

DOGME IN PRACTICE

SAMPLE LESSON ACCOUNTS

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IF YOU WERE A DOGME, WOULD YOU REGRET BARKING?

CHRIS OZÓG

Class

This was originally a class of 12 adults just starting B2, which was then split into two groups of six and then became more or less a group of three for me as two never showed up, and there's usually one of the remaining four off. This lesson had the three who usually attend and who are fast becoming one of my favourite ever classes.

Context

My three years with International House in Costa Rica, a private language school, will probably always be the happiest professional years of my life. I learned so much, developed my career so much, presented at my first conferences, became a CELTA tutor, IH CYLT tutor, IH LAC tutor and an IELTS examiner, met so many good teachers and stole all their ideas.

Why did you choose to use Dogme?

It might be better to ask—why did Dogme choose me! The particular ‘ecology’ I was working in—both in terms of the school and this specific class—really lent itself to experimenting with less course book-driven lessons and encouraging learner-generated content. Plus my own development as a teacher and teacher trainer had given me the confidence to work with the kind of spontaneity that a Dogme approach promotes: I don’t think I would have taken such risks as a first-year teacher!

Beginning

Out of a start-of-class chat the subject of ‘dogs’ came up. It has become a class joke the amount of moaning I do about the amount of barking the dogs in my barrio of San José, Sabanilla, do. Taking the dogs as our basis, I asked individuals to come up with five solutions to my dog/noise problem. Then, as a three, they had to discuss the merits of each problem, justifying their opinions, and selecting a group top five. This was lively 20-minute discussion in which there was loads of language flying around. The group then reported their top five solutions to me, which I wrote on the board and discussed with them as they were read out.

Development

At this point, we got to the focus on form. We were 70 minutes into the lesson and it had been pure conversation with lexis fed in where appropriate (sometimes the learners are surprised by how long and how much they speak in the class). In the end, I noticed that they could improve their range and accuracy of sentences such as “*if he do that, then he would to be happy*” and so went for 2nd conditionals as a point of emergent language to focus on. Using the solutions the group

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had agreed on, we re-wrote them as 2nd conditional sentences, highlighting the use of past simple and continuous tenses as well as the modals *would, could, might + infinitive*. We discussed the contractions and drilled them, as well as going over ways to start conditionals that aren't *if*, such as *providing that/as long as...* We also looked at changing the order of the clauses and removing the comma.

Having taken a quick break, it was time for some practice. I asked the group to take their original five solutions and re-write them using the language we had just discussed, with me buzzing around and helping out where they needed it.

Next, they had to analyse these re-written sentences and decide if they were correct, as well as deciding on a favourite of each person. This led to a highly amusing feedback session that largely took care of itself as they debated the merits of each sentence. Who would have thought that 2nd conditionals could make students laugh so much?

They then wrote these favourite sentences on the board and we discussed each one in turn, highlighting excellent use of language such as collocations, as well as correct grammar. We also went through what parts of the sentences could be changed while keeping the same meaning i.e. replacing *if* with *suppose* in questions and writing up these options too. Some collocations that came up included *sleep deeply, beat sth/sb to death, and stop + Ving*.

The group then copied down these sentences with the highlighted language.

The final practice involved me asking the group to close their eyes. I then rubbed off some select language. First of all, all the past tenses and modals. The group then opened their eyes and re-created the sentences together.

We then repeated this, until almost all the language had been removed. In feedback to each reconstruction, we highlighted the alternatives for *if* and the meanings of using different modals.

By this stage, we had regrettably run out of time. This was a real shame as I wanted to complete the task cycle with another related task

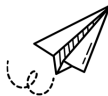
which, in the end, had to wait until the next class (not that there's any harm in that). To finish in the last 8 minutes, I asked the group to select the lexis they wanted to keep for the vocab envelope and write these words down on the cards. Everyone went home happy, except that I gave them two exercises from the course book for homework (they have bought it after all and at \$40, that's no snip in Costa Rica).

Commentary

“ I have to say, it was one of the most enjoyable classes I can recall and one in which there was so much language floating around, it was tricky to know what to focus on. You simply do not see the humour and creativity in people when you force them to work with language from a course book. I believe that doing things this way makes the language more memorable and the study of it more enjoyable. This lesson is now part of the class 'folklore' and the themes recur in almost every class and while I have no proof of it, it certainly “confirm[s] [my] own intuitions that Dogme, if not more effective, is more engaging, more memorable, more motivating—more fun!”



SCOTT





ONE OF MY FAVORITE SOUVENIRS

BARBARA HOSKINS SAKAMOTO

Class

This was a class of 12-15 Japanese women ranging in age from their late 50s to early 70s. The women all belonged to the same group (New Women's Association, a women's rights organization founded in 1919). They came to the class with amazing life experiences, a lot of fossilized English, and a fair bit of (decades old) public school trauma that made them hesitant to trust their own ability to learn. Their English level ranged from high A1 to low B1 on the CEFR.

Context

While ostensibly a Travel English course, members rarely needed to use English because they traveled with group tours. The community center where our bi-weekly classes were held provided a room with tables and a whiteboard, but no WI-FI, so our lessons were decidedly low tech. Students and I had complete autonomy over curriculum and

content. They preferred having a textbook because they could “see” what had been covered, but didn’t mind if we went off on tangents to follow interesting topics as they arose.

Why did you choose to use Dogme?

I was hoping that the topic of souvenirs would be engaging for my globetrotting seniors, because they didn’t have many ‘real life’ reasons to use English. When the topic came up in pre-class conversation, it was the perfect opportunity.

Beginning (about 20 minutes)

Before the start of class, Mrs. O shared a box of cookies she’d brought back from a tour to Germany and classmates asked about her trip, in Japanese. I wrote some of the questions on the board, in English:

Where did you go?

What did you do in ~?

What did you eat/drink?

How was it?

How was the hotel?

How were the public toilets?

What did you buy?

This was a frequent topic in class, but students had never really developed the habit of using English to talk about their travels. I nudged students to use the English questions to have a similar discussion about Mrs. O’s trip. Since they had just finished talking about it in Japanese, this was a chance to discover some useful travel English,

ONE OF MY FAVORITE SOUVENIRS

encourage everyone to participate, and to work on expanding responses. I added language to the board as needed or requested.

After about 15 minutes, we stopped, and we went over the language that had emerged in the discussion. I circled the word “souvenirs” and moved to the main focus for the lesson.

Development (about 60 minutes)

Souvenirs are important to my students. They spend a lot of time thinking about what to buy for themselves and for others when they travel. We started by talking about Mrs. O’s souvenirs and then began to talk about our own.

I erased the board and wrote “Souvenirs” at the top, then showed the students my brightly colored glasses case.

“ *This is one of my favorite souvenirs. I bought this in Poland a long time ago. I found it in a small shop that sold handicrafts. It was very colorful and cheerful, and every time I take out my glasses, I remember my trip. It’s also very practical. I often lose my glasses. This case is very difficult to forget!*

I then asked, *Why is this case one of my favorite souvenirs?* I wrote some of the ideas on the board:

happy memory
beautiful
useful

I asked students to think about some of their souvenirs over the years and add some other reasons. They came up with:

- **bargain** (something they couldn't get in Japan easily)
- **thoughtfulness** (a gift that showed someone was thinking of them)
- **small** (doesn't take space in a suitcase)

Next it was the students' turn to talk about their favorite souvenirs. I gave them five minutes to think, make notes in English or Japanese, ask for language, and imagine what they would say.

To develop fluency, students talked about their souvenirs three times in pairs, first for three minutes, then for two minutes, and finally for one minute. Each time they spoke with a different person, and in between conversations we added useful language to the board.

To wrap up, students shared what they remembered about each other's souvenirs, using language from their discussions.

Reflection

The time constraint of the 3-2-1 activity helped students focus on what they were trying to say and less on whether or not they were making mistakes. Students had a wide range of English ability, and it was always challenging to create speaking opportunities that provide enough support to help less fluent or confident students succeed, while providing space for the more fluent students to challenge themselves. This worked pretty well for both goals. If I were to do this lesson again, I'd try to plan it so that students could begin with physical objects to share. They often seemed to find it easier to show something while speaking than describing something AND talking about it.

Integration

After the activity, students said they'd like to see the souvenirs

ONE OF MY FAVORITE SOUVENIRS

their classmates had talked about, and we agreed to have a sharing time at the start of each class. This allowed us to continue using and building language to talk about things that actually motivated them about traveling.

Commentary

“ I love that this lesson led to a sharing time at the start of each class. The personal, tactile example of the glasses case is a lovely way to open the subject and make it accessible to everyone. The note that “every time I take out my glasses, I remember my trip” also suggests the ideal outcome: language memorisation being triggered by relevance, and students remembering a lesson because it was personal.



LUKE

