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Messages from the Editors

Welcome to Volume 11 of *The Mask & Gavel*. *The Mask & Gavel* is published by the Performance in Education (PIE) Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT). We publish academic papers concerning the use of performance, especially in regards to language learning. Examples of performance can include such activities as drama, speech contests, debates, oral interpretation, and the use of music. Starting with this volume, we are publishing articles online as soon as they are finalized. All articles are double-blind peer-reviewed before publication.

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Creating English Songs with Familiar Music for EFL Classrooms in Japanese Elementary Schools

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Abstract

This paper introduces a compilation of simple and easy English songs designed for children learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). While belonging to various language schools, the author encountered numerous songs that captured children's interest in English vocabulary and phrases. While some of these songs had original melodies, many were adaptations of traditional songs in Japan, USA, and UK. Consequently, the author undertook the task of developing English songs using familiar tunes and shared them with a group of Japanese and Filipino English teachers who taught Japanese children. The article presents the feedback received from these teachers regarding the preference for utilizing traditional tunes and the focus of these songs. Additionally, the list of the tunes used for *Wee Sing* CD series that have been very popular among children throughout Japan and North America will be presented for further discussion.

One can reasonably assume that songs that have remained popular for many decades probably consist of elements that contribute to their accessibility and familiarity. These elements include a distinct and repetitive rhythm, as well as a melodic range that is well-suited for inexperienced singers. This paper introduces some simple and easy songs for children's EFL classrooms based on the familiar music such as melodies or tunes of English and Japanese traditional songs or nursery rhymes free from copyright. While belonging to three private language schools and two preschools in Saitama prefecture between 1997 and 2000, the author encountered many songs that stimulated children's interests in English words and phrases. Several of these

songs had original music. However, many used the melodies of traditional children's songs. Thus, the author developed some English songs based on familiar music focused on vocabulary, grammar, themes, and events, following the steps for song-creation (see Steps for Song-Creation of this article).

The paper also presents simple songs that incorporate the texts from picture books, allowing students to actively engage by singing along rather than participating in conventional storytelling. In addition, the comments on song-creation from English teachers for children in Japan as well as the tunes the university students chose for their song-creation activity will be explained. Moreover, the paper introduces a list of tunes used for the world-popular *Wee Sing* CD series. These aspects will be further explored and discussed.

Literature Review

Foreign Language Education in Japanese Elementary Schools

During the 2020 academic year, the Japanese government launched their new English education curriculum for public elementary schools. Based on the new guidelines released by MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology), English has become a compulsory subject for the upper grades (fifth- and sixth- grades), and English activities have been incorporated into "The Period for Integrated Study" class for the middle grades (third- and fourth-grades). In addition, reading and writing have officially been introduced to the upper grades. (MEXT, 2018)

Although the Japanese government aims to increase the number of "specialist teachers" of English, the number of these educators remains low. Moreover, the budget to hire such English professionals has been cut down in most public elementary schools. As a result, it is anticipated that English classes will be conducted mainly by homeroom teachers who have less experience in teaching a foreign language.

Applications of Songs in English Language Education

Children enjoy singing and find pleasure in learning new songs. Many of them are delighted to show what they learned in class in front of their parents later in the day (Paul, 2003). According

to one Uzbekistan teacher, "Teachers can contextualize instruction by taking the content and turning it into songs that relate to young learners' lives" (Shin & Crandall, 2014, p. 101). Curtain and Dahlberg (2016) also insist, "Songs learned in the target language have the double benefit of giving students experience with an important dimension of the target culture and helping them to internalize the sounds, vocabulary, rhythms, and structures of the new languages" (p. 370). Other advantages and benefits of song use for language classrooms are the joy of lessons (Millington, 2011; Slattery & Willis, 2003), more cultural input (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016; Degrave, 2019; Millington, 2011; Rockell, 2016), more variety in class (Slattery & Willis, 2003), and higher motivation (Binns, 2016; Degrave, 2019). Furthermore, vocabulary and grammar lessons (Kanel, 1997; Millington, 2011; Slattery & Willis, 2003), pronunciation and speaking practice (Millington, 2011), automaticity and memorization (Paul, 2003; Rockell, 2016; York, 2011), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Binns, 2016) are the privileges students can acquire through songs.

Suggestions for Song Creation

Traditional Songs in Japan

As western music was deliberately taught since the Meiji period, most Japanese are very familiar with western melodies. In addition, Japanese people might be surprised to discover that some of our well-known traditional songs such as *Chocho* (the *butterfly* song) and *Hotaru no Hikari* (the light of fireflies) were born in western countries. Moreover, those songs have long been believed to be Japanese original songs although they were the 'modified' version of the western traditional songs (Yanagawa, 2021).

Adaptation of Songs

Paul (2003) states that there are many great children's songs teachers want to use for their classes. Thus, he encourages language teachers to modify original verses to help learners acquire more words, phrases, and expressions through songs. Abe-Ford (2001) also believes that English songs are effective for acquiring 'natural' English. According to her, teachers should modify verses relevant to the students' levels, interests, and environment. *Come Come Everybody*, the popular TV

morning drama series aired on the Japanese national broadcasting network NHK in 2021, began with the opening song of their actual radio English course featured between 1946 and 1951. This popular opening song was derived from the melody of a well-known Japanese children's song called *Shojoji no Tanukibayashi* [Raccoon Dogs Dancing at Shojoji Temple]. In the drama, this "English" song captivated children and elderly individuals across Japan, becoming a source of encouragement and enthusiasm toward learning English during the transformative times (Come Come Everybody, 2023). In contrast to Abe-Ford (2001) and Paul (2003), some scholars, such as Kanel (1997), disagree with the ideas of adapting songs for English education. He points out that authentic songs have some mistakes, non-standard structures and vocabulary, and irregular stress and intonation patterns. Therefore, teachers should develop new *language learning* songs by themselves. Takahashi, Kawai, Sawada, and Yanagi (2021) acknowledge the importance of choosing familiar music or simple melodies for the adaptation of songs for elementary school English. Teachers should also be aware that these songs are not always easy to sing for the learners. Takahashi et al. (2021) also advocate that strong attention must be paid to the selection of songs when teaching unique sounds and rhythms that are not found in the Japanese language to teach English. According to Takahashi et al. (2021), singing with some very popular tunes would be a significant challenge for young learners to acquire *English-like* pronunciation/intonation. Therefore, those melodies would not be suitable as a teaching resource for experiencing the authentic English language. Takahashi et al. (2021) also state that it is crucial to educate learners about the distinctions in singing method, language characteristics, and pronunciation and rhythm when adapting Japanese songs or English songs in class. Consequently, it is desirable to offer instructions that can generate a sense of accomplishment among students (Millington, 2011), such as "I understood the meaning of the English lyrics!" or "I sang like an English speaker!"

Steps for Song-Creation

Songs are introduced to English classes with different purposes. For example, as background music, chanting for vocabulary exercise, using actions/gestures for review, or for code-switching. The following are the modified steps for song-creation (Shimada, 2014, p. 29) based on the ideas from Kanel (1997) and Paul (2003):

1. Consider your students levels and interests, the environment, and the lesson schedule
2. Decide your target words, phrases and grammar points
3. Brainstorm a list of simple, popular melodies
4. Create verses (with your target words or phrases) and sing along with a familiar melody
5. Revise those verses if they do not match the melody (rewording, rephrasing or using contractions effectively)

The extra step 6 such as "Create gestures to the lyrics" would also work effectively to reinforce the meaning of the song.

Difficulties of Song-Creation for Inexperienced Teacher-Singers

Based on the author's experience of song-creation, the most significant feature of word substitution seems to be that it results in new or complex syllable groupings based on the melodies.

Types of Songs to Introduce in English Classrooms

Total Physical Response (TPR)

Asher's TPR (1969) is a popular method for young language learners. TPR works effectively in beginners' classrooms when checking students' comprehension. In this theory, teachers give instructions to students, and they show their understanding with actions without saying a word. It is also possible to make the following TPR song more student-centered if the students sing in turn (instead of a teacher), swapping *color* words.

<u>*Color* song</u>

Tune*: London Bridge* (*ENG)

Who is wearing something **<u>blue</u>? Something <u>blue</u>? Something <u>blue</u>?
Who is wearing something <u>blue</u>? Please stand up!/Please sit down!

Note. *ENG means English traditional songs, and JPN means Japanese traditional songs for children. **The words can be replaced with other words in the same vocabulary group.

Simple Questions and Answers

Simple Q & A songs can easily be created based on the tunes of popular children's songs using the 'repetitive' phrases in some picture books. The story texts in *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* (Carle, 1970) and *Panda Bear, Panda Bear, What Do You See?* (Carle, 2006) can be sung along with the two popular melodies: *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*, and the *Teddy Bear* song. Teachers can also create an easy and fun Q & A song based on the simple story of the picture book. Below the author presents two songs focusing on the story content *Pancakes* and *Acrobats*. Learning songs in the target language through picture books will give students triple benefits---song, language, and story.

Pancakes song (based on the storybook *Pancakes, pancakes!* by Eric Carle)

Tune: *Are You Sleeping? (ENG)*

[Verse I]

Are you hungry? Are you hungry? How about you? How about you?
Have some pancakes Have some pancakes Now I'm full Now I'm full

[Verse II]

Pan, pan, pancakes Pan, pan, pancakes Nice and hot Nice and hot
Add a little butter Add a little butter Now it's done Now it's done

Can You Do This? (based on the storybook *Cornelius* by Leo Lionni)

Tune: *London Bridge (ENG)*

Can you do this difficult trick? Difficult trick? Difficult trick? Can you do this difficult trick?

"Students in turn show the trick (instead of acrobats) here!"

Yes, I can. / No, I can't. (Yes, we can. / No, we can't.) Answer version 1
I can do it. / I can't do it. (We can do it. / We can't do it.) Answer version 2

Topic-Based Songs

When creating songs, it is important to think about how to relate songs to students' everyday lives (Shin & Crandall, 2014) as well as to find connections with new or familiar topics (Slattery & Willis, 2003). Based on the *Influenza* song (see Appendix) which was created in 2009 when the flu viruses rapidly spread across Japan, the author modified that song to develop the COVID-19 pandemic version in 2020.

Virus Protection Measures

Tune: *Row, Row, Row Your Boat (ENG)*

1.	Wear, wear, wear your mask	To keep the germs away!	(Repeat verse 1)
2.	Wash, wash, wash your hands	To keep you clean and safe!	(Repeat verse 2)
3.	Play, play, play all day	But keep your mask on tight!	(Repeat verse 3)
4.	Eat, eat, eat your lunch	But keep the chatter out!	(Repeat verse 4)

Grammar Rules

A study of college students by Kanel (1997) found positive results when conducting song-based activities. The study concluded that songs would work as effectively as other conventional activities in language education. Many students the author taught had difficulty acquiring grammar rules. For example, young students were often confused with verbs used for sports. The song verses, therefore, were arranged in accordance with the verbs such as *play, do, skate, ski, surf*, etc. As Millington (2011) states, "By adapting the song in this way, the teacher has the advantage of being able to select a particular language feature and incorporate it into the song. This feature could be an item of vocabulary, syntax, phonology, or a simple conversational expression. This allows the teacher to incorporate more songs into a curriculum and save time searching for and learning new songs" (p. 140).

<u>*Sports* song</u>

Tune: *Are You Sleeping?* (ENG)

[Verse 1]		[Verse 2]	
Let's play together	Let's play together	Let's play together	Let's play together
Let's play **<u>baseball</u>	Let's play <u>baseball</u>	Let's play <u>tennis</u>	Let's play <u>tennis</u>
Let's play <u>basketball</u>	Let's play <u>basketball</u>	Let's play <u>ping-pong</u>	Let's play <u>pingpong</u>
Let's play <u>soccer</u>	Let's play <u>soccer</u>	Let's play <u>golf</u>	Let's play <u>golf</u>

[Verse 3]		[Verse 4]	
Let's do together	Let's do together	Let's <u>ski and skate</u>	Let's <u>ski and skate</u>
Let's do <u>yoga</u>	Let's do <u>yoga</u>	Let's <u>snowboard</u>	Let's <u>snowboard</u>
Let's do <u>Kendo</u>	Let's do <u>Kendo</u>	Let's <u>surf and swim</u>	Let's <u>surf and swim</u>
Let's do <u>Karate</u>	Let's do <u>Karate</u>	Let's <u>roller skate</u>	Let's <u>roller skate</u>

Seasonal Events/Cultural Input

One of the benefits of learning a foreign language is exposure to different cultures and viewpoints. In that respect, it is estimated that combining language and culture into songs can nurture children's cultural awareness and interest. Chen (2009) defines one of the merits of song use as "a kaleidoscope of culture" and states, "Language and music are interwoven in songs to communicate cultural reality in a very unique way" (p. 88). While singing the 'World food' song, the students will naturally encounter food from another country that they have never known before. It could be a song that arouses their curiosity about food, countries, and people. While singing the second 'Halloween & Christmas' song, children can experience and enjoy traditional games, and acquire seasonal greetings as well as vocabulary.

***World Food* song**

Tune: *London Bridge* (ENG)

1. Have you ever eaten **Sinigang (Filipino food)? Sinigang? Sinigang?
Have you ever eaten Sinigang? Yes, I have. / No, I haven't.
2. Have you ever eaten Zoni (Japanese food)? Zoni? Zoni?
Have you ever eaten Zoni? Yes, I have. / No, I haven't.
3. Have you ever eaten Black pudding (British food)? Black pudding? Black pudding?
Have you ever eaten Black pudding? Yes, I have. / No, I haven't.
4. Have you ever eaten Vegemite (Australian food)? Vegemite? Vegemite?
Have you ever eaten Vegemite? Yes, I have. / No, I haven't.

Note. **The words can be replaced with other words in the same vocabulary group.

Halloween & Christmas

Tune: *Ring-a-Ring-o' Roses* (ENG)

[Verse I]
Ring-a-Ring-a Lantern
A pocket full of candy corn
Trick or treat! Trick or treat!
We all get the treats

[Verse II]
Black cats on the roof
Vampires in the coffins
We all scream! We all scream!
With a loud, loud voice

[Verse I]
Ring-a-Ring-a Christmas tree
A pocket full of candy cane
Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!
We all decorate the tree

[Verse II]
Santa with many presents (Christmas gifts)
Reindeers pull the sleigh
We're all in bed. We're all in bed.
With sweet, sweet dreams

Language Teachers' Preference of Music Based on the Mini-Survey and Feedback

Teachers' Preferences

The results of the mini-survey (Table 1) conducted by Shimada (2014) with 28 English teachers based in Japan show that many of them prefer to use familiar melodies of 'English' songs in their English classes such as *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*, *London Bridge*, and *Bingo*. According

to the respondents, tunes of English songs are already familiar to Japanese children and easier for them to learn; therefore, it does not matter if the tunes come from English traditional songs. A few teachers responded that the students are able to relax and enjoy songs more with English melodies perhaps with a faster tempo in comparison with Japanese songs. Another reason is that because Japanese songs are unfamiliar to some non-Japanese teachers, they feel comfortable using English songs instead. There are a few teachers who do not care about the types of melody as long as the tunes fit their students' levels and include appropriate tempo and rhythm. Below is the song list the teachers preferred to apply the melody to their English classrooms. The number in brackets after the song title means the number of respondents in the survey who use that song:

Table 1

Survey of 28 English teachers' melody preferences (adapted from Shimada, 2014, p. 30)

English song name	Number of teacher's preference	Japanese song name	Number of teacher's preference
Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star	20	*Ai, Ai* [Monkey]	6
10 Little Indians/Monkeys	17	*Chocho* [Butterfly]	5
London Bridge	17	*Churippu* [Tulip]	2
Bingo	14	*Mori no Kuma-san* [The other	2
If You're Happy	11	day I met a bear]	
Are You Sleeping?	11		
Row, Row, Row Your Boat	10		

Japanese Students' Preferences

In the 90-minute teacher education class in November 2021 and another class in November 2022, the author assigned her university students to create songs using any familiar melodies of traditional songs. The tunes they (10 pairs and 15 individuals) used for their song creation in the author's teacher education classes are as follows (Table 2).

Table 2

Tunes chosen for song creation in a teacher education class

Tune title	Number of times chosen	Tune title	Number of times chosen
Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star	*9*	*It's a Small World*	*1*
London Bridge	*4*	*Mary Had a Little Lamb*	*1*
Jingle Bells	*2*	*Mickey Mouse Club March*	*1*
Are You Sleeping?	*1*	**The Other Day, I Met a Bear*	*1*
Edelweiss	*1*	**Tulip*	*1*
Happy Birthday	*1*	*Under the Spreading Chestnut Tree*	*1*
If You're Happy	*1*		

Note. *Japanese traditional song

Table 2 shows the students' first choice was *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*, and the second was *London Bridge*. It should be noted that there was only one Japanese traditional song, *Tulip* included in the list. Although there were more varieties in their music selection compared to the list of veteran teachers, some students were struggling to fit their original lyrics with the melodies they chose. As a result, some of their English songs were like "Japanese-English" songs. The following song is the example of this.

<u>*Christmas* song</u>

Tune: *Mickey Mouse Club March* (ENG)

December 24th is <u>Christmas</u> [*ku-ri-su-ma-su*]

Santa Clause <u>gives</u> [giiives] me a <u>present</u> [*pu-re-ze-n-tou*]

There are many [maaany] of Christmas food

Turkey and cakes and roast [roooast] beef

Types of Music Used for the *Wee Sing* Series

The Selection of *Wee Sing* CDs

The *Wee Sing* series have long been quite popular among children and their parents, and teachers in the United States. Many parents and teachers in Japan are also familiar with the cover illustrations of those CDs or songbooks. Table 3 below is the list of tunes used for five *Wee Sing* CDs: *Children's Songs and Fingerplays*, *And Play*, *In the Car*, *Dinosaurs*, and *For Halloween*. Some CDs including *Christmas Songs*, *Bible Songs*, *25th Anniversary Celebration*, and the *Mother Goose* are excluded as their music is basically original and due to the possibility of overlapping of the music in the selected CDs.

Table 3

List of most common tunes in the Wee Sing series and how many times they are featured per CD

		Wee Sing series CDs				
Rank	Tune name (total times a tune is used)	*Children's Songs and Fingerplays* (~55 songs)	*And Play* (~30 songs)	*In the Car* (~45 songs)	*Dinosaurs* (~40 songs)	*For Halloween* (~30 songs)
1	Ten Little Indians (6)	2	2			2
1	Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star (6)	3		2		1
2	Mulberry Bush (5)	3	1			1
2	The Farmer in the Dell (5)		3	1		1
3	Are you Sleeping? (4)	3				1
3	Battle Hymn (4)	1		1	2	
3	If You're Happy (4)	1		2		1
4	Christmas Day (3)				2	1
4	Rain, Rain, Go Away (3)	3				

The Tunes Used for Wee Sing CDs

As shown in Table 1, the most popular tunes are *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* and *Ten Little Indians*, and both melodies are used for six songs on three CDs. In the previous research with English teachers in Japan, these songs were also ranked No. 1 and No. 2. The second most popular tunes are *Mulberry Bush* and *The Farmer in the Dell*. They are used for three CDs. The third most popular tunes are *Are You Sleeping?* and *If You're Happy* (both were also popular among English teachers in Japan), and *Battle Hymn* (this melody appears twice in the *Dinosaurs* CD songs). There are 5 scale songs that are mostly used for the *Children's Songs and Fingerplays* CD songs; however, they are arranged in different ways in terms of rhythms, etc. Thus, they are excluded from this list.

Discussion

The previous research of Shimada (2014) revealed that the majority of teachers teaching English to young EFL learners in Japan preferred tunes from English songs to ones from Japanese songs. Those teachers confessed that non-Japanese instructors were unfamiliar with traditional Japanese melodies.

Similar results emerged from the song selection by Japanese university students in the author's teacher education classes in this study. Additionally, the top 3 tunes selected for the songs of *Wee Sing* series include the same traditional English songs that appeared in the two studies such as: *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*, *Are You Sleeping?*, and *If You're Happy*. Millington (2014) states that many teachers are unaware of the effectiveness or potential of song use. Therefore, more teachers should use "songs as pedagogical tools" (p. 134) as he defines.

Children are fond of songs, and homeroom teachers tend to use CDs and other audio materials to teach English more frequently. Songs bring joy to the classroom and create a relaxing atmosphere. They also add variety to the everyday routine. However, there are some issues and limitations when adapting songs to class. For example, unless the teacher chooses the suitable music and appropriate tempo, the lyrics of the English song might cause students' mispronunciation and the wrong stress of English words. As presented in Japanese Students' Preferences, the *Christmas* song created by the Japanese student shows some words with extremely

long stress and voiced sound instead of voiceless sound. This might put language learners in danger of acquiring *Japanese-English* instead of natural English.

These findings suggest that more teachers should learn English songs and attend workshops to acquire skills in song adaptation.

Conclusion

As songs draw naturally on the affective dimension and emotions, it is reasonable to anticipate their potential to be adapted for presenting standard syllable stress in spoken language. "Musical elements trigger positive emotions, motivation, verbal memory, social bonding or even self-regulation, all of which are needed for the development of good language skills" (Fonseca-Mora, 2016, p. 6).

Binns (2016) emphasizes the importance of the physiological effects that music can have on individuals, suggesting that educators should carefully contemplate the music they choose to incorporate into the classroom in the future. She also states "music cannot teach students unless it is combined with suitable preparation, justification, and tasks. Music, just like any supplemental tool, can be used constructively and effectively or not: its effectiveness depends totally on the teacher" (p. 17).

The research on song use has not been examined adequately. More in-depth research and detailed surveys on song creation for young learners' English classrooms should be conducted with larger samples. Lectures and workshops on the adaptation of songs specifically for public elementary school teachers are desperately needed. Song creation and adaptation should also be incorporated into the curriculum for university teacher candidates. Furthermore, teachers of young learners of English should make more efforts to actively introduce songs to their EFL classrooms.

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Appendix

(Presented in Shimada, 2014)

***Influenza* song**

Tune: *Row, Row, Row Your Boat (ENG)*

1. Gargle, gargle, gargle — When you have sore throat

(Repeat two lines)

2. Blow, blow, blow your nose — Gently blow your nose

#(Repeat two lines)

#(Optional) Gently, gently, gently, gently — Gently blow your nose

3. Wear, wear, wear your mask — When you cough so hard

(Repeat two lines)

4. Stay, stay, stay in bed — Quietly stay in bed/When your fever's high

#(Repeat two lines)

#(Optional line) Quietly, quietly, quietly, quietly — Quietly stay in bed

Using the Space: Details of a Summer Acting Program for Japanese High School Students

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Abstract

Theatre has potential as a form of experiential learning, and language learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts could be ideal contexts for extensive language practice through such an approach given the lack of opportunity many students have to use the language meaningfully outside of class. The current study introduces a summer program designed by the author for members of a Japanese high school's English club. I discuss the schedule and details of the various parts of this program, then briefly review data from student reflection surveys about the overall experience. The program set out to give the students a novel and performative approach to English, and findings from the surveys suggest that the experience was transformative and broadened their understanding of non-verbal communication.

This paper provides a rationale, description, and participant review of a summer program designed to give a group of Japanese high school students the chance to participate in a series of acting workshops. I conceived and created the program as a blend of experiential learning and embodied learning, which I consider to be closely aligned. Used here, embodied learning follows on ideas from Barsalou (1999, 2008) whose work has allowed us to understand that we make use of our motor-sensory memory of something that we once perceived when we recall it later. By extension, this suggests the importance of corporeal and sensory input during learning. From this concept, I came to understand the importance of working on the physical aspects of performance, and my motivation for the summer program described and analyzed in this paper had its origins in work I had

previously done regarding theatre rehearsals, particularly my experimentation with a task design that has learners analyzing play scripts in pairs (Reid, 2016). Working in the performing arts on various stage management crews, I had witnessed the utility and potential in the recursive practice of rehearsals, and I became more interested in how performers went about building a living, four-dimensional performance from an inert text. This process is, after all, the lifeblood of what makes the mode of theatre unique. I wondered how many opportunities many students have had, if any, to explore this aspect of language in their learning. I wanted to find a way to give students a similar experience of exploration and reflection through performance.

Introduction

For second language (L2) learning, theatre and drama have attracted a consistent amount of attention from scholars. Theatre production as a total experience is posited as a framework for second language learning in studies such as Smith (1984) and Ryan-Scheutz and Colangelo (2004). The former outlined an entire course built around theatre production. The latter staged a production of a play in Italian performed by native English-speaking students and unofficial pre- and post-tests offered some evidence of language improvement, with participants showing high motivation and appreciation of the immersive experience. Within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, Belliveau and Kim (2013) provide an extensive synthesis of various studies regarding theater and drama in L2 classrooms, with their findings indicating that learners appreciate that theatre is intrinsically rewarding and engaging and that it offers a deeper exploration of language use than other activities. Park (2015) describes three different case studies of the implementation of theatre activities that echo these participant sentiments, while Gualdron and Castillo (2018) describe their ongoing English-medium theatre program for university students in Colombia and note that their program can effectively address numerous aspects of language learning, including the affective dimension and intercultural competence. One of the dominant conclusions to draw from these varied works is the positive effects theatre activities have on motivation and engagement (thus, on learner affect), as well as frequent self-reports of language development. The process of theatre itself receives a lot of attention, and certain more emergent methodologies such as process drama (e.g., Kao & O'Neill, 1998), deemphasize the production aspect of theatre in favor or student-centered role-plays that make use of activities often associated with rehearsals and actor training courses. This mirrors the sentiments of

earlier authors such as Maley and Duff (1978), who advocated for a similar emphasis of process over product.

As a practitioner-researcher of theatre in L2 learning, I tend to take an opposing view, one that would agree with the sentiments of scholars like Via (1987) who emphasizes the importance of theatre and its communication with an audience. Via discusses in detail the "senses" that demand attention when practicing theatre, and these are not the typical senses of the body but rather sense as in awareness of the self, the audience, and the relationship between the two (p. 114-115). This awareness asks learners to consider the possibility that people are already unconsciously monitoring themselves in regard to an audience in their daily lives. Indeed, a heightened awareness of how meaning is conveyed with non-verbal behaviors might elicit a response in the audience, for example, as a visual or auditory signal might trigger a connection to their own sensory experience of the world. So, in essence, considering the reception of an audience is a primary preoccupation of theatre.

Given the audience's eventual viewing of a performance as the raison d'être for the whole enterprise, my experience as a student of theatre, along with my work in the performing arts, push me to favor a focus on production. I see the various 'games' of rehearsals serving a larger purpose: they are meant to develop trust between performers and hone both mental and physical skills necessary for performance in front of an audience. In this way, I view rehearsal as a place of discovery, certainly, but the journey is very much about the destination; the impending performances necessitate exploration and thorough preparation. Theatre is an aesthetic practice like any other art, and so the matter of aesthetic appreciation, in other words the audience's reception and interpretation of a work, must be firmly in a performer's mind. One matter that may be overlooked in approaches like process drama that eschew public performance is the actual utility of different games. Rehearsal games often involve a great amount of physicality because theatre performance itself will also need clear voice as well as interpretable movement and corporeal expression. It has been my estimation that this latter non-verbal side of performance receives less attention outside of perhaps gestures and facial expressions as a superficial aspect. Other non-verbal aspects have equally clear importance in making meaning in a theatre since they convey meaning in real-life. Haptics (touch) and proxemics, to name just two examples, are interesting and seemingly underdeveloped areas of dramatic performance when one considers how such non-verbal communication can be interpreted by the audience. This discussion gave me the motivation

for my summer workshop: I wanted to give a group of English language students the chance to fully embody the language they practice.

With this goal in mind, I designed a program built around developing participants' ability with the physical side of theatre performance: vocal quality, gestures and poses, kinesics, and proxemics. The theoretical framework for this study draws from existing rationale for experience as a source of learning. Kolb (1984) notes that, "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience…" (p. 38). This process, this cycle, is something Kolb identifies as consistent among the theorists, such as Lewin, Dewey and Piaget, who inform his own work and gave rise to a cycle of learning which is, to summarize and simplify to some extent: 1) concrete experience which is followed by, 2) reflection that informs, 3) conceptual analysis and, finally, leads to 4) application of the results of that cycle (Ibid., p. 21-25). In essence, the last step refers to related situations and not just the specific experience that initiated the cycle. This cycle shows that learners learn through participation and reflection. This view aligns well with theatre praxis in terms of how rehearsals prepare for performance. Scene work is recursive—performers return again and again to the text, to the situation, and work through it. New insights come from reflection that then manifests through analysis into plans for future articulation. Moreover, theatre is arguably ideal for such a cycle as the activity itself affords participants with the opportunity to use their imaginations to inhabit and explore any interactive situation that can be simulated on a stage. Theatre is, in essence, very much about *play,* about experience without real-world stakes.

Scholars working within various disciplines have frequently noticed this potential of theatre as an experiential, educational instrument, both in and of itself, and in applied contexts. For example, Sinha and D'Souza (2022) looked at the use of role-plays in corporate training and reference Kolb's learning cycle in their rationale. Among their findings they noted that '[the application of theatre] ... not only stimulates participants intellectually but also emotionally and, thus, represents a situation with logic and mindfulness. […] [They] can actually "see the problem" rather than just [discuss it].' (p. 9) *(authors' quotation marks).* From this study we can see that, as Kolb discussed, the experience itself is vital; it cannot be an abstract consideration of a subject, it must be a direct interface with it. This interface affords an immediacy of situation that also aligns well with embodied learning, discussed above, as the experience is very much about experimenting with physicality and being present and moving on a stage.

Given this ideal utility, the most pertinent question that remains is how theatre as experiential learning can be implemented in a more traditionally focused EFL context. Regarding this implementation, Knutson (2003) notes that while there has been recognition and promotion of experiential learning, a lack of consensus on methods and teacher training remains. The author also states, however, that, "The method is easily adaptable to a wide variety of educational settings, especially to classrooms where project-based and task-based learning already form the core of a curriculum." (p. 53). Indeed, I agree that theatre practice aligns well with both, albeit only if a task-based approach can be said to accommodate the complex, longitudinal nature of theatre and preparation for performance to the same extent as project-based learning.

A Summer Program: Acting in English

Setting

Japan is a challenging context for L2 learning. The nation is, for the most part, both genetically and linguistically homogenous. Secondary school students study English as a subject for both high school and university entrance examinations but lack external exposure to the language daily unless they actively seek it out via the internet or other broadcast media. Even then, there is little necessity in daily life for most people to use it outside of school.

Motivation

As a teacher working within this context and dealing with its real constraints and opportunities, I have always strived to make the most out of lessons and afford students ample time to work with the language and become comfortable and gain better command through consistent, varied practice. Theatre has always been a means for me to achieve this, and I recall observing how both theatre rehearsals of existing plays, and sessions of devising theatre as well, have performers consistently engaging with language again and again as they experiment with different interpretations and performance choices. While students studying English at a high school in Japan are not training to be actors, I felt they could benefit from seeing how *fully* embodying a communicative act could help raise their awareness of how verbal language interacts with non-verbal aspects.

Therefore, I wanted to see what would happen if students were asked to pay more mind to the physical side of performance rather than to the words they were saying. That is to say, they were free to attend to language matters as they deemed necessary, but I would keep

my focus squarely on guiding their embodiment of character. In order to allow discoveries of connections between body and language to occur naturally, I never overtly stated that my desired objective was for them to gain a better understanding of how non-verbal factors affected verbal performance and the meanings being conveyed. Instead, perhaps in the vein of a sociology experiment, I left this objective undisclosed and waited to see what students mentioned in their reflections. With this in mind, I contacted the affiliated teachers who supervised the English club at the research site and from their consultation regarding time commitments, I designed and prepared the materials for the series of sessions that together made up the workshop.

Design of the Program

The program was split into two one-week sessions with a two-week break in between for summer holidays. The first week involved three three-hour workshops centered around the students trying out various drama games. For this, I used games that I was familiar with from my time as a theatre student or as a stage manager observing rehearsals. Students would try out these games and then learn about the basic intended purpose for each game in regard to rehearsing for a performance. These workshops took place on alternating weekdays. After this first week, students were tasked with devising a basic plot and script for their performance. It was decided between the participants and their club supervisors that this performance would take place during their high school's culture festival and serve as the showcase for their English club.

During the two-week break, students worked on their own to select a story to perform as a short play for the showcase. The second week of the program commenced after the break. For this week, I met with students for four days and held rehearsals of their play. Each morning started with around 20-30 minutes of warm-ups utilizing the games introduced in the previous workshop sessions. The remaining time varied between 2-4 hours depending on student availability. This time was devoted to rehearsing various scenes of the play. I told the students to assume some directorial responsibilities and allow me to function as an advisor. After a one-week break, the workshop concluded with a performance of their devised work.

Table 1

Workshop Schedule

Week	Day	Session	Schedule
1	Monday	Day 1	Introductions, Warm-up Games, Physical Movement Work
	Wednesday	Day 2	Warm-up Games, Physical Movement Work, Tableau Work
	Friday	Day 3	Warm-up Games, Tableau Work, Scene Analysis
2-week break			
2	Monday	Day 4	Scene Work
	Tuesday	Day 5	Scene Work
	Thursday	Day 6	Scene Work; Full Run-thru
	Friday	Day 7	Technical Rehearsal + Dress rehearsal
1-week break			
3	Saturday	Day 8	Performance

Overview of Program Activities

My desire was to build participants' ability for performance in the first week through a variety of activities that put emphasis on the physical aspect of theatre, including the need for greater vocal projection and movement, gestures, and facial expressions that are 'readable' to audience members whether they sit in the front row or the balcony. This is a special demand of theatre, particularly since theatre traditionally does not employ any electronic amplification of sound nor does it make use of any video equipment for close-ups of performers' faces. Therefore, the body needs to communicate in ways that can be perceived from a distance. This communication includes the use of proxemics.

Warm-up Games

These brief group activities, such as "Zip, Zap, Zop" and "Mirror Exercise" are likely what many would refer to as drama games. They are mostly physical in that they involve the actors moving around and using their body. There is typically minimal language input our output. Participants are meant to be aware of one another and learn to read each other's body language and become comfortable with reacting quickly.

Physical Movement Work

Various short skits involving some improvisation and reaction. The idea of such work is to encourage the actors to 'inhabit the scene' to 'be present' and be willing to respond to the performance choices of their skit partners. One short skit we practiced was to manifest a secret in some way physically and perform a scene. In a short scene, one character is asked to have a basic conversation with another character, but that character has a secret they think will be discovered. So, I asked the actors to imagine that this secret was a literal object on their person or somewhere in the room and their goal was to make sure that their partner did not find it.

Tableau Work

For the version that I used in the program, a tableau is a theatre training exercise where a director or teacher calls out a theme and actors choose to pose within a 'frozen' scene together. Typically, one or two initial choices will lead others to adapt to those choices and add themselves and their ideas into the 'picture' being made. In addition to the desire for building trust, comfort, and awareness between groups members, this activity received specific and separate attention from other warmups and physical movement as it was meant to be further utilized in rehearsals as a means of making meaning *without* words.

Scene Work

This refers to the participants working with their devised text. I wanted them to be responsible for each other's language and, as with any piece of devised theatre, take on some directorial responsibility. As they were new to this experience, I naturally served as an expert observer and moved between groups to offer any insight and advice I felt was useful at that moment. All the same, I left script continuity in their hands and focused solely on, and only reacted to, what they were showing me through their performances. In this way, I tried to indirectly encourage them to refer to the script but leave it aside when performing and try to truly inhabit the moment.

Technical and Dress Rehearsals

Lacking the budget or production level that is typical of theatre (the performance had no set and used only a small amount of lighting fixtures), these two rehearsals happened in the same afternoon. The performance involved some off-stage narration delivered by

participants with hand-held microphones. So, the technical rehearsal focused on those matters, as well as the minimal lighting cues and other sound cues present in the performance. The dress rehearsal commenced after a break and allowed everyone one last chance to rehearse as an ensemble, this time in costumes and accompanied by light and sound cues.

Performance

As mentioned before, the performance itself was presented as part of the showcase of the high school's English club and their activities. Therefore, this public performance was limited to just this one occurrence.

Findings from Student Reflections

I administered open-ended reflection surveys for all participants after the conclusion of the public performance. Students were free to fill out their reflections in Japanese or English. I translated the Japanese responses into English and, for any case in which an accurate translation was unclear, I consulted a native Japanese-speaking colleague and asked them to check my translation of those cases. I used a grounded approach to qualitative analysis (c.f., Charmaz, 2006). Using this method, items are coded as they are encountered in order to let salient themes emerge from the data, rather than bringing a particular preconceived coding system to the data and focusing on those aspects exclusively. For discussion of this analysis, each participant has been given a pseudonym.

Overall, the student feedback focused on the transformative nature of this experience. Consider the post-performance reflection of one participant, Mary (translated from Japanese):

> *"I am not good at English and to be honest, I don't like it that much, so I didn't have much motivation at first. But I decided that if I was going to do it anyway, I would try my best, so I asked for advice from everyone and tried to listen to what the teachers had to say. Just by changing my mind, I became more motivated. I think it's great that I am surrounded by people who have a lot to learn from, such as people who have studied abroad, have an English test, or like Western movies and music. It made me want to get involved in English as much as I could. I thought it would be difficult and I didn't want to be in the show, but it felt good to feel a sense of achievement after the show, and most of all I was happy with the applause. I couldn't speak English perfectly, but I learnt to communicate with movements and facial expressions. I*

> *started off with negative feelings, but in the end it was fun and I'm glad I did it… [] … I hope this experience will lead to more opportunities to learn English and I hope I will come to like [them].*"

Mary's reflection on her experience highlights how important the final performance is to the process that precedes it. She was able to find satisfaction through participation and seemed to develop a more positive attitude towards English. The collaboration seemed fruitful for her as her fellow classmates each had their own individual experience with English that contributed to her change of attitude. Perhaps this type of opportunity had been lacking for her in her studies up to this point.

Skills development was another focus of student reflections. Lisa wrote the following about the summer program after the performance:

> *"Studying drama for the first time in forever. I worried that I may perhaps couldn't understand instructions in English. First, it was difficult for me to understand, but I gradually became used to English instruction. I learned communication way of expressing with our bodies. I could speak English a lot and I enjoy it. I want to [do] drama again."*

It is easy enough to interpret Lisa's sense of accomplishment with the program. She indicated the non-verbal portion in particular, and this was a topic also mentioned in the reflection of another participant, Emma, who wrote (translated from Japanese):

> *"[the authors'] drama coaching has helped me to be more expressive. I found out that theatre is not just about saying lines in a monotone way, but that you can get much more into the role and closer to the character by working on various aspects such as body language, facial expressions and the volume of the voice. I was a little anxious and nervous about performing in front of the whole school, but after many rehearsals and trusting my fellow students, I was able to achieve my goal. Everyone seemed to enjoy watching me perform and the amount of applause I received made me happy and confident."*

Once again, the overall process was capped with the satisfaction felt at the end of the performance. Emma came to appreciate the contributions that non-verbal communication makes to a performance and seemed to become more aware of how to control them and express herself better. This was an experience that was echoed by two other participants,

Carol and Anna, who also mentioned having anxiety about the performance and a feeling of accomplishment upon hearing the audience's applause.

While the sense of satisfaction from completing a performance after several rehearsals was doubtlessly transformative for everyone involved, not every participant ended up enjoying the act of performance itself. In this vein, Sarah offered a contrasting reflection of the experience, noting that she nevertheless found value in it and a motivation to apply some of what she learned. She wrote: (translated from Japanese):

> *"Summer holidays, communication at the center. I was taught to express myself through play. [The author] mainly taught me to speak loudly and express myself in a big way. I thought that even if I couldn't understand the language, I could communicate a little by expressing myself with my body. I could only understand a little English, so I struggled a bit, but I'm glad I managed. I'm not good at acting roles, so I don't think I'll be doing them in the future, but I thought I'd like to try communicating a little bit more."*

While others might consider doing a similar experience again, Sarah seemed satisfied and did not wish to pursue such an experience again. At the same time, she found a lot of value in the process, learned to appreciate aspects of non-verbal communication that are vital to performance, and seemed happy with her results in the end.

Discussion

Beyond the overall sense of achievement and satisfaction that the learners felt after their performances, they seemed to regard the rehearsals and workshops about movement, expressions, voice quality, and proxemics as useful. It could be fair to surmise that high school students, such as the participants in the current study, might not normally have such an experience at school in their own language, let alone in a foreign language. Therefore, the summer program could only go so far in training the participants in some of the skills that are necessary for theatrical performance. What is important to stress from this experience is that, while the ostensible goal of the program was to give the students some training in acting for theatre, the underlying objective was to motivate further language practice, facilitate development of language skills, and make stronger connections between language and physical experience rather than to develop the participants' acting ability. Regarding this point, the post-task reflections suggest that this aim was successful for all participants. Many

of them mentioned speaking and communication and reported feelings of improvement, but no one spoke about the experience strengthening their ability as performers of theatre, suggesting that the participants did indeed frame the experience as primarily one of language learning from the start. It could also be the consequence of the limited timeframe and scope of the program, or perhaps the consequence of the participants devising their own story rather than working with an extant English play script, thus increasing the challenge. Certainly, some of the participants seemed to value the collaborative aspect of the experience in general, but no one discussed how this aspect relates to actor training specifically.

The performance and its specific rehearsals only constituted half of the summer program, yet the post-performance participant reflections largely neglected to mention any of the workshops done in the first week. This might be the result of a recency bias given that four weeks separated the end of week-one and the day of performance. Nevertheless, my focus during rehearsals remained firmly on preparing for the performance, and I had the sense that the participants understood and appreciated the need for this preparation. As I worked with various participants in their respective scene rehearsals, I focused only on coaching them about blocking (their positioning and movement), which essentially left them to recall details from the earlier workshops and apply their own understanding of voice and body language to their performances. For example, the tableau activity from the workshop days could serve as reinforcement of spatial arrangement and posture as meaningful when considering where to situate the actors during a particular scene. However, a rehearsal note of mine from the first full rehearsal on Day 6 commented on the struggle some of the students had with considering how their proximity to one another could convey meaning. The matter was discussed after rehearsal but left unresolved and I simply trusted the participants to follow my advice for how they entered, exited, and moved around their scenes, which for the most part they did, although whether my notes about motivation for moving closer or further from someone at certain points in the dialogue were heeded was hard to discern. I attributed this to the relative inexperience they had with theater and acting and decided to lessen my emphasis on it for the final rehearsal. Nevertheless, I had expected some of the participants to mention blocking in some capacity given the focus I put on it during rehearsals, but the absence of comments suggests that the decision to introduce blocking during rehearsals was not successful and the participants likely needed some manner of introduction to blocking during the workshop days instead.

In conclusion, the current study adds to the available body of research that highlights how much of a transformative experience doing theatre in another language can be. Participants found achievement and satisfaction, and even if they did not develop any further interest in theatre or acting, they still found it useful. If these participants are any indication, many students are bereft of extended periods of meaningful engagement and experimentation with a language they are learning. Certainly, the exam-focused curriculum of Japanese high schools likely leaves some students far from satiated if they are seeking deeper opportunities for practice than what they get in their normal textbook-driven lessons. In cases like these, experiential learning through theatre production might be the ideal remedy.

Future Research Directions

As a closing to this paper, several limitations are highlighted to encourage further research. First, many contexts, particularly similar contexts to the high school in the current study, might not have the luxury to devote substantial portions of multiple days to undertake such a production. The program described in the current study required around 22 hours including the time for performance. This may represent too large of an undertaking for some, especially for learners of a similar age to the participants. Perhaps university level courses offer a better fit in terms of time, but as far as further research in concerned, future studies implementing a similar program with younger learners should be encouraged as they are often underrepresented in the research literature (which is particularly the case for high school students).

Second, it would be useful to see how native speakers perform in such a workshop to get a gauge of how much emphasis the participants put on non-verbal aspects of performance or how well they would respond to direction regarding blocking. This would help determine whether matters like blocking might be better off as secondary concerns for an introduction to theatre production. More importantly, it could help shed light on how different cultures go about the reflection process in experiential learning. Concerning this framework, participants were encouraged to talk to each other and reflect after rehearsals, but due to various constraints both internal and external, data collection could not extend to these individual reflections during and between rehearsals. Further research could follow a more ethnographic angle and accompany a participant through the process more fully and pay greater attention to when and how reflection on the experience happens and how it feeds the next cycle of the experience.

Lastly, in relation to that production, it would be good to see if rehearsals which focus on movement and the body nevertheless prompt students to discuss language and language use. Interaction between peers or between learner and teacher can be fruitful moments of incidental language focus within the larger work plan of a rehearsal, and, in a desire to make meaning, moments where learners need to understand certain choices they have to make in a performance could prompt a deeper discussion of the language that complements those choices.

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Why Teach Improv? Teaching Improvisation in University EFL Communication Classes

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Abstract

Improv, or improvisation, is not just for teaching performers and students. It is also taught in workshops to help people with social anxiety, ADHD, and autism (Amador, 2018), business leaders (Kulhan & Crisafulli, 2017), seniors, therapists, military and more. This paper focuses on the application of improv skills and techniques to EFL teaching. First, this paper describes what improv is, and what it is not, and compares and contrasts it to other similar performance teaching methods readers may be familiar with. The paper then examines the principles and skills taught in improv and argues why they are ideal for EFL communication teaching. It then outlines the typical components of the author's improv university lessons. Finally, it explains the ways by which activities were made increasingly challenging throughout the first semester leading to students performing short improv scenes in front of a small audience of classmates.

The image of modern-day improv is mostly from the TV show *"Whose Line Is It Anyway?"* In this high-paced, intense show professional comedians compete against each other by not only saying funny lines quickly, but also singing and dancing. So, it makes sense that most teachers would never think that improv would be ideal for teaching EFL communication. Trying to be fast, funny, and win points with jokes, all in a second language, is much too difficult for a second language learner.

However, while improv is often funny, it is not actually about telling jokes or trying hard to be funny. In fact, improv performances do not need to be funny and telling jokes will often ruin a scene (Halpern, Close, & Johnson, 1994). Even so, improv often is funny as participants are typically placed in a situation that is a strange combination of two or more elements that do not usually go together. In this kind of context, if the actor plays the situation straight, the result is often quite funny. If, for example, the scene is: "A guide takes tourists around, but clearly has no idea what he is talking about", all performers have to do is act out the situation in a straightforward way and often humor will be a by-product.

Improv Is a Craft

Several years ago I was reading a book on Improv called *Truth in Comedy: The Manual of Improvisation* (Halpern, Close, & Johnson, 1994) for enjoyment. I had performed stand-up comedy and was interested in learning more about other forms of comedy. As I read, I realized that improv is not just performing without preparation, it is a craft with many principles and rules that help improvisers perform well. Improvisers actually come prepared to speak spontaneously, because they have learned the craft. The principles of this craft are communication skills that are taught in improv workshops and classes through games, activities, and practice.

Improv vs. Other Similar Teaching Methods

Improv is similar to other methods of EFL communication education. Let us compare improv versus other forms of acting or theatre such as roleplay, readers theatre, drama theatre, screenplays, and drama techniques.

To start off, let us look at what these methods have in common. As Walker (2022) suggests, the major challenge for a teacher wanting to use any of these creative methods in an academic setting, "is in ensuring specific language-based learning objectives are being met, whilst also encouraging creative freedom amongst the students" (p.112). Thankfully that challenge makes for a better curriculum. Whether using screenplay, drama, or improv, there is more to these

approaches than just memorizing lines or speaking spontaneously. These teaching methods offer "considerably more learning opportunities when approached not as a traditional listening and speaking activity, but as a foundation for creative exploration in which language acquisition is organically embedded through context" and "provide students with a clear context to the learning objectives set out by the teacher" (p.114).

So how do these methods differ? Textbook dialogues and roleplays are often based on achievement goals relating to grammar points or vocabulary. A typical textbook dialogue focuses on prescribed vocabulary or grammar that may sound awkward when put together. The language used, while often useful, may not always be natural or have a realistic context. However, roleplays and readers theatre scripts can vary—they may have these textbook qualities or may be more context-based depending on the goals of the teacher.

Drama theatre and screenplays focus more on message and context, much like real life. Modern screenplays and drama theatre offer scripts written with more authentic English that a student might encounter in real life, where the context of each scene is important in getting across the overall message.

Improv takes this focus on context even further. Rather than providing scripts, improv provides prompts or situation cues that students must use as their context for communicating. Without a script to rely on, students must listen closely to what their group members say. Because listening is so important, students have to stay in the moment and not think ahead. Students are encouraged to speak "truthfully"—that is, to speak authentically based on the situation and according to the character they chose for the scene. The ESL student's words may not be grammatically correct at times—they are, after all, second language learners—but they will speak with the English language ability that they have at that time, much as they would have to if they traveled abroad.

So, the emphasis in improv is even more on the message than on speaking correctly. The major challenge and opportunity is that students must figure out how to communicate with the English ability that they have, making communication skills essential. "What do I say when I do

not have the right vocabulary or sentence structure to convey my message?" "What is the workaround to say what I need to say?"

Improv and drama techniques often use the same exercises or games to practice acting skills. This is because they both come from the work of Viola Spolin in her foundational book called *Improvisation for the Theater*, (Spolin, 1999). Kobayashi (2012) describes drama techniques as using "spontaneous 'games' to promote group synthesis, build confidence and encourage creative thought. They require no rehearsals, costumes or scripts; nor do they have to be perfect." (p.30). The same is true for improv. The difference is that while improv falls under the umbrella of drama techniques, improvisation is not only about games but also a form of theatre that can be acted out in front of an audience both in short and long form. In my classroom, I have used improv games to practice communication skills that have helped my students spontaneously perform improv scenes in front of a small audience by the end of the first semester. Let us look at the communication skills taught in improv that help students get their message across.

Why Improv Is Perfect for Teaching EFL

Before we go over a few of the principles, and skills, of improv, let us define the word "offer" in improv. An offer is any feeling, word, or action given by one performer to another.

The most famous principle in improv is that performers should say "Yes, and" to all offers. Improvisers need not use the exact words "Yes, and", but they must be accepting ("Yes") and adding to or building on what another improviser says ("and"). For example, if the first student says "I'm hungry. I'd like to go out and eat.", the second student would not say, "No thanks, I'm not hungry." That rejects the offer. Instead, they might say "Sure (*yes*), how about the Chinese restaurant downtown? (*and*). Then the first actor might say, "OK! (*yes*) Let's go in my car." (*and*).

Each improviser accepts what the previous person says or does, and adds to it, and the conversation continues. Experience shows that if someone says "no," that is, in some way rejects the offer, the conversation in an improv performance often hits a dead end. Actually, even if the

response is only “yes”, it is still difficult to keep the conversation going. However, "Yes, and" keeps the scene moving.

The “Yes, and” skill of accepting and building on what someone else says or does is a great skill for keeping a conversation going in real life, including conversations in a student’s second language. In improv, knowing that your partner or group will always accept what you say or do can be a real relief for second language learners who are often anxious about making mistakes or being rejected when speaking.

Next is the principle: “There are no mistakes, only opportunities.” I tell my students that this goes further than simply saying, “mistakes are OK.” The principle “There are no mistakes” means that whatever you say or do in an improv scene will not only be accepted by the other group members, but also used in the scene. What looks like a mistake that should be rejected, becomes an opportunity. Again, this takes away the stress that many learners experience around making a mistake in a second language in their regular studies. Acceptance like this leads to the next skill.

This skill of working with a supposed mistake is called “justifying” in improv. For example, if someone mimes a steering wheel but then says, “We’re flying!” To justify this “mistake" another performer might say, “This new car can transform into a plane.” Improv actors practice the skill of justifying with various games or activities so that they will be ready to work with whatever is thrown at them in a scene. One such activity is called “Strange Gift.” Here one player gives another a bizarre gift (e.g., “a broken traffic light” or “a bag of teeth”). The receiver must thank them and justify why it is exactly what they wanted. “Justifying” and “no mistakes” teaches the performers to support each other and creates trust. They learn that they will not be laughed at or rejected even if they say something that might normally be considered wrong. Justifying, which is really a form of adapting, is a skill that will be useful for a second language learner when facing real life situations where they will need to adapt.

Another principle of improv is “make your group look good,” which connects to the principle that “no one should stand out.” One actor should not take over a scene, instead the mindset is “How can I support my group?” This is a team approach. The emphasis on group work in improv works well with the strengths and values of Asian societies, that emphasize the group

over the individual. Asian students can use their strengths in group work to overcome their tendency to hesitate. Another benefit of focusing on the group is that students think less about themselves, and thereby feel less pressure. To apply these principles and make them communication skills, students play many games or activities that focus on one or more of the skills.

Why Improvisation? Why Should I Use Improv as an EFL Teacher?

Many educators see the value of the communication skills students learn from improv. As White (2018) states, in "Top Ten Improv Games for EFL Classrooms," "Many teachers have found that improvisation is valuable for a multitude of reasons, including increasing student motivation and lowering foreign language anxiety, creating a positive learning environment, and generally increasing the level of enjoyment for foreign language students" (p. 50).

How I Teach Improv

I work in a medium-sized public university in the Chubu region of Japan. My improv lessons are taught in the General Education Department to students of a variety of majors, including education and medicine. Classes typically consist of 30 to 35 first year students.

Typical Lesson

Journal writing is important in my improv classes. At the end of each lesson, students write short notes about the improv activities we did that day. For homework, students are asked to reflect on what we did in class. They refer to their notes, and typically write from 80 to 125 words, sharing their reflections and insights about what they did. They typically focus on the improv activities just done in class and, in terms of the improv principles and skills learned so far, write about such topics as: What did I learn from the activity or others? What did I notice? How have I improved? What could I do better?

During a typical lesson, I put students into random groups of 3 or 4 and start with a speaking warm-up. I do this so that over the semester they will get to know everyone in the class

and build comfort and trust in the classroom. I give the students a simple relatable question such as, "What is your favorite music group or singer?"

Next, it is time to share their journal writing homework. Students take a moment to silently reread their journal reflections. After that, students either read that journal entry or share it from memory. As the class gets closer to the end of the first semester, I encourage students to share their entries from memory, or only glance at the journal as they share.

Often, I give a short lecture on a principle or concept of improv that relates to what we are doing that day. I teach principles like "justifying" or "honesty" and students write notes from the whiteboard for homework. At midterm, I give a test on the major improv concepts and principles taught in class.

Next come the warm-up improv activities that we learned earlier in the semester. Students then learn new activities to practice the skill we are learning or reviewing. Each time, I explain what skills this activity practices. Otherwise, students might think the games are just silly games and not understand the point of the activity. Students then practice the new activity. Early in the semester these might be gesture and counting activities such as "What is it?" and "Counting on you" and then gradually they might be activities that require quick thinking and speaking like "Fortunately, Unfortunately." Finally as we approach the end of the semester the activities, such as the "Martha Game" (see end of the next section for explanation) look more and more like a regular improv scene. At the end of the lesson, students reflect in their journals in bullet-point form.

Progressing Through the Semester

I progress step-by-step through the semester so that students can gradually get to where they can perform improv with some confidence and trust in their classmates. Here are some steps that I use to make it as gradual and gentle as possible.

First, students need to get to know each other. The first activities should be simple and allow for lots of laughs. I also emphasize from the start that there are no mistakes in improv and that the goal is not to "do it right" but to enjoy the process and the activity. The games are not competitive.

Each class, students are in new groups of three or four so that they get to know as many classmates as possible. Sometimes, later in the lesson, groups combine and repeat an activity in a larger group which increases the challenge and their confidence.

Gradually, games become more challenging and closer to resembling performing an improv scene. Toward the end of the semester students will perform improv in front of another group of three or four students and then later in front of two groups. It is only during the middle to the end of the second semester that they perform in front of the whole class. However, to save time and keep a comfortable atmosphere, evaluations of performances are done in front of two groups.

What does improv look like? Due to limited space, groups perform simultaneously in different corners of the classroom, with one group performing while another provides the scene prompt, such as, "A restaurant where the waitress keeps getting the order wrong". The performing group does not plan anything, not even roles, but just starts performing immediately. Typically, one or two members of the group move toward the center of that part of the room (the stage) and begin. They need to move and use the "stage" area, otherwise they will stand in a small circle and talk and be less likely to act out the scene with lots of movement. They perform for two or three minutes. Afterward, the watching groups clap, and then the groups switch roles.

An example of an easier activity that is similar to performing an improv scene is called "The Martha Game". Just like an improv scene, performers go near the corner of the room and also get a scene prompt, such as "The Beach". Instead of having conversations, they only need to go out and say what they are. The first student might say "I'm a parasol" (*and gesture with their whole body being a parasol*). The next one might say "I'm a wave" (*and act out being a wave*), the third person might be a beach chair. Finally, the fourth person is an actual human and walks out to the beach and interacts or comments on the parasol, beach chair, and wave. That person might say something like "Oh the waves are so nice", (*putting their feet near the waves*) and "It's hot, I think I'll stand here" (*under the parasol*) and so on. These activities build toward two to three-minute improv scenes.

It is really rewarding when students can spontaneously perform their improv scenes. After everyone is done, I congratulate them on their scenes and remind them of the first class of the

semester when many felt that they could not do a scene without any preparation. I can see in their reactions that they realize they have come a long way. Second semester students review previous activities and skills and learn new ones.

Conclusion

Improvisation exercises teach communication skills such as "Yes, and" and "No mistakes" effectively in a fun, relaxed environment that helps students improve at listening, speaking spontaneously, and continuing a conversation. This happens gradually over a semester as trust is built up between classmates and as activities become increasingly challenging. Improv skills of listening, adaptability, and collaboration carry over to real-world communication. Future research could explore whether students' feelings toward English and their confidence in speaking spontaneously improve significantly by the end of a one or two semester course.

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Sharing Ainu Wisdom Through Music: Intercultural Encounters in Performance in Education (PIE)

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Abstract

This paper reports on Ainu artist and musician Motoi Ogawa's performance lectures given in two English-medium liberal arts elective courses, *Culture (Ethnomusicology)* and *Performance in English* at Komazawa University in Tokyo, during June 2025. The flow of classroom activity surrounding the performance, including pre-teaching and post-lecture reporting is detailed, and important themes from student responses in the form of "messages to the artist" are presented. The paper discusses the potential benefits to both cultural and linguistic learning of inviting visiting artists into a Performance in Education (PIE) classroom. In this case, the inclusion of an essentially Japanese language-based activity within an English medium class illustrates how diverse linguistic resources can be positively juxtaposed and integrated for meaningful English language learning. In addition, based on in-class teacher observation and written feedback from students, direct contact with an Ainu culture bearer resulted in considerably greater levels of student engagement and interest when compared with the mere provision of information about Ainu culture and prerecorded digital examples of performance.

Performance in Education (PIE) encompasses a vast range of performance styles and genres, while the educational contexts, processes, and problems to which these could be potentially applied are almost limitless. At the same time, efforts to improve and strengthen theoretical models, research practice in PIE, and gain helpful insights on effective

approaches to evaluation and testing that can be positively applied to PIE are also underway (Kluge, 2018). Such work speaks to the ways music, drama, and the performing arts benefit the development of vocabulary (Meiliana et al., 2024; Milord, 2007), pronunciation (Kartal, 2023; Misa, 2024), motivation and engagement (Brown & Novak, 2007; Vallejo & Pérez Ortega, 2024), and cultural understanding (Crooke et al., 2024). It also suggests that live performance can have a positive impact on the cultivation of empathy and social skills (Rathje et al., 2021) and attaining stronger emotional and physiological engagement in learning (Karkou et al., 2022).

Within this stream of activity, beyond the fundamentally intercultural nature of EFL classes taught by instructors with backgrounds outside Japan, the inclusion of "world music" or ethnomusicological resources provide broad opportunities for cultural learning in the classroom (Menezes, 2025). Recent examples of such work include the use of traditional performances such as the Māori *Haka* to teach Japanese students about culture (Cotter, 2020), and the author's own work exploring the ways Filipino and Japanese students perceive traditional Japanese *Noh* (Rockell, 2024).

As reported on in this paper, intercultural PIE teaching and research takes the form of research-led teaching in the English-medium elective classes *Performance in Education* and *Liberal Arts – Culture (Ethnomusicology)* taught at Japanese universities in Tohoku and Tokyo over the last decade. Both of these courses culminate in the performance of an English Language Noh-style play co-created with students. Performance in Education offers ample opportunity to promote physically mediated musicality, while in Culture (Ethnomusicology), pre-recorded performances provide the impetus for reflection, discussion, and further independent exploration. Here, students are encouraged to view performances focussing in turn on aural, visual, kinesthetic, and linguistic elements of performance, which in combination can be thought of as semiotic clusters (SC) (Rockell, 2024).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when live performance activity and face-to-face teaching were particularly limited or restricted, turning to digital performance resources (DPR) such as pre-recorded performances was invaluable in helping PIE activity to continue. The benefits of DPR notwithstanding, including tireless repetition, the ability to stop and start a digital recording at any

point, and the ability to engage with the performance asynchronously, it may be the case that the attractive features of *live* performance, whether as a participant or as an audience member, act more effectively to draw many people to PIE.

My personal experience of a performance by a visiting ballet dancer and violinist to an agricultural community hall near my rural primary school in West Melton, New Zealand, during the 1970's made a strong and lasting impression. This performance, which included excerpts from the ballet Swan Lake and Vivaldi's Four Seasons, helped to stimulate an ongoing interest in PIE. Indeed, school visits by performers from national arts organizations such as the Royal NZ Ballet and NZ Symphony Orchestra continue to this day. The situation is similar in neighboring Australia, where the programs of major companies such as Musica Viva (music) and Bangarra Dance Theatre give students valuable opportunities to encounter the performing arts firsthand. In Japan too, schools regularly host visiting performers through government programs such as the Agency for Cultural Affairs and NPOs such as MUSIC SHARING. At the same time, while scholars have been interested in this phenomenon for some time (e.g., Boyer, 2025; Holdus & Espeland, 2013), the area does not appear to have been strongly researched. With this situation in mind, post-COVID, I have begun initial, exploratory investigations and taken first steps by inviting guests to Tokyo to perform or offer live mini performances/lectures to my students.

In the current paper, I report on the visit of Motoi "ToyToy" Ogawa, an Ainu artist, culture bearer, and performer from Hokkaido in June 2025. This visit helped draw students' attention to the sensitive issues that Ainu musicians have faced, such as forced cultural assimilation (Ruiz, 2024; Uyeda, 2021), loss of language (Tsahelnik, 2025), and breakdown of intergenerational cultural transmission (Nummelin, 2025). When cultural and linguistic transmission is interrupted in this way, issues such as reliance on historical recordings rather than live performance, commodification and touristic-oriented representations of questionable authenticity, and an underlying lack of resources and support for traditional performance also arise (Uyeda, 2021). Ogawa's direct contact with students during his lecture performance allowed him to touch upon such problems as he shared his personal story.

Figure 1

Motoi Ogawa, "ToyToy" plays the tonkori *during a performance/lecture for students at Komazawa University, 2025*

Educational cooperation with Ogawa was made possible thanks to the area studies-related Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research for research on fish skin and sustainability in the fashion industry. As part of a research team led by anthropologist Yuko Nishimura, I was invited to expand the idea of sustainability beyond material culture and artifacts to encompass the preservation and transmission of cultural practices, including the performing arts. My primary area of interest was the *tonkori,* a plucked, 5-string zither associated with the Ainu people of Hokkaido, pictured in Figure 1 above, played by Motoi Ogawa. Initial investigations, including an exploratory visit to Hokkaido in 2024, prior to the 2025 performance lecture visit, prompted me to report how Ogawa, the son of prominent Ainu activist Ryūkichi Ogawa, learned to play the tonkori independently. Deliberate work supporting the transmission of the art of the tonkori is also being carried out in Hokkaido by ethnomusicologist Rie Hochi, based at the Hokkaido Museum, and in Tokyo, where tonkori expert Nobuhiko Chiba offers lessons online and through the Tokyo College of Music. (Nishimura et al., 2025).

After making these observations, I interviewed Ogawa in Ebetsu on a subsequent research trip to Hokkaido in early 2025, primarily examining the compositional process and

background to his 2016 album *ramu* (Ogawa, 2016). On this occasion, I invited him to perform for my students in Tokyo, and we began to make preparations for his visit.

Visiting Artist: Flow of Classroom Activity

Ogawa's visit to Komazawa took place in session ten of the fifteen-session spring semester 2025. This section describes the main flow of activity before, during, and after his performance lectures.

Before Visit: Pre-teaching & Preparation

Pre-teaching involved a mini-lecture, multimedia activities, discussion/presentation, artist greeting, question preparation, and deciding which facilitator roles student volunteers would carry out during the visit. In session three, I gave a mini-lecture (15 minutes) in English on Ainu history, culture, and musical instruments, including the *tonkori* and *mukkuri*. Next, students were asked to watch a publicly available video clip touching on recent Ainu socio-political issues and to complete a cloze or "gap-fill" based on the video text. This was provided to students via Moodlecloud. Following this, in the same class session, students were divided into small groups of three to five students for discussion/presentation activities. Topic choices included a detailed investigation of a specific Ainu musical instrument, possible avenues for the preservation and transmission of Ainu music and musical instruments, and discovering more about a chosen location in Hokkaido.

To maintain a sense of expectation prior to Ogawa's visit, I called his private cellphone number during class session seven and encouraged the students to greet him heartily in English, saying "Welcome to Tokyo, ToyToy!"

In session eight, at Ogawa's suggestion, students were shown part of his talk *Tradition for the future –Coexistence without dependence* (TEDx Talks, 2015). They were asked to view the entire video for homework and were requested to prepare at least two questions they would like to ask Ogawa directly if the opportunity arose during his visit.

In session nine, just prior to Ogawa's visit, volunteer facilitator roles were assigned, which included meeting the artist at the main campus gate, guiding him to the classroom, presenting him with a bouquet of flowers, giving a thank you speech, and helping with classroom set-up (moving chairs and tables, insuring there was a suitable performance space for the performer and electronic socket access for his amplifier, etc.). These preparations were facilitated using English as a directive language from the teacher to students, and the language used when students asked the teacher for clarification. Discussion between students took place mainly in Japanese. They also had recourse to the popular Japanese game, *janken* (rock, scissors, paper) when deciding facilitator roles.

During the In-Class Lecture Performance(s)

The lecture performances were held on two subsequent days, on Tuesday after lunch in the Performance in English elective class, and on Wednesday morning in the English medium culture (ethnomusicology) class. These were separate classes, and made up of a varied cross-section of students, since the elective classes are not restricted by student year or major subject of study. A similar format was followed on both days, beginning with brief greetings in the Ainu language, followed by the sharing of Ogawa's personal story and the difficulties he experienced as an Ainu during his childhood in Sapporo. He also talked about the personal realizations he made during his time studying at college in Okinawa, and the journey towards his current positive stance of "coexistence without dependence" living as an Ainu in contemporary Hokkaido.

When Ogawa introduced the tonkori, he invited students to come forward individually and experience the tonkori's vibrations directly, while he held the instrument against their bodies as it was plucked. He also performed an extended tonkori solo utilizing all of the instrument's timbral resources. A particularly poignant moment occurred during his second lecture performance when a pause after a staccato chord was followed what appeared to be spontaneous block chord harmonics (a harmonic is a high pitch produced by lightly touching an instrument's string at certain node points rather than pressing it down when it is plucked).

The performance culminated in a vocal performance with tonkori accompaniment in which Ogawa encouraged students to sing along during refrain sections made up of Ainu-language non-lexical vocables, vocal sounds with no clear semantic meaning but which function musically, providing rhythm, timbre, mood, and emotion.

During the performance in English class Ogawa also encouraged students to use these sounds in a round (a musical piece where several voices repeat the same melody but start at different times). The kind of round he encouraged, however, was one in which singers could join in at any random point, unfettered by the idea of standard, fixed entry points and *kata* [form, pattern, or model].

On each of the two days, the session finished with question time, a thank you message, and the presentation of gifts from student volunteers. The only significant problem that arose in relation to these performances was the need for ample time–at least ninety minutes–to tune the tonkori, and for the performer to warm up (taking into consideration acoustics, temperature, humidity, etc.). Since these are problems specific to musicians working with sensitive, wooden instruments, and may not be immediately understood by educational administrators, careful planning to ensure that classrooms are available in the previous period and can be reserved for two consecutive class periods would benefit those intending to invite visiting artists such as Ogawa.

Post- performance

Ogawa's lecture-performance had been conducted mainly in Japanese, with some Ainu language-based content appearing in his songs and in his initial greetings. Post-performance, however, the focus returned to English when students were asked to complete a reflection paper. This task was presented to students using the essay quiz option of the author's Moodlecloud course, and was to be completed in English within one week after the performance-lecture. The quiz included a section in which students were able to write messages to the artist. These were sent in their original English versions by email to Ogawa and his partner in Hokkaido the following month, who were encouraged to take a copy of the student messages to the manager of Heights Center English School, a personal friend of Ogawa, for a more personal translation or

interpretation and discussion of the contents. Students' messages to the artist were sometimes quite personal in tone, and for privacy reasons, only prominent themes from the messages appear below.

Prominent themes from students' "Messages to the Artist."

- The tonkori's impressive timbre and the impact of hearing its 'unique, mysterious, and wonderful sound' for the first time live.
- The emotional impact of Ogawa's narrative that included sharing difficult childhood experiences of discrimination as an Ainu.
- The desire to share what was learned in the performance-lecture with others.
- The idea that, despite having learned something about the Ainu previously second-hand through formal education, only by hearing stories directly from Ogawa could one come to understand.
- Gratitude and empathy with Ogawa's position on the part of students with mixed cultural backgrounds and the desire to eliminate all discrimination from Japanese society.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this initial exploratory study was mainly to report one of the author's PIE activities. At the same time, although purely anecdotal, it was interesting to note that based on in-class teacher observation and written feedback from students, direct contact with Ogawa during his visit appeared to have stimulated considerably greater levels of student engagement and interest when compared with their reaction to the lecture about Ainu culture given by the author earlier in the semester or having students watch digital examples of Ainu performance. Indeed, students were impressed by the live tonkori in a way they had not been after merely viewing the multimedia, and Ogawa's performance lecture seemed to touch certain students deeply and completely turn around their attitude in class.

The kind of deep transmission and embodied knowledge that Ogawa brought to students is what the intended meaning of "wisdom" in the title of this paper refers to. Evocative, though perhaps imprecise, the term captures the kind of lived-experience so vividly brought to life in the classroom through Ogawa's narrative and musicality, and while it might be foolish to speak of a "turn towards wisdom" in the current age, its importance has not escaped the scholarly gaze (Kallio & Tynjälä, 2025; Lähteenkorva et al., 2025, Ryan, 1999).

This exploratory study also revealed other areas that invite ongoing future investigation with a more rigorous, pinpointed research design. For example, the combination of English, Japanese, and Ainu languages highlighted the need to explore useful ways of working with multiple languages in the classroom. The classroom visit reported on here involved Japanese and Ainu (Ogawa to students) embedded within English (English medium class) embedded within Japanese (the main language of the broader environment in which the English language class takes place). The functional flow between languages, and possible deliberate implementation of languages other than English in projects like this one for meaningful English language learning warrants further investigation.

In addition, the differences between digital performance resources and live performance could be examined more carefully in future work, not as an attempt to argue for one over the other but rather to discover better ways to engage with them individually and in combination for the benefit of students (Kim & Kim, 2024; Swarbrick et al., 2019).

Finally, from a pedagogical perspective, the timing, frequency, content, and manner of delivery of the pre-teaching prior to a visiting artist's performance, as well as the nature of post-performance reporting, could be carefully examined in future research in an attempt to maximize the educational benefits of visiting artists in PIE. At the time of writing, Ogawa has agreed to offer annual performance-lectures to students in Tokyo beginning in 2027. With his help, and that of other visiting artists, it is hoped that an increasing number of fruitful intercultural performance encounters can take place, and he can continue to promote the sharing of wisdom through PIE.

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