

Glocalized Pedagogy: Theater as a Tool for Teaching Non-Verbal Communication and Intercultural Skills

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Glocalized Pedagogy: Theater as a Tool for Teaching Non-Verbal Communication and Intercultural Skills

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Abstract.

This paper explores glocalized pedagogy in a “Language & Communication” class for 2nd-year design students. Theater was used to enhance non-verbal communication, creativity, interculturality, and language learning. Using motives from *Hamlet*, students reinterpreted themes to address personal, local, and global issues. Through storytelling and acting, they explored cultural intersections and artistic expression. Flexible participation allowed all 48 students to perform skits, with 16 presenting publicly. The approach fostered introspection and peer appreciation. Challenges, such as limited time for peer review, could be addressed by extending the course. This research highlights theater’s role in promoting cultural understanding and artistic growth.

Keywords: Glocalized Pedagogy, Non-Verbal Communication, Theater in Education, Intercultural Learning, Shakespeare in Higher Education, Cross-Cultural Education, Performative Pedagogy

1. Introduction

After studying for 6 years at the Graduate School of Design and then joining the Media Design Course as a faculty afterward, I became aware of several art student dilemmas. A common problem is giving up one’s studied craft due to pressure of job-hunting (Japanese: 就職活動). Specifically, students experience pressure to secure a prestigious job unrelated to the artistry they learned at the university. Another common issue is that Japanese students rarely exhibit or participate with their work internationally, because of a foreign culture inexperience. A possible answer to addressing these issues is to incorporate a glocality based pedagogy. This means combining local elements with non-local ones to gain a third perspective on the issues discussed (Roudometof, 2015, p.12).

This paper was designed to describe how 2nd year undergraduate students attempted to address issues of their interest via theatrical skits in English. This process was a part of the “Language and Communication Course” (言葉とコミュニケーション) originally taught by Prof. Miharū Fuyuno, but this year taught by me together with Prof. Laura Blanco.

The first half of the course, taught by Prof. Laura Blanco, was focused on the goal of applying the study of linguistics and their application to the design studies of the students. The latter part of the course was devoted to the practice of non-verbal language.

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The goals for this part of the course were:

- to develop confidence and clarity in student non-verbal communication within real-life interactions (both Japanese and foreign settings);
- to effectively read and respond to non-verbal cues during conversations.

The educational design process for this course was challenging, particularly deciding on how to teach the elements of non-verbal language in practice. Furthermore, the question of how to simulate a multicultural setting was also difficult to answer. The medium of theater contains the practice of both. Stagings of foreign plays allow students to examine local issues through a global lens, embodying the principles of glocality (Roudometof, 2015, p. 12). Through the techniques of “becoming a character” and “displaying a character” (Hosoi, 2023, p. 235-236), the course was inspired by the historical examples of Sada Yacco Kawakami. She adapted traditional Japanese theater to foreign audiences (Yamaguchi 86-93; Oshima 617-618) and the other way around (Yamaguchi, p. 150).

For this course the selected play of which to draw the motives from was Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Firstly, because it is a play, which majority of the students had heard of. Secondly, because it is a fitting play to discuss corporate life problems. Students were presented with scenes from an original play called *Hamlet Today* a modernized and simplified Chat GPT inspired play based on the motives of Shakespeare’s original. AI generated and teacher-edited material was chosen to simplify the material enough to make it actionable in a span of 4 weeks. Students discussed both personal and local perspectives, aligning with Patel and Lynch’s (2013) principles of glocalization in pedagogy. These glocalization in pedagogy principles reflect the fostering of a “third culture space” through mutual respect and cultural exchange (Patel & Lynch, p. 226). The reinterpretation process encouraged students to critically reflect on socio-economic and even political concerns, linking a local perspective to a global ramification (Patel & Lynch, p. 225).

This paper outlines the course pedagogy together with photo collages of student skits together and peer comments, show-

ing how the motives of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* were interpreted in a contemporary Japanese setting. Using storytelling, a core component in glocalized pedagogy, the students explored themes of their interest through both verbal and non-verbal communication techniques inspired by Akira Kurosawa (*Every Frame a Painting*, 2015) and Joe Navarro’s analysis of body language (Navarro, *Wired*, 2018). This paper quotes pedagogical ideas stemmed from glocality, their use in a multicultural study process and how these ideas were incorporated in student performances.

2. Definition

Foreign students often find it memorable when elements of their far away culture are fused with a local one. The same goes for the opposite – as local students tend to pay extra attention to how a foreigner teacher “handles” their culture. Foreign counterparts, often inadvertently, “pay homage” to the local culture in an unseen way. Because of how easy it is to pay attention to such situations, there may be potential hidden within them. This potential is called glocality.

Glocality aligns with the nature of creating an artwork involving multiculturalism of authors, themes, and artistic devices. It is a method of blending, mixing, or adapting at least two processes of which one is local (Roudometof, 2015, p. 12). It is important to acknowledge that the practical nature of the term can be used for a pedagogical benefit. Instead of viewing global and local as a problem relationship, the terms can be viewed as different sides of a coin (Robertson p. 62).

3. Glocality in Theater

In Japanese theater performers traditionally “displayed characters” as in kabuki, while Western techniques are based on “becoming characters” (Hosoi, 2023, p. 235-236). This idea was incorporated in the planning of the class through the set English language as well as the plot derived from *Hamlet*.

Sada Yacco Kawakami’s transition from traditional to modern acting is an example of glocality, as she adapted traditional Japanese theater for a foreign audience by replacing male onnagata actors (Yamaguchi 86-93; Oshima 617-618). Later her performance in *Hamlet* as Ophelia used Japanese lullabies instead of the traditional style of Nagauta singing (Yamaguchi.

p 150) In this situation contemporary artistic devices were used to accommodate adaptation of a foreign material to make it easier to relate to – the other cornerstone technique used in preparation for *Hamlet Today*.

4. Application of Glocality Based Pedagogy in the Classroom

The paper titled “Glocalization as an Alternative to Internationalization in Higher Education: Embedding Positive Glocal Learning Perspectives” reflectively discusses valuable ideas of glocalization that celebrate a blend of cultures in work. In this section I have selected several quotes, which characterize our 4-week work process with the students.

Glocalization “forces learners and teachers to level the playing field on the basis of mutual respect and shared responsibility” (Patel & Lynch, 2013, p. 224).

This idea was central in the classroom, as at the beginning of the course the students were informed about the motivation for this 4-week class. It was primarily one of learning, and an artistic endeavor to showcase successful work which could enable the class to attend international theater festivals together. This approach fostered a “third culture space”, in which our culturally diverse world views converged to “map shared futures” (Patel & Lynch, 2013, p. 223).

“Within the higher education context, glocalization refers to the respectful exchange of cultural wealth among learners and teachers to inform and enhance higher education pedagogical practice” (Patel & Lynch, 2013, p. 226).

Students reinterpreted the modernized *Hamlet Today* excerpts by adding their ideas of local issues to motives of the globally renowned original by Shakespeare. Discussion based rehearsals allowed the students to have complete agency over the content of the scenes. The students also discussed whether to perform in the final performance or shift to analysis of peer work, ensuring flexibility and inclusivity.

“Storytelling acts as a powerful medium for engaging learners in community building” (Patel & Lynch, 2013, p. 226).

The ability of storytelling was crucial to our class as students used non-verbal communication techniques inspired by Akira Kurosawa’s films. The techniques on reading the non-verbal language by Joe Navarro further allowed the students to evaluate the work. The combination of the two allowed to explore the form of glocality while grounding the themes to their everyday lives.

“Within glocalized discourse, individuals and groups critically reflect upon socio-economic and political concerns from their local perspectives while taking into consideration the global ramifications” (Patel & Lynch, 2013, p. 225).

Students reflected on larger corporate and more localized social themes through their scenes in the lens of English language. This allowed students to adjust the stage language according to the fusion of local Japanese culture and the globally widespread English. This in turn emboldened the students perform their scenes in the way of “becoming characters” rather than “display the characters” (Hosoi, 2023, p. 235-236). The plots arguably could be more difficult to perform in Japanese since the students are not trained actors.

5. Methods

Teaching theater can benefit the students in studying design. The following skill set was selected to develop in the students:

- 1) artistically discussing one’s interests or local problems through stage presence;
- 2) practicing English and the body language accompanying it through acting;
- 3) using one’s preferred artistic craft (other than acting) for stage design, costumes, props to acquire a foreign perspective on the theme or the craft;
- 4) using active listening in analysis of peer stage performances;
- 5) deciding one’s preferred study module: 50% stage performance, 50% peer work analysis vs. 70% stage performance (with 1 additional rehearsal), 30% peer work analysis + additional 20 % of scene analysis rehearsal;
- 6) adding/removing text (setting, environment, spoken text, gender, etc.) to convey local problems or one’s interests.

Each class lasted 3 hours (with a lunch break). The classes were adapted for 44 participants.

Week 1 (3 hours):

- Activities:
 - Introduction to non-verbal communication techniques (gestures, intonation, eye contact) and active listening through video (A Former FBI Agent Explains How to Read Body Language).
 - Discussion of Stanislavski's system for developing character motivation (e.g., "Who is talking? Where? When? Why? What is changing in their relationships/environment?") (Stanislavski, 1936).

- Students paired up and selected simplified scenes from *Hamlet Today*.

- Homework:

Stage a scene addressing a specific issue, incorporating creative elements such as props or costumes, with flexibility to change text, setting, or roles.

Week 2 (3 hours):

- Activities:
 - Analysis of expressive movement techniques based on Akira Kurosawa - Composing Movement (YouTube: Every Frame a Painting).
 - View and critique half the scenes, focusing on character motivation and providing feedback to classmates.

- Homework:

Rework scenes based on feedback and Kurosawa's techniques. Prepare the remaining scenes for presentation.

Week 3 (3 hours):

- Activities:
 - Divided into three groups: rehearsals, performances, and poster preparation.
 - Reviewed the remaining scenes and provided comments on character motivations.
 - Students selected one of two modules for Week 4:
- Module A: 50% performance, 50% analysis of others' work.
- Module B: 70% performance (including additional rehearsal), 30% analysis of others' work.

- Homework:

Prepare posters and rehearse final scenes.

Week 4 (3-4 hours):

- Activities:
 - Conducted one-hour individual rehearsals for Module B students.
 - Final performances included the use of props, costumes, and multimedia.
 - Module A: Answered questions about peers' performances (e.g., "What non-verbal elements did you notice?").
 - Module B: Performed final scenes to an audience.
- Both modules participated in presenting posters on selected non-verbal communication topics and documenting feedback.

6. Examples of Student Work - Performance Photos, Synopsis and Peer Analysis of Non-Verbal Language

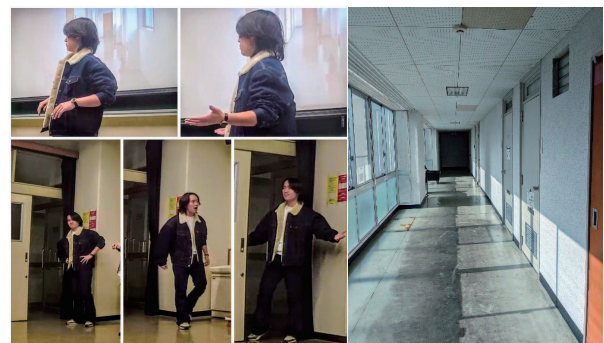


Figure 1. Hamlet's encounter with his father's ghost in scene focused on real psychological theater aesthetic. Below is the photo projected for the scene, taken by the author.

A student performing Hamlet's encounter with his father's ghost in a humorous dormitory scene. A ghost, unaware of him being a ghost is hungry and ignored by everyone. Finally, a student responds to his "Good morning!". Surprised he talks to her and notices her distress. She reluctantly tells him that at night she saw a ghost looking inside her refrigerator. The intrigued ghost asks for a description, she then realizes that he looked exactly like him. She decides to flee to her room, but the ghost angrily declares that it is his room. She runs away, after which the frustrated, confused and still hungry ghost addresses the audience with a question: "Can any of you

cook?”. This scene successfully captures the challenges of sharing a dormitory.

Student Comments (translation):

“I saw the distance between two people, which implied tension in the scene.”

“The way characters moved subtly while engaging in conversation created layers of meaning.”

“The body language and facial expressions conveyed more than the words themselves.”

“It was easy to understand the conflict through their gestures.”

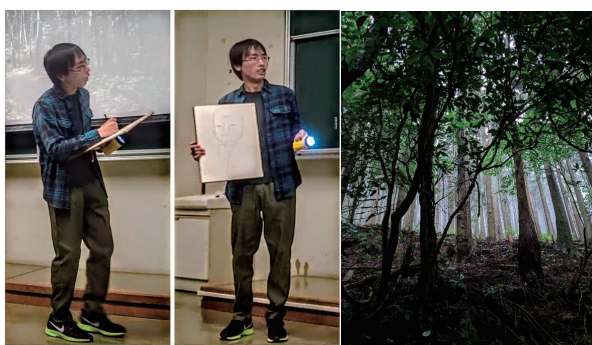


Figure 2. Horatio's encounter with the ghost of Hamlet's father enables his artistic vigor. Sketch held by the student authored by the student himself. Photo in the scene taken by the author.

A student performing a modern take on the scene where Bernardo, Horatio and Marcellus encounter the ghost of Hamlet's father. Horatio and Marcellus are two part-time workers in an electronics company, who are hiking near the Aokigahara forest when sundown approaches. Marcellus then notices a silhouette that resembles the late CEO and Horatio hurriedly sketches it. Marcellus, terrified, argues it does not look like the late CEO as Horatio joined the company after his passing. He then suddenly notices other ghosts. Horatio becomes joyful about being able to continue sketching ghosts and Marcellus runs away. This scene successfully embodies the willingness to pursue the path of an artist even in dangerous situations.

Student Comments (translation):

“It was easy to see that the two were terrified, and I think the artist was good at expressing interest even when fear and curiosity were mixed.”

“Subtle gestures emphasized vulnerability while retaining composure.”

“The artist used small yet significant movements to convey both hesitation and curiosity.”

“Their contrasting emotional expressions added depth to the scene.”



Figure 3. Hamlet's dialogue with Ophelia in contemporary Japanese pop duet aesthetics.

Two students performing the iconic dialogue between Hamlet and Ophelia reimagined as a contemporary Japanese duo band debuting front of a large audience. After performing a cover of Aimyon - マリーゴールド Hamlet, the guitarist, receives a phone call, which disrupts his focus for the next song 米津玄師 - レモン. Mid-song he fails to maintain the correct rhythm, stops playing and announces to Ophelia and the audience that he is quitting the band after just winning a lottery. He apologizes, gifts his guitar to Ophelia, and leaves. Determined to continue, Ophelia tries to play the guitar for the next song despite having no prior experience. She fails and desperately asks the audience for a minute to rehearse. She leaves, and her efforts fade into the distance. The scene explores an artist's devotion tested by the acquisition of wealth and the struggle to accept failure.

Student Comments (translation):

“The performer's ability to keep the rhythm while conveying emotion was impressive. The juxtaposition of silence and music gave the scene a dynamic.”

“The synchronization between singing and body movements was captivating. It showed how rhythm can guide the emotional flow of the performance.”



Figure 4. Hamlet arguing with Horatio about her plan to unmask Claudius’s crime. Below are some of the images for the scene designed by the students.

Two students performing their version of Hamlet disclosing his plan to Horatio about stage a play depicting the murder of a former king in front of King Claudius. Hamlet, female VP of a large corporation heads to the welcome party of the new CEO accompanied by her bodyguard and friend Horatio. When Horation finds a USB flash stick dropped by Hamlet, he discovers that it contains a virus accusing the CEO of murder. To protect Hamlet and Horatio’s family, he tosses it into the sea and convinces Hamlet to attend the party peacefully and leaves. Hamlet then draws another USB stick from the inside of her shoe and proceeds to the party. The scene cleverly explores the tensions of contemporary Japanese cor-

porate drinking culture. Students drew the visuals of the background cityscape and the sea as well as designed the animation effects.

Student comments (translation):

“When talking about important things, he looked her straight in the eye and clapped his hands to change the topic. I was a little moved by how considerate he was to her and his own family.”

“I liked the characters’ small squabbles over intangible things and the exquisite sense of distance.”

“Hamlet’s shrewdness was well-executed.”



Figure 5. Imagined meeting between Claudius and the ghost of Hamlet’s father. The scene is accompanied by professionally shot video with environment images designed by the students.

Two students performing a modern Japanese version of an imagined meeting between Hamlet’s father’s ghost and Claudius (the new king and the killer of the former king, his brother). Claudius, now the CEO of “Big Company” starts the scene with a humorous, charismatic video address to his workers: “it is a new era and at this time our hearts are united as one, forget the sorrow of the past and build the future”. He is then chased by a mysterious stalker to his office, where his confidence crumbles to crippling fear. He is confronted by his brother’s ghost after which he realizes it was a hallucination

caused by his new sleeping medicine. The scene is a great allegory of the often-corrupt backstage of large business management.

Student comments (translation):

“The CEO’s reactions were subtle but powerful. The mixture of humor and seriousness made the story engaging.”

“The CEO’s climb to the top was symbolic of his struggle. The momentary silence before the loud realization was impactful.”

“The CEO’s quiet gestures, combined with sudden intensity, created a feeling of unexpected tension. It made the scene immersive.”

“They created this scene starting with a video, and it was serious and amazing. I can say this to all groups, but as the number of class tasks increases, I have nothing but respect for them for being able to perform at this level at this time of year.”

7. Conclusion

The integration of glocalized learning in the “Language & Communication” class proved innovative and effective in refining the skills of non-verbal communication, creativity, cultural exchange, and language learning. The use of theater medium motivated students to perform scenes of personal, local, and global problems. The collaborative course structure allowed student to choose a preferred study module and was inclusive and adaptable. All 48 of 48 students performed in class and 16 students out of 48 performed in public. While this might seem like a failure to motivate public performances – it was designed to do the opposite. Students voluntarily observing the final performance had the chance to introspectively reconsider the value of their work after seeing a positive public reception of similar scenes. Such voluntary participation approach, rather than indicating a lack of motivation, encouraged introspection and appreciation towards peer work. This can work as a steppingstone to encourage reluctant students to perform publicly in a course of 16 classes instead of 8.

Student capacity to adapt social and personal problems into motives of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* shows value of integrating practical Shakespeare in university curricula. Tools that enable summarization and translation of old plays brings the students closer to the genius of Shakespeare and promotes the artistry of students. However, the class would have benefited from reading the original play before the course start or in a full class format of 16 classes. Extended scene analysis and discussion time could deepen the discussions beyond non-verbal communication to deeper thematic concerns.

Ultimately, this study has been valuable in understanding the practical value of glocalized pedagogy in higher education. This is a powerful instrument in bringing Japanese students toward the acutely needed interest in foreign language and culture. Such classes are vital to build reciprocal understanding in an increasingly chaotic world.

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