

# Scott Thornbury

---



## New School, New York

### About the speaker

Scott Thornbury has an MA (TEFL) from the University of Reading and is currently Associate Professor of English Language Studies at the New School in New York, where he teaches on an on-line MATESOL program. His previous experience includes teaching and training in Egypt, UK, Spain, and in his native New Zealand. His writing credits include several award-winning books for teachers on language and methodology, including *About Language: Tasks for Teachers of English* (Cambridge University Press), *How to Teach Grammar*, *How to Teach Vocabulary* and *How to Teach Speaking* (Pearson), *Uncovering Grammar*, *Beyond the Sentence* and *An A-Z of ELT* (Macmillan) and *Natural Grammar and Grammar* (Oxford University Press). He has also contributed to a number of handbooks on language and methodology, including the *Routledge Handbook of Corpus Linguistics* (2010), and *The Routledge Handbook of Applied Linguistics* (2011). His most recent book, *Teaching Unplugged* (Delta Publishing; co-written with Luke Meddings) won a British Council Innovations Award (ELTON) in 2010. He is series editor for the *Cambridge Handbooks for Teachers*.

### About the presentation

#### *The Secret History of Methods*

I am regularly asked "What's the latest method", suggesting that the concept of method persists, despite recent attempts to bury it ("The method concept is dead!"). Drawing on an extensive archive of language teaching textbooks, I will review the history of methods, and in so doing, will argue that the prescriptive concept of method is less useful than the descriptive concept of methodology, i.e., what teachers actually do, rather than what they are obliged to do. I will also attempt to show that the history of methods is best construed, not as a linear progression, but as cyclical, and that, as Kelly commented as far back as 1969, "old approaches return, but as their social and intellectual context are changed, they seem entirely new". I will then extrapolate some core parameters, different configurations of which help define and differentiate language teaching methods, and I will apply this descriptive framework to a relatively "new kid" on the methodological block, the Dogme/Teaching Unplugged movement (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009), founded on the belief "that language learning is both socially motivated and socially constructed" and whose proponents "are looking for ways of exploiting the learning opportunities offered by the raw material of the classroom, that is the language that emerges from the needs, interests, concerns, and desires of the people in the room." At the same time, I will make the point that Dogme might best be considered as neither method nor methodology, but as a tool for self-directed teacher development.