort dedicated to building up a community of learners, as in the case of the humanistic learner-centered approach. The extra efforts are balanced out by “outsourcing” curriculum planning and materials development to the students themselves and making it part of the learning process. As in the case of student-centered learning, the problem that arises is that students may well be unprepared to adopt such an active role, as they are unaccustomed to it after long years of learning in traditional classrooms. However the same treatment can be applied as in the case of other learner-centered methods: a gradual introduction to the new method, while keeping in mind and adjusting to local conditions.

Beside its challenges to teacher and students, Dogme offers a number of benefits to the learners and the teacher. Dogme is low-cost and low-maintenance: no props, materials or technology is required; therefore it can be applied to learning situations facing financial difficulties. It is feasible with bigger groups and within cultures using a script different from the Roman alphabet. With the dismissal of the textbook and focusing on the people present in the classroom, Dogme relieves the

pressure of a dominant Anglo-Saxon culture typically found in textbooks and promotes cultural and personal diversity and a dialogue of both individuals and their value systems. This is advocated indirectly, as people in the room are encouraged to be present and participate in conversation on all sorts of topics as individuals. By making authentic conversations the foundation and source of all learning, Dogme places the individual, both teacher and students in the heart of the lesson, creating an environment where a personal investment of students is both possible and encouraged, as the onus is on students to carry out the tasks that comprise the gist of their learning.

Dogme teaching, being rooted in oral communication and the firm belief that textbooks and third party printed materials are inessential to language learning, takes a stand against literacy playing a central role in English language teaching. Its manifesto, couched in clear terms, calls for a simplicity and self-regulation in the use of materials that indeed can be seen as chaste. Through relying on the people present in the classroom and the ideas, interests, experiences and knowledge they bring with them, Dogme beckons teachers to return to a way of teaching where people and not technology or materials dictate the process of learning.

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