International Journal of Education & the Arts

http://www.ijea.org/ **ISSN: 1529-8094**

Volume 21 Number 11 **February 26, 2020**

Knowing *Noh* and '*Nō*-ing' English through Intercultural Performing Arts

Kim Rockell
Komazawa University, Japan

Citation: Rockell, K. (2020). Knowing *Noh* and '*Nō*-ing' English through Intercultural Performing Arts. *International Journal of Education & the Arts, 21*(11). Retrieved from http://doi.org/10.26209/ijea21n11.

Abstract

This paper takes the form of a detailed report discussing the development, rehearsal and presentation of a short English language *Noh*-style play performed by Japanese university students in 2018–2019. It shares students' perceptions in response to the flow of rehearsals and performances, which were documented with ethnomusicological fieldwork methods. Music and drama are increasingly recognized internationally as effective vehicles for language education and in this case the aspiration to master 'a tool of global communication' is coupled with local sensibility and an important Japanese heritage tradition. Contemporary cyber-culture immersed Japanese youth sometimes express little interest in traditions such as *Noh*. This project prompted a greater appreciation of traditional Japanese culture amongst such students. The benefits of regular practice of the declamatory speech that is basic to *Noh* chanting was also found to be particularly beneficial to students' confidence with spoken English.

Introduction

In this article, an educational *Noh* play performed in English and set in cyberspace is presented as a unique, local site of intercultural exchange. *Noh* is a form of traditional Japanese theatre with a 700-year history, which combines poetry, drama, music, song and dance (Choo, 2004; Emmert, 1994; Hensley, 2000; Komparu, 2005). Knowing or '*Nō*-ing' English at a Japanese University involves bringing this traditional Japanese form of musical theatre into the English language classroom, a place where, despite calls for more expansive thinking (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011; Shah & Elyas, 2019), the content or teaching materials more often reflect only the cultural traditions of inner-circle English speaking societies.

Confident communication in spoken English remains a problem for many Japanese university students (Suzuki, 2017; Yanagi & Baker, 2016). Unfortunately, conventional English language education in Japan has not always provided sufficient speaking opportunities (Cripps, 2016; Fujita-Round & Maher, 2017; Suzuki, 2017). As an advocate of arts-based projects in education, I have approached this problem through music, and more recently through theatre and drama (Rockell, 2018a, 2018b, 2019). During the more than a decade I have spent in Japan, I have observed much exuberant, spontaneous and even boisterous language behavior during activities outside the conventional academic classroom. My own experience learning to sing Japanese *enka* ballads, and later to perform *Noh* chant convinced me that there are many occasions when Japanese people are definitely not as shy as they are sometimes characterized to be by non-Japanese English language teachers. Thus, it occurred to me that the introduction of dramatic forms such as *Noh* could offer fresh pathways for stimulating oral language production as a step towards breaking the communicative impasse in the classroom.

Theatrical activities encourage various ways of using the human voice, including declamatory speech. They stimulate group interaction, improve pronunciation and oral production and promote orality in the classroom generally (Gaudart, 1990; Gilbert, 2002; Gill, 2016; Kluge, 2018; Rathore, 2018). In L1 (first language) environments, speakers' confident use of language is supported by an array of productive modes on a continuum from whispering to shouting (Raitio, Suni, Vainio, & Alku, 2012). However, conventional EFL teaching frequently relies on standard speech alone, and does not support common vocal behaviors that occur in professional environments, such as declamatory and heightened speech, which might occur during such activities as asking a question in a public forum, inspecting facilities at an industrial site, or addressing seminar participants without a microphone. Performing arts and especially *Noh* chanting help to foster these capabilities.

As an advocate for the arts in education, I frequently remind skeptics of music's historical place within the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy) that have "formed the

basis for Western intellectual thought through many centuries" (Gwee, 2018), and emphasize the cognitive flow-on benefits of music and arts for other spheres of activity (Goldstein, Lerner, & Winner, 2017; Schellenberg, 2004). Occasionally, as occurred at the 1st International Conference on Intercultural Dialogue through the Arts in Saga, Fukuoka 2017, I am able to share my ideas freely before a sympathetic audience who, like myself take for granted the idea that the arts, broadly understood, are a good thing, and beneficial to education (Rockell, 2018b).

But, I would suggest that these benefits go further than even a supportive audience might imagine. Arts engagement involves much more than surface-level culture, and the songs, dance and theatre of the world can act as a kind of "microcosmic culture-capsule disseminating symbolically the essence [of a culture]" (Rockell, 2009, p. 62). This imbues all kinds of intercultural performing arts events with a rich underlying dynamic that is simultaneously a site of potential conflict, and one of learning.

In Japan, the English teaching activity I am involved in can be thought of as fundamentally *inter*cultural. It is not uncommon for this kind of encounter in contemporary Japan to involve a highly talkative English-speaking instructor as representative of an imagined Europe or North America, before a group of silent young Japanese students (Rivers & Ross, 2013; Ruecker & Ives, 2014). And when thinking about how cultures meet, one readily focuses on the broad interface, which the notion of interculturality tends to invoke (Houghton, 2012, 2013; Porto, Houghton, & Byram, 2017). This is not to lose sight of '*intra*culturality' and the complex structure and workings of societies that might be glossed initially as belonging to a single, unified cultural group. Communication across disciplinary, generational and socio-economic divides within a culture often calls on careful and nuanced dialogue, even within broadly representative cultural groups (Kecskes, 2015). The way these dynamics are impacted by the incorporation of the performing arts is a matter that contributions such as the current article seek to help us understand.

My personal engagement in the performing arts began with classical guitar lessons as a child and eventually culminated in academic involvement in ethnomusicology and the music of East and South-east Asia. Some years later in 2013, made possible by the increasing demand for courses taught in English at Japanese universities (Brown, 2017; Kubota, 2017), I found myself employed at an institution in the Tohoku region. Japanese universities involved in processes of internationalization, increasingly concerned with their place in world university rankings (Ganotice Jr, Tang, Tsui, Villarosa, & Yeung, 2016), hire foreign PhD holders in any discipline from English speaking countries. Thus, I came to be employed in the language research center of an institution specializing in computer science. There, it was inevitable that, given the freedom to do so, rather than computers, which were hitherto outside my purview,

the incorporation of music and traditional arts would become a part of my language teaching approach at the university (Rockell, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2017; Rockell & Ocampo, 2014).

Meanwhile, living for an extended period of time in Japan presented the treasured opportunity to engage in fieldwork, characterized by the late Bruno Nettl as "a sine qua non of the ethnomusicologist's own style of life and study" (Nettl, 1983, p. 9). Serendipitously, the city of Aizu-Wakamatsu has a strong *Noh* tradition, so being based there also provided the opportunity to study this very special Japanese performance art (Rockell, 2018c). After gaining an introduction to a local *Noh* teacher through her friend, the Korean wife of our language center director, I was accepted as a student and began lessons. The physically demanding nature of *Noh* chanting can be surprising for beginning practitioners, as it certainly was in my case. Given public perceptions of Japanese students as overly introverted and shy (Fusa, 2016; Saunders & Chester, 2008), it occurred to me, as the result of an informal conversation with my *Noh* teacher during my early lessons, that having Japanese students of English practice *Noh* with the strong voice it entails would help to bring them 'out of their shells' and make them more confident.

Many of these students have very little interest in their traditional Japanese culture (Kaplan, Kusano, Tsuji, & Hisamichi, 1998). Nevertheless, as an initial step, I attempted to engage their interest by creating a *Noh*-style play in English, which was incorporated into the third-year advanced English elective course Computer Assisted Ethnomusicology in academic years 2018–2019. Students performed this play, entitled The Coding Catastrophe, in their final class before summer break. Language data arising from this work was recently examined from a sociolinguistic perspective, in particular in relation to the recent surge of interest in translingualism (Rockell, 2019). It also helped provide insight on dealing with the practical problems that arise when rehearsing English *Noh* (Rockell, 2018a). In the current article, I report more extensively on the same play, with an emphasis on intercultural language education through the arts, and the many-layered implications that arise from such inquiry.

***Noh* in English?**

This project is not the first time *Noh* has been performed in English, but it is the first time it has been done specifically for the purposes of language education. Two of the many examples of *Noh's* influence in the West include the early, orientalist imaginings of Irish poet William Butler Yeats' in his play The Dreaming of the Bones, and Samuel Beckett's English translation of his French play Waiting for Godot, which is a parody of *Kami Noh* (where a god or spirit appears as the main actor or protagonist). However, the figure that has been most influential in developing English *Noh* is Richard Emmert, professor in the department of Japanese Literature and Culture at Musashino University.

I first became aware of Emmert thanks to Google Scholar, just prior to attending a workshop at which he assisted as part of the International Musicological Society congress held in Tokyo, 2017. Emmert has acted as artistic director of 'In the *nō*' (A number of authors including Emmert prefer the alternative spelling '*nō'*), the online newsletter of Theatre Nohgaku, a group that aims to "share *nō*'s beauty and power with English speaking audiences and performers," and in addition, as a certified *Noh* instructor of the Kita 喜多 school, he has taught and performed throughout the world for over two decades. Emmert has composed music in *Noh* style for original English texts, arranged English translations of traditional *Noh* plays and released a CD entitled *Noh* in English. He refers to this activity collectively as English *Noh* (Emmert, 1994; Hensley, 2000). Emmert's activity provided early inspiration for the current project.

When applied to language teaching, through *Noh,* theatrical approaches to learning can be streamlined to benefit Japanese university students by drawing on an approach that values the dramatic sense and cultural perspectives of Japanese tradition. Such an approach helps to circumvent the "lingering and pervasive climate of native-speakerism" (Houghton & Rivers, 2013; Rockell & Ocampo, 2014), where English is linked chauvinistically to L1 speakers and is seen essentially as a cultural expression of English-speaking countries. At the same time, it avoids English becoming a mere code with strongly reduced idiomatic and cultural features, in the interests of it more easily serving the function of an international communication tool. Rather, in this project we attempt to explore a 'third way', which embeds English into a very traditional form that is rooted in Japanese language and culture.

Rendering a *Noh* in English for purely artistic purposes presents its own set of problems. These are addressed by Emmert in his 1994 paper *Nō*: Exploring its Non-Japanese possibilities. Although Emmert admits that the differences between the mora-timed Japanese and stress-timed English languages present problems, he refuses to accept the idea that because the music of *Noh* developed naturally with Japanese language, it could not work with another language such as English. In moving *Noh* into English, Emmert sought to identify and preserve its fundamental elements by dividing these into internal and external aspects. He suggests that external elements, or ones that can be changed or done without include: language, costumes, masks and patterns of movement. At the same time, he identifies quality of movement and *hassei* 発声 [the way the chant is rendered], as internal and vital to *Noh* (Emmert, 1994).

Although Emmert says that language can and does change and is therefore an external element, observation of current Japanese *Noh* practice within Japan shows that this is one element that does not change. In fact, ancient Japanese texts continue to be rendered faithfully in the original classical Japanese. In listening to the candid explanations of teachers of both

the *Kanze* 観世 and *Houshou* 宝生 schools, emphasis on the idea that a focus on *kata* [fixed outward forms or patterns] is a necessary precursor to engendering the true spirit of *Noh* could be noted. This brings into question whether Emmert's ideas find universal acceptance at the time of writing.

Methodology: Searching for the Ox

The primary goal of this paper is to report in detail on a recent project. Accordingly, I seek to present it as an in-depth discussion that might help to reveal the project's many-layered implications. With this goal in mind, a qualitative research design was adopted, which also included an informal survey to gain feedback from students during the preparatory phase, rehearsals, performance and post-performance. Supporting a qualitative research methodology, the ethnographic methods common to my home discipline, ethnomusicology and other related anthropological fields (Nettl, 1983, 2010; Stobart, 2008; Titon, 1996), seemed most appropriate for the project. Diary-keeping as a participant/observer was the main process of gathering data, broadly writ and this was very much supported by audio visual and photographic evidence provided with the assistance of Ms. Margaret Price.

The triangulation of these multiple data sources formed the basis for rich description in conveying findings, and it was intended that in this way the validity of the qualitative data could be enhanced and maintained. Sharing findings-in-progress with peers during the course of research and seeking respondent validation through post-performance conversations also contributed to this process. The responses provided by participants during each stage of the project were voluntary and totally anonymous, and the *Noh* masks worn during in-class performances and dark lighting further protected the performers' privacy.

It was hoped that this approach might also provide a window on the kinds of conceptual frameworks that participants bring to intercultural arts education and how their attitudes change as they engage with the work at different stages. The thirty participants took part in the *Noh* performance voluntarily as part of an elective class. In terms of assessment, all members were given a general grade for participation, and bonus points were awarded to those who volunteered for the more demanding roles of *shite* [main actor or protagonist] and *waki* [supporting actor], or who put special effort into helping with costume creation and set design.

At the time of research, in combination with my increasing involvement in *Noh*, my thinking was influenced by exposure to related work on the philosophy of Zen Buddhism (Izutsu, 1982) and the Tao Te Ching (Laotzu, 1989). Some scholars have suggested a link between *Noh* and Zen Buddhism, hence the invocation of 'Searching for the Ox', a reference to the traditional series of 10 poems and drawings that illustrate the stages moving toward enlightenment in Zen. The information shared in the following sections is drawn from diary-

keeping during the early development of the project, after which, ongoing observations of students at key stages during the project are discussed, following a generally chronological sequence.

Initial development of the project: Educational imperative and creative constraints

As the work of Emmert provided much of the early inspiration leading to the conception of this project, in developing an educational English *Noh*, we tried as much as possible to include the elements identified by Emmert, referred to earlier, in our work - both 'internal' and 'external'. However, our context differed from Emmert's purely artistic one, since in our institutional setting, the performing arts were being put to the service of language education goals, broadly writ. In the early stages of development, it became clear that when educational imperatives guide the creative process, then a number of additional constraints can come into play. In this case they included:

- Appropriateness of theme and content
- Length of the work
- Level of difficulty of vocabulary and constructions used in the script
- Musical/theatrical performance level of difficulty (given that these students are not performing arts majors)
- Time(s) and space(s) available for rehearsal
- Need, mandated by language education objectives, to maximize speaking opportunities for all participants (rather than for a single protagonist)

In choosing a theme for the play, the goal was to select something that would be interesting or relevant to computer science students, and one that would draw on vocabulary related to computers. *Noh* stories often deal with dramatic events and tragic themes (Rockell, 2019, p. 151). In the history of the Internet, tragedies such as the death of teen gamers, the Therac radiation incident and the disruption of the Asian Internet as a result of a massive earthquake off the coast of Taiwan in 2006 provide appropriate dramatic themes for an English *Noh*. However, in post-2011 Fukushima, with a number of students coming from areas affected by the tsunami and events at the nearby nuclear power plant, it seemed more appropriate to select a theme that did not directly involve loss of human life, and one that might also permit an element of fun. I therefore chose the story of a man who believes he has deleted his entire company's website and the websites of his clients by mistakenly entering the incorrect code on his computer server. The play is based on the story of a hosting provider Marco Marsala (Griffin, 2016), and takes place in cyberspace and in an international, English language environment at the beginning of the 21st century. The *shite*, or protagonist Mr. McMorsel (a character loosely based on Mr. Marsala), travels to the cloud to try and retrieve the lost data.

He returns, transformed into a robot and performs a robot dance through which he is able to bring back the important data and save his professional reputation (Rockell, 2019, p. 151).

By using this theme, it was possible to draw on English vocabulary relevant to these particular students, such as the words: code, data, programming, analysis, command, and memory read. Computer related language, themes and general *otaku* [person obsessed with Japanese cyber culture such as manga comics and anime films] attitudes were strongly prevalent in the campus environment, with some students sharing their future aspirations of becoming androids, creating digital replicas of their own brains, and their hopes that what they saw as an ideal future society, totally dominated by artificial intelligence, might come into existence. In developing the project, I aimed to be sensitive to these ideas and synthesize various elements into a creative work for educational purposes.

In general, the lines of text were arranged to follow the syllable patterns of *tanka* poetry (5-7-5-7-7), which is commonly found in *Noh* texts. (Rockell, 2019, p. 161). This is illustrated by the following two verses from the *Jo* 序 or introductory section of the play.

Out in Cyber-space
There is Mr. McMorsel
Terrible mistake!
Entering mistaken code
Caused a terrible headache

Office in the air
Internet intelligence
Storage in the cloud
Offering convenience
Through cutting-edge marketing

Administrative constraints necessarily limited the length of the work. Participants in the project were studying under a ‘quarter system’ and attended 100-minute-long classes twice a week for a total of 15 sessions. Of these, 5 sessions were able to be given to preparing the play plus one more session for the final performance. The class was divided into two groups named ‘Steve Jobs’ and ‘Horiemon’ (an entrepreneur who is well known in Japan). Students also performed the drama in groups and as a combined, whole-class group. The whole-class performance was audio-visually recorded, and this was made available only to students on the elective classes’ learning management site for them to view privately. Given the aforementioned limitations, it was only possible to prepare a play of approximately 6 minutes length.

Figure 1. Horiemon and Steve Jobs *Noh* masks used in The Coding Catastrophe 2017

In preparing the script, I kept in mind the fact that the participants would be using English as a foreign language and were not performing arts majors. This meant building in frequent repetition and short, clear phrase lengths. Also, only simple melodic contours with few pitch glides and only basic physical movements were included. Most challenging physically for these students was the robot dance in which the steps of the *shite* trace out the shape of the letters of bash script code rm-rf. This required extra practice, especially as the robot mask obscured the *shite's* vision as do traditional *Noh* masks, and in this case, there was no pillar to orient the performer, as occurs in standard *Noh* theatres. The fixed seating arrangement with individual student desktop computers in the regular classroom restricted the freedom of movement required by the roles of *shite* and *waki* (Rockell, 2017). There was also no open space in which the *juitai* [chorus of chanters] could assemble in kneeling position on a mat on the floor.

Moreover, while the sound of audio-visual materials used in the curriculum of regular English language classes were often audible through the classroom walls and in the corridor outside at the university, there was no precedent for the sustained chanting and semi-shouted exhortations that occur in teaching *Noh*. For these reasons, the activity needed to be moved to the university Business Innovation Centre's 3D Theatre. To gain access to this space, advance booking is necessary and for each individual session a separate form is required, with the details of the activity written in Japanese by the applicant. These forms are then carefully translated into English, scanned and emailed back to the user for confirmation. So, in a kind of convoluted process, written Japanese was a necessary prerequisite to the robust use of spoken English in an educational context (Rockell, 2019, pp. 157-160).

In general, in *Noh* a single performer takes the role of *shite* or main actor, but since our primary goal was English language education, we overlooked this convention and doubled up on roles. Usually, a *Noh* stage is simple and unadorned, except for the *kagami ita* 鏡板 or 'mirror board,' the back wall painted with the image of a large pine tree, which "marks the stage out as a sacred place" and "representative of longevity and of everlasting life" (Ishii, 1994).

Figure 2. Kagami ita of the the Aizu-Wakamatsu *Noh* theater

Moving into cyberspace, this was replaced with a representation of the global Internet, sourced from Google Images and labeled for noncommercial re-use. A search to identify the original artist proved unsuccessful, although it did result in some interesting communication with a graphic designer in Texas who had taken the image from yet another large, freely-available image database.

For the dress rehearsal and final performance, students were asked to wear black, white or red T-shirts and white socks, reminiscent of the *tabi* 足袋 [ankle-high white socks with a toe separation] that are used by *Noh* performers (Rockell, 2018a, p. 39). This directive was interpreted very liberally and socks of various hues found their way onto the stage area. The

costumes and masks, such as those in figure 1 worn by the *shite*, were made by a small group of students under the supervision of Ms. Margaret Price, who was an American graphic designer and documentary film maker, based in Japan at the time of the project. Ms. Margaret Price also took footage of rehearsals and final performance and produced and edited a short film about the project.

Ms. Margaret Price's presence was highly significant as it tended to focus students' efforts, as well as providing extra opportunities for them to communicate in English. Such informal conversations took place during the students' costume making workshops in the author's office, before class, and during breaks in rehearsals.

Instead of a *hayashi* 囃子 [instrumental group] used with *Noh*, *jiutai* members downloaded online drum apps onto their cellphones, which also took the place of the ubiquitous folding fans. Nevertheless, even with full volume settings and reinforcement with Bluetooth speakers, the sound was not strong enough and needed to be supported with traditional handclaps.

Thus, the practical circumstances surrounding the activity circumscribed and dictated what was possible in performance. Within these parameters, however, we were able to draw together widely disparate historical and contemporary, local and international resources making use of the Internet.

Discussion: Assessing an Intrinsically Beneficial Activity

The ongoing observations made during this project provided a window on attitudinal changes on the part of students that accompanied their participation in this intercultural arts project. Generally, these included changes in attitude towards speaking English, and reappraisal of the way they felt about traditional Japanese *Noh* theatre. Insights were also gained with regard to students' notions of the perceived uniqueness of Japanese culture, linguistic and cultural differences between Japanese and English languages, aesthetics, the educational English *Noh* activity in general, as well as the appropriateness of the narrative chosen for the project.

In addition to ethnographic observations and diary-keeping, an anonymous, informal survey, which included open-ended questions was conducted at several points during the flow of rehearsals, before, during and after the project. This gave a general indication of students' changing experience of both English and *Noh*. Answers were sought in either English or Japanese. Where students were given the option of answering in either language, most responses were made in Japanese and later translated by the author. In the informal surveys conducted during the latter part of the project, when a choice of response language was offered a very slight increase (approximately 1%) in English use was noted.

After taking part in English *Noh*, the greatest change was in students' perception of speaking English as being enjoyable. Increased confidence in speaking English one to one was reported in informal surveys, but at the same time there was no reported change in confidence in speaking English in front of a group. Participants' comments indicated a generally favorable view of English alongside a widespread lack of confidence in their individual ability to communicate in the language. Positive appraisals of English were mainly based on the idea of the importance of the language in an imagined future career and not on actual communicative experiences. The English language was characterized as difficult and students reported struggling with pronunciation and 'putting their ideas into English'. A comparison of observations at the early and later stages of the project also revealed an increased interest in *Noh* that was greater than the corresponding change in their interest in the English language. The student participants' comments indicated that a number of them had heard about *Noh*, particularly through high school art and music classes, but none had direct experience of watching a live performance. Interest in *Noh* was based on the perception that being Japanese it is important to know about Japanese traditions.

After two sessions: 'Awareness is the greatest agent for change'[1]

As part of the informal survey, a fruitful avenue for gauging the opinions, beliefs and attitudes of participants was provided by the following open-ended question and directive, provided by students after they had experienced two 100-minute sessions of English *Noh* and again at the end, a week after they participated in the final performance: *Noh* is a very traditional form of Japanese theatre. Is it difficult or easy to perform *Noh* in English? Please write one paragraph about your experience of *Noh* in English.

Responses revealed that although some students felt the project was easy, fun and a good opportunity to learn about *Noh*, the majority considered it a very difficult exercise. In most cases, the fundamental differences between English and Japanese pronunciation and intonation and the perceived uniqueness of Japanese culture was seen as a barrier to creating and performing *Noh* in English. The following selection of student comments illustrates this perception:

Comments relating to language

- "It's hard to play very old traditional music in a different language."
- "Reading English words slowly and in a loud voice felt as if something was wrong."

[1] A quote attributed to Ch'an master, Huangbo [Ōbaku Kiun] d.850.

- "In Japanese, there are many words that have the same sound but not the same meaning. Using that language, elegance was born. In English I don't know about that kind of language."
- "English and Japanese have different syllables and composition of words. It becomes an unnatural delimiter in English."

At this point, as revealed by the comments above, student respondents were somehow unsettled and uncomfortable with the melding of English and the underlying patterns of prosody they considered proper to a traditional Japanese form such as *Noh*. This suggests that the English *Noh* activity had set up a kind of cultural confrontation within the classroom. This perceived discomfort extended to differences in aesthetics, which students viewed as being rooted in culture-of-origin and about which, at this point, they appeared to hold essentialist notions.

Comments relating to cultural differences and aesthetics

- "*Noh* is part of Japanese culture and has a long history. It is passed on traditionally from father to son. Even if it can be imitated, I think it is difficult to express perfectly."
- "Japanese aesthetic sense is different from foreigners. I think it is difficult to match them."
- "*Noh* contain a lot of representation methods unique to Japan."
- "It is difficult to convey unique, Japanese culture."
- "It is very difficult to perform *Noh* in English because English is different from Japanese. First, is how to raise 'tension'. English rises rapidly. Japanese rises slowly. 'Tension' expresses the feeling of the actor. So, with this, the way of imagining is different."

At the same time, some students at this stage of the project reported finding the activity unique, surprising, and interesting, despite regarding it as difficult. One student even presented a proactive strategy for reconciling differences in English and Japanese intonation by finding a "common rhythmic point". This can be understood as a place in an English sentence where the syllable stress or accent falls at a similar point to where the student might expect it to come in a Japanese sentence or phrase of the same length, rendered by vowel lengthening. This is an example of increasing language awareness, particularly of pronunciation-related aspects, which was also evident in the later stages of the project.

At the end of the project – final and post-performance

The final performance was an in-house affair held in the University 3D Theatre, and although interested professors and students' friends were welcome to attend, only one colleague was able to be present at the event. The play was performed in full three times; first by each of the two teams and then as a combined group performance. It was generally well synchronized, and some of the performers in key roles had memorized their lines in the days prior to the event, freeing them to focus on choreographic aspects such as the robot dance. Having completed the final performance, participants' retrospective appraisals were almost entirely positive. In particular, an awakened interest in traditional Japanese *Noh*, increased language awareness, and a positive overall experience, were reported. Responses to open ended questions in an informal survey included several positive comments about English *Noh*, including the following:

- 能についてはは知識、興味がほとんどありません。しかし、授業を通じて少し興味、関心が高まりました。いい経験ができました! [I have little knowledge of and interest in *Noh*. However, my interest and attention increased through the (computer assisted ethnomusicology) classes. I have had a good experience!]
- [発音や発声法、声のトーンなどが特殊的で面白い。[The pronunciation, vocalization method, voice tone etc. were special and interesting.]

Describing the experience at the end of the quarter, a week after the final performance, students now unanimously appraised the experience positively, despite perceived difficulties. It was described as a valuable, novel, precious, and even as 'an unforgettable' experience. The strong regular chanting and heightened speech in English at all stages of the project encouraged students to develop increased confidence in their productive language skills. This was very evident from the point of view of the instructor as a participant observer, and was also reflected in students' perceptions of their increased confidence to use English.

Students also thought that the script and subject matter had been appropriate, commenting favorably on the use of robot costumes, virtual drum and terms such as 'command rm-rf' and 'cloud', which had been included in the dialog. Moreover, a number of students commented informally that they had been inspired to try learning traditional Japanese *Noh* with a qualified instructor or to seek out professional live performances of *Noh*. Students reported learning the importance of teamwork, improving their productive confidence with spoken language, increased language awareness, and gaining more knowledge about traditional *Noh* as a result of participating in the project. The unusual practice of writing English in *tanka* form caught students' attention and this too increased their language awareness. Additionally, the activity helped students to learn more about their own national traditions. As mentioned, many of them had heard about *Noh* but never actually experienced it.

As far as negative appraisals went, unlike feedback from earlier in the quarter, at the end of the project these were reduced to one student reporting feeling slightly uneasy when choosing roles and deciding on costumes, and another having difficulty not bursting out laughing as he watched his fellow students dancing and wearing the robot costumes. Suffice to say, this student was reminded that, according to chapter 71 of the Tao Te Ching, "If there were no laughter, the Tao would not be what it is" (Laotzu, 1989).

Conclusion

In this paper, we considered performance activity and interaction in the context of formal tertiary education in Japan, whereby a non-Japanese instructor taught his L1 (English) to a group of thirty Japanese undergraduate computer science students. An attempt was made to report on this activity in detail, drawing on ethnographic observations and diary keeping as a participant observer. Here, the intercultural site of exchange was revealed to be by no means neutral. Its underlying dynamics included expectations of a hierarchical arrangement in which the instructor had significant control. In this situation, the students had little agency, despite the intention of the teacher to empower students as a result of interaction with them. At the same time, embedding English into a form that arises from traditional culture associated with students' L1 helped to redress the power balance. Although another possible avenue for students to reclaim agency in the classroom is through passivity and non-responsiveness was available, their increasing willingness to participate, and the enthusiastic contribution of their voices as occurred in this play can be seen as a positive result of this intercultural arts project.

Other potential conflicts inherent in this situation include the possibility that students might take a critical stance with regard to the appropriation of their traditional culture. Written and produced by the author, one might rightly criticize the Coding Catastrophe's combination of traditional Japanese theatre and teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) as a willfully constructed anachronism within a society that generally exhibits carefully controlled, situation-specific behavior (Esaki & Nishihama, 2016). However, it can also be seen as emergent; the inevitable result of broader forces described earlier that brought an English-speaking ethnomusicologist to live and work for several years in Aizu-Wakamatsu city, Fukushima. During this project, however, no such criticism arose. Conversely, there was increasing participation and even the expression of gladness on having been led towards a positive reappraisal of *Noh*.

The conflict-leading-to-learning here lay in the dissatisfaction students experienced when their expectation in terms of prosody and aesthetics were challenged. The anomalies they discovered led to increased linguistic and cultural awareness. Viewed positively, this case illustrates the idea that even negative appraisals can have positive results and lead to growth.

However, when examined from the point of view of Emmert's essential and non-essential features of *Noh*, which were referred to earlier, it was language, a feature considered non-essential by Emmert, which emerged as most problematic. Students made their best efforts to use the style of vocalization and physical movements requested and as a group, appeared very comfortable adopting the kind of formal body postures that the activity demanded. Notwithstanding this, while Emmert may have refused to accept language difference as being a barrier to performing English *Noh*, the student participants in this particular project most certainly considered it to be so.

Additionally, it was through the symbolic forms of expression afforded by the performing arts that the deeper sense of values these forms represent, brushed up against one another. This resulted in a conflict that appeared muted rather than overt, and perhaps merely thought provoking for the participants.

Interestingly, just as some Japanese may think it axiomatic that the English language is a cultural expression of English-speaking countries, the students in this project held similar essentialist views on *Noh* as being a distinct and separate expression of Japanese culture. When applied to English teaching, the call and response rote-learning style characteristic of training in *Noh utai* [chanting] used in rehearsals can be seen as reminiscent of an archaic, non-communicative and teacher-centered classroom practice. In spite of this, students did not appear to be at all uncomfortable with being drilled in *kata*, and it can be suggested that such an approach suited their learning style.

In being what Poole (2010) refers to as *uchimuki* [inward looking], it was not simply a matter of students drawing on their own culture. While they considered traditional *Noh* as a patrimony of Japanese people, and theirs too by default as a result of them being Japanese, it was also external to them, being outside their framework of everyday experience. English, whether through formal instruction or the reception of global popular culture, was far more familiar. At the same time, English was *sotomuki* [outward looking] for these students, since it was relevant in the present only with reference to an imagined future career that they believed would involve considerable international engagement.

This dual nature was also present in the cyberspace narrative. For computer science students, the relocation of *Noh* in English brings it into the realm of the comfortable and familiar. At the same time, the grand tragic narrative, and warning of real and serious consequences as a result of negligence in the workplace, may have been beyond the ken of students who in their day to day academic lives frequently forget their homework or textbooks with relative impunity.

While the intercultural dynamic here was predicated on the interaction between the foreign male instructor, representative of the English-speaking world, and a predominantly male group of Japanese students, within Japan, an intra-cultural element was also at play. This was an important contribution of this intercultural performing arts project, whereby technically oriented students were encouraged to express themselves in a less familiar way, lyrically and through movement, and where young, tech-savvy Japanese were brought in to contact with a 700-year-old tradition. The presence of the North American female cameraperson also provided a rare (in a predominantly male environment) opportunity for spontaneous interaction.

Thus, interculturality acted to broaden students' self-identity and experience. Participation in English *Noh* empowered students and increased their potential avenues for engaging globally. It did so by simultaneously increasing their confidence in using a communicative tool (English), and by forging a more grounded local identity as a result of gaining greater knowledge of Japanese traditions. The flow-on benefits of this activity have the potential to manifest themselves in a willingness to explore more local traditions, with the understanding that these experiences can be shared widely using English.

At a deeper level, the form and structure of a *Noh* drama reflect the social dynamics of ancient Japanese society, which students may unconsciously compare with their contemporary experience and with the cyberworld fantasy in which their drama unfolds. The masks, whose unchanging expressions appear to vary subtly with the slightest change in angle or lighting, reflect unwillingness to express emotions in public or to stand out in any way, which are characteristics these students themselves exhibit, particularly in the course of formal, educational activities.

The fact of this intercultural performing arts activity occurring in an educational context is most significant. Earlier in the paper, I pointed out a number of constraints on artistic activity that were noted in this educational setting. However, it is clear that such an educational context also offers important freedoms, most significant being the freedom to explore new and unlikely combinations of artistic forms, genres and modes of expression.

In general, the feedback, comments and suggestions to date for continuing to develop this work in the future offered by colleagues in Japan and abroad have proved extremely thought provoking and helpful. Having undertaken the Coding Catastrophe project, the idea that arts-based educational projects offer a valuable, positive impact on students that is worth developing further in the future is affirmed. Certainly, the affective dimension of English language learning was ameliorated for those students involved in the process. The stimulation

of interest in a branch of Japanese performing arts that is not immediately accessible for contemporary young Japanese was another very positive result of the project.
Ms. Margaret Price, who prepared a short film of students work for their private viewing, was not actually represented in the film herself, but her presence during rehearsals, performances and costume making was extremely significant. It was revealed on this occasion that the presence of a camera tends to focus student attention and affect the classroom dynamic more strongly than the efforts of an individual instructor. Additionally, some very interesting, follow-on observations on the creative process from an intercultural perspective were noted by Ms. Margaret Price during the costume-making workshop. She commented that these Japanese students tended very much to 'think out', pre-plan and take an inventory before making any direct action instead of engaging in a real-time, self-reflective creative stream of activity. This is something the researcher has also observed on numerous occasions in more than a decade in Japan.

Besides interculturality, the project described in this article has provided the author with much food for thought in terms of translingualism (Rockell, 2019), and a more careful examination of how technology as a theme is used and represented in the script also helped while preparing practical English *Noh* workshops for EFL instructors in Japan (Rockell, 2018a).
Moreover, while this project used an original script prepared by the author, future work will have students collaborate in creating their own scripts. It may also be interesting to consider how, in a similar way, Japanese as a second language might be learned and taught in combination with non-Japanese forms drawn from students' culture of origin.

The unlikely melding of *Noh*, which is something very traditional and rooted within the Japanese L1 (first language), culture and self-identity, with English (and all the test-based educational pressure and threatening cultural and political imagery that young Japanese sometimes associate with the language) stimulated participants to think in new ways. They became more confident in producing spoken English, more interested in their cultural heritage, knowing *Noh* and '*nō*-ing' English, and enjoying the tremendous benefits that intercultural performing arts activity can bring to education.

References

Benneworth, P., & Jongbloed, B. W. (2010). Who matters to universities? A stakeholder perspective on humanities, arts and social sciences valorisation. *Higher Education, 59*(5), 567-588.

Brown, H. (2017). Why and Why Now? Understanding the Rapid Rise of English-medium Instruction in Higher Education in Japan. *Journal of International Studies and Regional Development, 8*.

Choo, L. B. (2004). *They came to party: an examination of the social status of the medieval noh theatre.* Paper presented at the Japan Forum.

Cripps, A. (2016). English Language Education in Japan: Problems and Solutions. *Perspectives on English Language Education in Japan. Charleston, US: CreateSpace*.

Emmert, R. (1994). Nō: Exploring Its Non-Japanese Possibilities 1. *Contemporary Theatre Review, 1*(2), 137-144.

Esaki, M., & Nishihama, C. (2016). A Relationship Between Creativity, Management Styles, Culture, and Language (A Case of Japanese and English). In *Creativity, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship Across Cultures* (pp. 87-93): Springer.

Fujita-Round, S., & Maher, J. C. (2017). Language Policy and Education in Japan. *Language Policy and Political Issues in Education*, 1-15.

Fusa, K. (2016). *Communicatioln Vulnerability in the Digital Age: A Missed Concern in Constructivism*. Paper presented at the International Association for Development of the Information Society (IADIS) International Conference on Cognition and Exploratory Learning in the Digital Age (CELDA) Mannheim, Germany.

Ganotice Jr, F. A., Tang, H.-H. H., Tsui, G., Villarosa, J. B., & Yeung, S. S. (2016). Globalization of World University Rankings and Its Impact on Asian Universities. *World University Rankings and the Future of Higher Education*, 329.

Gaudart, H. (1990). Using Drama Techniques in Language Teaching. *Language Teaching Methodology for the Ninetees Anthology series, 24*, 230-249.

Gilbert, A. G. (2002). *Teaching the Three R's Through Movement Experiences*: ERIC.

Gill, C. (2016). Maximising Asian ESL Learners' Communicative Oral English via Drama. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies, 7*(5), 240-246.

Goldstein, T. R., Lerner, M. D., & Winner, E. (2017). The arts as a venue for developmental science: Realizing a latent opportunity. *Child development, 88*(5), 1505-1512.

Griffin, A. (2016). Man Accidentally 'Deletes his entire company' with one line of bad code. *The Independent*.

Hedges, L. V. (1987). How hard is hard science, how soft is soft science? The empirical cumulativeness of research. *American psychologist, 42*(5), 443.

Hensley, C. (2000). No Business Like Noh Business. *American Theatre, 17*(1), 34-38. Retrieved from http://www.charliehensley.com/files/NoBusinessLikeNohBusiness.pdf.

Houghton, S. A. (2012). *Intercultural dialogue in practice: Managing value judgment through foreign language education*: Multilingual matters.

Houghton, S. A. (2013). Making intercultural communicative competence and identity-development visible for assessment purposes in foreign language education. *The Language Learning Journal, 41*(3), 311-325.

Houghton, S. A., & Rivers, D. J. (2013). *Native-speakerism in Japan: Intergroup dynamics in foreign language education* (Vol. 151): Multilingual Matters.

Ishii, M. (1994). The Noh Theater: Mirror, Mask, and Madness. *Comparative Drama,* 43-66.

Izutsu, T. (1982). *Towards a Philosophy of Zen Buddhism*. Boulder: Prajñā.

Kaplan, M., Kusano, A., Tsuji, I., & Hisamichi, S. (1998). *Intergenerational programs: Support for children, youth, and elders in Japan*: SUNY Press.

Kecskes, I. (2015). Intracultural Communication and Intercultural Communication: Are They Different? *International Review of Pragmatics, 7*(2), 171-194. doi:10.1163/18773109-00702002

Kluge, D. (2018). Performance-Assisted Learning: A Proposal. *Mask & Gavel, 6*(1), 30-38.

Komparu, K. (2005). *The Noh theater: principles and perspectives*: Floating World Editions.

Kubota, R. (2017). Globalization and Language Education in Japan. In *Second and Foreign Language Education* (pp. 287-299): Springer.

Laotzu. (1989). *The Complete Tao Te Ching* (J. Feng & J. English, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books.

Matsuda, A., & Friedrich, P. (2011). English as an international language: A curriculum blueprint. *World Englishes*, *30*(3), 332-344.

Nettl, B. (1983). *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one Issues and Concepts*. Urbana and Chigago: University of Illinois Press.

Nettl, B. (2010). *Nettl's Elephant: On the History of Ethnnomusicology*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Poole, G. (2010). *The Japanese Professor: An Ethnography of a University Faculty*. Rotterdam: Sense.

Porto, M., Houghton, S. A., & Byram, M. (2017). Intercultural citizenship in the (foreign) language classroom. In: SAGE Publications Sage UK: London, England.

Raitio, T., Suni, A., Vainio, M., & Alku, P. (2012). *High quality synthetic speech on a wide vocal effort continuum: Statistical parametric speech synthesis with glottal pulse library.* Paper presented at the The Listening Talker.

Rivers, D., & Ross, A. (2013). Idealized English Teachers: The Implicit influence of Race in Japan. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education, 12*(5), 321-339.

Rockell, K. F. (2009). '*Fiesta*', Affirming Cultural Identity in a Changing Society: A Study of Filipino Music in Christchurch, 2008 (Master's Thesis) University of Canterbury. Christchurch. New Zealand.

Rockell, K. & Ocampo, M. (2014) Musicians in the Language Classroom: The Transfer of Musical Skills to Teaching a "Speech Mode of Communication". *English Language Teacher Education and Development (ELTED)* Vol.16, 34–47.

Rockell, K. (2015a) *Interactive Musical Composition using a Looping App to Support L2 Development*. Paper presented at Digital Arts – 2nd Global Meeting at Mansfield College, Oxford, United Kingdom.

Rockell, K. (2015b) Musical looping of lexical chunks: An exploratory study. *JALT CALL Journal* Vol.11(3), 235–253.

Rockell, K. (2016) Incorporating Music in CALL: An exploratory study establishing a protocol for Computer Assisted Language Learning Incorporating Music (CALLiM) *AsiaCALL Journal* Vol.11, 18–42.

Rockell, K. & Ocampo, M. (2017) Music in the Philippine Language Classroom. *Humanising Language Teaching* Vol.19(7), 1.

Rockell, K. (2018a) English *Noh* Theater Workshop: Lessons from a Japanese university EFL classroom. *The Mask & Gavel* Vol.7, 38–49.

Rockell, K. (2018b) *Noh in Cyberspace, Empowering the International Voices of Japanese Computer Science Students*. Tiempo 4 All 1st International Festival/Conference on Intercultural Dialogue through the Arts. Fukuoka, Japan. Tiempo 4 All Commemorative Edition. 35-36.

Rockell, K. (2018c) 会津で見つかったお宝[A Treasure found in Aizu]会津能楽会会報 8 号.

Rockell, K. (2019) The Coding Catastrophe: Translingualism and *Noh* in the Japanese Computer Science EFL Classroom. In S. Dovchin and T. A. Barret (Eds.), *Critical Inquiries in the Sociolinguistics of Globalization* (pp.147-167). Multilingual Matters. Encounters Series.

Ruecker, T., & Ives, L. (2014). White Native English Speakers Needed: The Rhetorical Construction of Privilege in Online Teacher Recruitment Spaces. *Tesol Quarterly, 49*(4). doi:DOI: 10.1002/tesq.195

Saunders, P., & Chester, A. (2008). Shyness and the internet: Social problem or panacea? *Computers in Human Behavior, 24*(6), 2649-2658.

Schellenberg, E. G. (2004). Music lessons enhance IQ. *Psychological science, 15*(8), 511-514.

Shah, M. A., & Elyas, T. (2019). TESOL at the crossroads: Representation of source cultures in TESOL textbooks. *Cogent Education*, (just-accepted), 1643524.

Stobart, H. (Ed.) (2008). *The New (Ethno)musicologies*. Maryland: Scarecrow.

Suzuki, S. (2017). Emerged challenges for English education in Japan: The emotional baggage of language learners. *Apples: Journal of Applied Language Studies, 11*.

Titon, J. T. (1996). Knowing fieldwork. *Shadows in the field: New perspectives for fieldwork in ethnomusicology*, 87-100.

Yanagi, M., & Baker, A. A. (2016). Challenges experienced by Japanese students with oral communication skills in Australian universities. *TESOL Journal, 7*(3), 621-644.

About the author

Associate Professor Kim Rockell's research interests encompass ethnomusicology and musical performance in education. For the past several years, he has been resident in Japan, where he has been learning the *utai* [chant] and *shimai* [dance] of the *Noh* theatre. He also is a classical guitarist, versatile performer and teacher. His projects have examined plucked-string traditions, Philippine *rondalla* and Hispanic musical influences in the Asia Pacific, migrant music and music in diaspora, and the music/language nexus. As an educator, Kim has a broad professional experience. He has taught at universities in Australia, Japan and New Zealand. He is currently on staff at Komazawa University, Tokyo.

International Journal of Education & the Arts

http://IJEA.org ISSN: 1529-8094