

# EXPLORATIONS

## How to Confuse a Dragonfly: Spontaneity and Improvisation in the Language Classroom

Brad Barker  
Rikkyo University

*Improvisation has been called the “dark matter of teaching” that may make up the bulk of lessons but cannot be scripted or planned (Maley & Underhill, 2012); research in this area is scant. Making connections with “explicitly improvisational professions” (DeZutter, 2011) such as music, this exploratory case study describes my initial attempts to become a more improvisational teacher during university English language courses. I investigate what improvised classroom moments look like, and how a shift toward spontaneity and improvisation can promote teacher development. I recorded field notes on the results of “unplannable” activities, improvised moments, classroom interactions, and teacher reflections. In addition, I attempt to show that building space into lesson plans can allow for room to breathe and for student contributions to fully develop. With this focus, I noticed that the emergent moments were more interesting than anything I as a teacher could have pre-planned.*

*Keywords:* Dogme ELT, improvisation, spontaneity, emergent language, creativity

*You've got to learn your instrument. Then, you practice, practice, practice. And then, when you finally get up there on the bandstand, forget all that and just wail.*

*- Charlie Parker, Musician*

There has been recent interest in the role of spontaneity and improvisation in teaching, but comparatively, it is a neglected part of educational research and teacher education, and few teachers discuss teaching as an act of improvisation. Maley and Underhill (2012) call improvisation “the dark matter of teaching” that may make up the bulk of lessons but cannot be scripted or planned. In the field of astrophysics, dark matter is thought to make up more than eighty percent of the material in the universe, but it cannot be directly detected (Ananthaswamy, 2022), and this concept may have parallels to teaching. Richards (2013) talks about teaching as a kind of skilled improvisation and gives examples of teachers improvising to make the most of teachable moments. However, a search for “improvisation” on The Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) Publications website, which contains archives of multiple journals spanning nearly five decades, found only 9 results (as of March 2024). Among these results, only one article had the word “improvisation” in the title, and most others mentioned the word only in passing or as part of an improv drama activity. An interview with teacher trainer Ken Wilson began to touch on the heart of the matter, but in a tentative way (Cornwell, 2011). In contrast, “lesson plan” found 73 results, and “motivation,” an example of an established research field, yielded 535 results.

Improvisational teaching has its supporters. Sawyer (2011, p. 1) discusses the finding that experienced teachers “were better at improvising in response to each

class's unique flow [and that] they tended to spend less advance time planning than novice teachers" (e.g., Borko & Livingston, 1989). DeZutter (2011) contends that teaching is inherently improvisational and proposes a redefining of the profession as an improvisational one, much like unscripted theater and jazz music. She identifies these explicitly improvisational professions as useful sources to draw upon because in these disciplines, "conscious efforts are made to develop improvisational expertise, and [...] a body of knowledge has been built up for doing so" (DeZutter, 2011, p. 27). She notes that teaching lacks a body of knowledge about what excellent classroom improvisation is, and how teachers learn to improvise. Importantly, DeZutter (2011) emphasizes that rather than using the more commonly used words teacher "flexibility" or "responsiveness," it is important to use the word "improvisation" as, among other reasons, it "helps us see teachers as creative, knowledgeable, and autonomous professionals [...] rather than as technicians whose work mainly involves implementing procedures prepared by others" (p. 33).

In the English language teaching world, Dogme ELT (e.g., Meddings & Thornbury, 2009) is probably the most well-known example of an improvisational approach. The Dogme ELT movement began with a provocative paper written by Thornbury in 2000. His frustration based on the supposedly "communicative" teaching practices of the day was palpable. Thornbury, a teacher trainer at the time, describes his rules as he waged war on materials-driven lessons: "Photocopies were proscribed; the OHP [Overhead Projector] was banished. Grammar presentations had to be squeezed into 5 minutes. Real talk, usually relegated to the bookends of the lesson proper, had to form the lesson core. And the teacher had to talk – not *at* the students or even *to* them – but *with* them" (Thornbury, 2000). The Dogme ELT approach focuses on conversation-driven lessons, reduced reliance

on materials and technology, and emergent language.

Improvisational teaching is entwined with the concepts of creativity and play. For example, Kasperek (2017) found that activities with explicit creativity aims can open up space for the unexpected. Unexpected outcomes may require teacher improvisation. Kasperek (2024) also proposed the concept of "playfully studious teaching" as a response to the harsh realities of schooling, such as the "microfascist desire for control" (p. 201). An improvisational mindset involves letting go of the desire to control. With these more theoretical and political connections in mind, however, the everyday practice of improvisation ultimately deserves its own specific focus.

In this exploratory case study, I document my initial attempts to become a more improvisational teacher during English language courses at a university in Japan. For this study, I designed and implemented classroom activities that allowed for more open-ended outcomes than what I was used to. One activity was designed to be impossible to plan for as a way to foster spontaneity and hone my improvisational abilities. Examples from the classroom illustrate what improvised classroom moments look like. These emergent moments were often engaging and bizarre, and they became the focus of lessons that seemed to unfold naturally. The purpose of this study was to investigate the following:

1. What do improvised classroom moments look like?
2. How can a shift toward spontaneity and improvisation promote teacher development?

By addressing these questions, I attempt to:

1. Add to the body of knowledge about spontaneity and improvisation in teaching.

2. Provide examples of improvisation in the language classroom.
3. Explore how spontaneity and improvisation can be fostered.
4. Make connections with writings from researchers in general education that have not received much attention in ELT (English Language Teaching) (e.g., Sawyer & DeZutter).
5. Make connections with existing bodies of knowledge in fields that have established improvisational traditions, such as music.
6. Draw attention to the polarizing and inaccurate way the topic of improvisation is often discussed in ELT as only a component of the perceived radical and idealistic approach that is Dogme ELT.

In this study, I characterize improvised lesson moments as the teacher getting out of the way of students' learning. More so than before, my role was mainly to help students articulate what they wanted to say. Without restrictions or expectations placed on them by me or the coursebook, the student output took on a life of its own and was filled with personality and detail.

## Background

My teaching approach before this study was based on a CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) approach, but it was also planning-centric, and characterized by a relative lack of spontaneity from my point of view as the teacher. While it is true that any activity in which students do not have much time to prepare is spontaneous for them, there were relatively few moments during my lessons that deviated from the lesson plan or seemed genuinely spontaneous to me. For instance, I would often ask students to answer open-ended questions such as, "What is the best country to visit?" I could not know beforehand what students might respond with, but I could make predictions about what they might say, and dialogue

would often follow predictable and formulaic patterns (e.g., Opinion? Opinion. Reason? Reason. Example? Example.). Although classroom dialogue had the potential to expand in different directions, it often did not.

More than simply the implementation of an activity, mindset seems to be an important component of improvisation. I first heard of Dogme ELT (e.g., Meddings & Thornbury, 2009) after five years as a full-time teacher when I read an unpublished article written by a colleague (Lowe, 2012). The approach was never mentioned in my MA TESOL (Master of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) courses, including a methodology course that covered historical approaches and methods (e.g., Total Physical Response, Suggestopedia, and PPP [Presentation Practice Production]). Dogme ELT was intriguing, but my teaching context demanded a high degree of uniformity and somewhat rigid lesson planning that left little space for a Dogme ELT approach. The first I heard anyone talk about teaching and improvisation was seven years later at a talk by a colleague at a small ELT conference in Tokyo (Brereton, 2019). By hearing from others that teaching could be improvisational, I was liberated. I was inspired to read everything I could on the topic and start focusing on spontaneity and improvisation, or lack thereof, in my daily teaching. As is often the case with reflective practice, simply talking or writing about a concept can have a meaningful impact on teaching and learning. This exploration opened a mode of teacher development for me even after years of teaching, but at the same time, it made me realize how undeveloped my teaching was.

I felt underprepared for the "dark matter of teaching" that Maley and Underhill (2012) discuss. The emphasis on planning seemed to place most important decision-making with me the teacher, or even with the coursebook authors (in terms of topics, activities, target language, texts, etc.).

Teacher trainers and texts did occasionally talk about lessons “not going to plan” or a vague idea of the importance of being flexible, but if a lesson did not go as planned, it would be seen as a flaw in the plan rather than a flaw of a planning-centric approach to teaching. A lesson diverging from the plan was not presented as an opportunity to respond to emerging student needs and interests. The idea of building unplanned space into lessons, or going to class with a “loose plan” and a few materials was not seen as a viable option. There was little focus on the moment-to-moment decision-making that occurs while teaching. At first, when trying a less-structured approach, it felt like I was not teaching the way I was supposed to, even though these types of lessons often led to student-driven dialogue and a strong focus on meaning-focused communication.

### Context and Participants

In this exploratory case study, I document a shift in my conceptual understanding of what is possible or desirable in language teaching. Biesta discusses De Vries’ distinction between the *technical role* and the *cultural role* of educational research. The purpose of this study was mainly in line with the cultural role that helps practitioners “acquire a different understanding of their practice” (Biesta, 2007, p. 2). Case studies are a hybrid research method that generally uses “a range of methods for collecting and analyzing data, rather than being restricted to a single procedure” (Nunan, 1992, p. 74). I typed field notes following each lesson that included noteworthy spontaneous and improvised classroom moments. For this study, I use the descriptions of improvisation proposed by Sassi (2011). Level one improvisation involves the curriculum development process “when teachers design their own lessons, activities, or investigations” (Sassi, 2011, p. 214). Sassi (2011) explains that “at a second level,

improvisational teaching can also refer to actions in the classroom that vary from what the teacher had planned in advance – for example, when a teacher who is following a particular lesson plan shifts direction in response to what students might say or do.” The third level improvisation occurs “in the spaces between planned moments” and is “the improvisation that can occur within the context of a planned lesson. Specifically, the [...] teachers’ abilities to respond to students in the classroom and to actively engage students in learning” (Sassi, 2011, pp. 214-215). Field note data includes the results of “unplannable” activities, improvised moments, classroom interactions, and teacher reflections. Images of board work were also collected.

Student participants were 95 first and second-year university students taking one of two compulsory English language courses with me as their instructor. Students were all English language majors and classes which ranged from 20–25 students met twice a week during the 15-week semester. I present data from five classroom groups that were collected during Spring Semester 2019. All participants signed bilingual consent forms. Student names are pseudonyms.

### Teaching Constraints

Schools and institutions can sometimes discourage creativity. Richards (2013, p. 18) gives an example of a teacher being told not to add anything to a course that is not in the coursebook. In this context, the students and the company funding the lessons measured progress solely by how much of the textbook was covered. Berliner (2011) talks about the phenomenon of “creaticide” that is present in some schools in the United States and the United Kingdom. Contexts in which the extreme focus on protocols, routines, scripts, and standardized test scores can kill creativity. Teachers are constrained and students have few opportunities for creativity or development of higher-order thinking.

In teaching contexts in Japan, teachers will have constraints to negotiate. Somewhat traditional academic English courses with pre-planned syllabuses and required coursebooks are common at universities. Classes that meet once a week during a 15-week semester may have little breathing room. Moreover, one precursor to good improvisation seems to be a good rapport between the teacher and students, and between the students, in whatever way it may be developed. Sawyer (2017) talks about familiarity between participants as one thing that can foster group flow. But how likely is it that good rapport can be established after only 15 meetings or less?

It may seem that there is little possibility of improvisational teaching, but there must be something more than simply getting through lessons. There must be space to teach and connect with the humans in the room, which seems to be the entire point of meaningful education. Teachers can identify the constraints that can be removed or adjusted. For example, a rigid course could be distilled down to its most basic topical elements. If there is a required textbook covering a common topic like People or Customs, there is a lot of room for expansion or supplementation that can transcend the pages of the textbook.

Teachers in Japan also have considerable freedom in many cases. Although prescribed course aims are the norm, it is usually mostly up to teachers how they achieve those aims. There does not seem to be a general push to implement more scripts and teaching protocols. Is there space for a warm-up activity? Often, teachable moments emerge during everyday lessons, and teachers can change course to take advantage of these moments.

### Exploring through Classroom Improvisation

This first example of classroom improvisation happened after I started building more unstructured space into lesson plans, something I had rarely done before.

During a first-year writing class, after reading a paragraph in the required coursebook that talks about a man's fear of flying, the class discussed their fears. Several students said they were quite afraid of insects, especially cockroaches. Realizing that students may have strong feelings about this topic, I had them discuss the best and worst insects in small groups in the next lesson. The prompt was a slide on the projector screen with two questions (1. What is the best insect? / 2. What is the worst insect?) and a page from a visual dictionary.

After the discussion, I had nothing specific planned apart from one primary lesson aim: students should understand how to write a good title for a text. Students checked visual dictionaries of insects on their smartphones to aid them during discussions and several had electronic dictionaries. The discussion became a good opportunity for emergent vocabulary (e.g., How do you say *kimoi* in English? Japanese: キモい; English: gross, disgusting). After a brief student-to-student discussion, we began a whole-class discussion. I started by asking a student in the front row what the best insect is. She responded with "dragonfly." My next question was, "Why?" She struggled to give her reasons but pointed her index finger and repeatedly traced the shape of a circle in the air. Another student helped her by saying "eyes." Another said, "confuse." Another said, "Drunk, like drunk." Everyone seemed to understand, except for me. After a lot of negotiating meaning between me and the students (e.g., So, are you saying...?), I understood that students were saying that they move their finger in a circular motion in the air to confuse the dragonfly, just before reaching out and catching it by the wings. I asked follow-up questions such as "Where do you catch dragonflies?" "In the park." And importantly, "Why do you do it?" "For happiness." "It's traditional Japanese culture." Next was a brief whole-class discussion about how the dragonfly feels, followed by playful accusations from me that

the students do not care about the dragonfly's feelings. "What happens after you catch the dragonfly?" "Release it. Throw it." "Who taught you to do this?" "Grandmother" "Grandfather" "Dad." During the interaction, I reacted with expressions of shock and disbelief. There was whole-class laughter and positive group tension. In the end, the discussion concluded with a few of my final comments: "I can't believe it" and "I'm going to tell all my friends about this."

I transitioned by asking students to open their textbooks to page 25, which was not smooth, but it still worked well enough. Students then proceeded to the "planned" part of the lesson for the day: how to write a good title for a paragraph. In their coursebook, students read about how to write a good title, followed by a few examples of good and bad titles. As students were working, I wrote two possible titles for a paragraph about the dragonfly technique: 1. *Traditional Japanese Culture*, 2. *How to Confuse a Dragonfly*. Later, we talked about which title is better and why.

At the beginning of the next lesson, I asked students to tell me one word that describes the previous lesson the week before. Naturally, they said "dragonfly." We watched a short video on YouTube of someone demonstrating the technique. Then, after a brief review of the prior lesson, students began writing their titles and paragraphs about various topics that I had approved. During the lesson, I began writing a paragraph entitled *How to Confuse a Dragonfly*.

In the next lesson, I presented my *How to Confuse a Dragonfly* paragraph to students but cut into individual sentences. Groups were tasked with putting the sentences in order. They seemed to enjoy the task and were successful after a few minutes. Groups spontaneously collaborated with other groups to solve the problem.

I'll never forget the day I learned how to confuse a dragonfly. It's a popular pastime in Japan that I heard about from my students. Many children learn the technique from their grandfather, father, or other children. First, point your index finger towards a resting dragonfly. Then, move your finger in a circular motion in the air. If you're lucky, the dragonfly will get confused and fly towards your finger. If you're fast enough, you can catch it by the wings. People do this for fun, but I wonder what the dragonfly thinks.

Students tried their best as one group to help communicate this one idea. This happened in a classroom of quite low-proficiency students. Most students had TOEIC scores around 300-400 or lower. Likely, each student as an individual was not yet able to explain how to confuse a dragonfly. One student provided one word or described one part. Students may have only been able to reach the communicative outcome with the help of their peers. But together, they were able to express complex ideas. The lesson seemed to be driven by students' natural desire to express their ideas and my natural desire to understand what students were trying to tell me.

During the whole class improvised moments, the students seemed to be engaged and focused on what was unfolding. This may be related to the "close listening" and "complete concentration" that Sawyer writes about in his "Ten Conditions for Group Flow" (2017, pp. 53-56). Maley and Underhill (2012) write, "In a flow state, we are so into the activity we are engaged in that time passes unnoticed and events take place in a seemingly effortless way, with all the elements complementing each other as in a dance" (p. 7). I am unsure if we reached this kind of group flow state, but intercultural exchange and communication as the main drivers of the lesson were enjoyable for me and hopefully for students as well.

For me as a teacher, these were giant steps toward identifying the role improvisation plays in teaching, and that it is desirable if the teacher and students can improvise together. By slowing down and being patient, student contributions had the chance to fully develop.

After the dragonfly lessons, I attempted to design an activity with the specific aim of fostering spontaneity and improvisation. The result was an activity that is impossible to plan for: one that I call “Tell Brad something he doesn’t know.”

### Tell Brad Something He Doesn’t Know - Take 1 - The Tables Are Turned

The activity began by showing a prompt on the projector screen. The prompt was a PowerPoint slide with large white text on a dark background that said, “Tell Brad something he doesn’t know.” After a few seconds, a student offered the initial idea which was a piece of notebook paper with Japanese words that are very difficult to pronounce for learners of Japanese as an additional language. In contrast to later versions of this same activity, the idea was delivered in writing instead of orally as it was in all other instances. However, this student had no way of knowing what kind of activity we would be doing in class and could not have prepared for it in any specific way. I suspect the student wanted to share it with classmates or show it to me after class.

高級	<i>koukyuu</i>	luxury
公共	<i>koukyou</i>	public
呼吸	<i>kokyuu</i>	breath
皇居	<i>koukyo</i>	Imperial Palace
故郷	<i>kokyuu</i>	hometown
国境	<i>kokkyou</i>	national border

I asked the student to write the *kanji* on the board. Every student seemed to be involved in some way. For instance, a couple of students came up to the front of the classroom to help with the board work, and others were providing English translations while seated at their desks. I asked a few

questions to the students about some features of the *kanji*. Students then gave me an impromptu lesson on advanced Japanese pronunciation. Suddenly, I was being tested on my Japanese pronunciation by the students standing near the front of the classroom and I was not doing well. Students were laughing at me and with me as I did poorly on their test. It was one of the most difficult tests I had ever taken. They gave me feedback and instructions (e.g., Student: Try this one. / Teacher: Can I hear you say it again?). Next, partly to include more students, I transitioned by introducing a related idea I had been thinking about but had not yet discussed with this group. I told students that when Japanese words emerge when they are speaking English, it is okay to pronounce the word normally in Japanese. There is no need to pronounce it as English speakers do, for example, karaoke as /ˌkəriˈoʊki/. And similarly, it is often not necessary to translate Japanese words into awkward English. For instance, it is much better to simply say miso than “fermented soybean paste” in most cases. As an example, I then asked students how to say Tokyo in English (or, more accurately, how many English speakers pronounce Tokyo). They tried and failed multiple times to figure it out. Students who were seated were also discussing and trying to figure out how it might be pronounced. As a hint, I sounded out a few of the Japanese words on the board as if they were English words. One word was similar: *koukyo* [Imperial Palace]. A single student got it first. The key was to read it as if it were an English word: /ˈtoʊki,ou/ I hoped that students would notice the differences in languages that can cause difficulty for learners and the strange ways that words can change when incorporated into another language. Next, after a student question about what I had studied in university, the discussion shifted to a discussion about university life. A few students asked questions about my university life, such as my major. I also told students

that my university life was much different from theirs and gave examples. Among other things, we talked about the idea of “my job is a university student.” This was discussed both in pairs and as a whole class with me asking questions to students about whether they agreed or disagreed with the idea.

This may be an example of the lesson flow emerging from “collaborative classroom dialogue” (DeZutter, 2011, p. 40). Students had a large hand in shaping the direction of the lesson—they had agency. Although this activity was meandering and somewhat unfocused at times, a positive is that it was largely driven by dialogue and meaning-focused interaction.

During my formative years as a teacher, I was trained to aim for a one hundred percent English classroom. I do not subscribe to the idea anymore, but through this activity, I found that I was reluctant to bring certain themes into the classroom. Leaving a part of the lesson open to a pure form of student contributions allowed me to reconsider my pedagogical assumption about what should be allowed or what is desirable in the classroom. During this moment, I remember feeling somewhat uncomfortable as the *kanji* were being written on the board. Lessons were not supposed to begin with students writing *kanji* on the board. But rather than descending into chaos, the lesson turned into a discussion about the cross-influences of the L1 and L2. While typing notes and reflecting after the lesson, I realized that discussions about *kanji* were basically absent from past lessons I had taught. It was likely that there was a gap in students’ knowledge and a missed opportunity here. Were most students able to talk about their L1 using their L2? Did they have an interest or need to be able to do this? Terms like On-reading, Kun-reading, radical, and stroke order came to mind as possibly relevant. However, it is also likely that talking about the Japanese language was something that does not match student expectations of what should

happen in an English language course, and this must also be considered.

### Tell Brad Something He Doesn’t Know - Take 2 - Same Birthday

The activity began by showing the prompt on the projector screen. The prompt was the same PowerPoint slide with large white text on a black background that says, “Tell Brad something he doesn’t know.” After a couple of minutes of student thought, I gave a couple of examples (e.g., dark secrets or school rules). Then one student began. I recorded this exchange in my field notes after the lesson:

Student: Birthday! Question okay?

Teacher: Yeah! Go ahead.

S: Huh?

T: What are we talking about? Do you want to know my birthday?

[pause]

Okay, when is your birthday, Kenji?

S: April 20th.

T: April 20th? Your birthday is on April 20th?

S: Yes.

[pause]

T: You have the same birthday as my wife.

[The classroom erupts into laughter, surprise, and disbelief.]

S: Really?

T: Yes, really.

To conclude, there was a brief moment of joking with Kenji, “Next year, we’ll have a birthday party with you, me, and my wife. Just the three of us. There will be cake and presents. It’ll be great.” Kenji seemed to be wondering if I was joking or serious. The activity was under five minutes from start to finish.

It was great to begin a lesson with a peak experience. Although spontaneous and in the spirit of the activity as designed, this does not appear to be a good example of improvisation but rather an unlikely outcome that happened by chance. The exchange was



unscripted and unplanned, but it could have occurred anytime during a lesson. It was also not representative of the activity as all other versions lasted much longer and did not have as dramatic an outcome. I did learn that it might be a good idea to conclude the activity with a peak, wherever it may be. It should also be said that due to the unpredictable nature of this kind of activity, it was often difficult to tie it into the overall theme of the planned coursebook lesson. A few times the class referred back to something that happened in “Tell Brad something he doesn’t know” as a kind of inside joke, but at times it was confined to a warm-up activity. Tying lesson moments together to make a cohesive whole is one of the more challenging aspects of this approach that I identified as one area for personal improvement.

### Tell Brad Something He Doesn’t Know - Take 3 - Daruma from Funabashi

After displaying the same prompt (a PowerPoint slide with large white text on a black background that says “Tell Brad something he doesn’t know.”), a few minutes passed before the initial idea emerged. I had to be patient, but eventually, an idea was offered by a student in the back of the classroom. I recorded the following exchange in field notes after the lesson:

Student 1: Do you know Chiba-kun? [a mascot for Chiba Prefecture]

Teacher: Yes.

S1: Funassyi? [an unofficial mascot for Funabashi City, Chiba Prefecture]

T: Are you from Funabashi?

S1: Yes.

T: I’ve passed through there on the train, but I’ve never been. Tell me about Funabashi.

S1: There are spiritual spots.

T: Spiritual places?

S1: Shrines, Daruma (a traditional doll or talisman).

T: Okay, I know a little about Daruma. I used to live in Takasaki, Gunma Prefecture, and Daruma is famous there too. Can someone please draw a picture of Daruma on the board?

[No one volunteered, so I gently lobbed a whiteboard marker to someone in the back of the classroom. A student who was not the first speaker caught it and drew a picture of Daruma that included details such as *kanji*. I asked students to explain the *kanji* and two other students wrote the *kanji* reading and the meaning in English (Japanese: 必勝 *hissyō* | English: certain victory).]

T: What kinds of things do people wish for?

S2: Passing a test.

S3: Girlfriend.

T: Okay, how do you make the wish?

S4: You draw eyes on Daruma when making a wish.

T: Anything else?

S4: Then you go to the temple to pray for the wish to come true.

T: Who do you pray to?

S4: Buddha. [pause]

S4: You color Daruma’s left eye first and then, if the wish comes true, you color the right eye too. [Pause and brief student discussion in Japanese to confirm with others that this was correct.]

T: What’s next?

S4: Take Daruma back to the temple and burn him. [I reacted with expressions of shock and horror.]

T: Thank you, Daruma! [burning up in flames sound; a few students laughed]

What if your wish does not come true, how long do you wait?

S4: One year. Then burn him.

T: Sometimes I see big Darumas and small Darumas [for sale at temples]. I live near a temple and often see many different sizes. What does the size mean?

S4: Big ones are better but very expensive.

T: I see. Has anyone ever bought a Daruma and made a wish? [Only two students raised their hands.] Really? Only two? Okay, Rikako, tell us about the time you got a Daruma and made a wish.

S5: In high school, I had a basketball tournament. We got a Daruma.

T: One for the team or one for each member?

S5: One small one for each team member, and one for the team that was bigger.

T: And your wish was to win the tournament?

S5: Yes.

T: Did you win?

S5: Yes.

T: Okay, nice! How much was the team's effort and how much was Daruma? How much did Daruma help? Was it 50-50?

S5: Maybe it was 40% Daruma and 60% team.

T: Please explain. [Student struggled to think of any reasons or ideas.] Okay, thank you.

T: What about you, Ayaka? Tell us about your Daruma story.

S6: I was four years old when I got the Daruma. I can't remember what I wished for.

T: Where did you get it?

S6: Somewhere away from home. We were traveling. Maybe Nikko?

T: Okay, beautiful place! Thank you very much for sharing.

This was a pleasant exchange with students. I knew basic information about Daruma beforehand, but few details. I thought students did a great job of explaining them. Of course, this exchange could have emerged from a coursebook-based lesson, as topics like customs and traditions are fairly standard. However, for whatever reason, detailed exchanges like the one above often do not emerge from coursebook-based activities.

Although hard to put a finger on, the example above seems more plausibly authentic than other activities I have done in the past (e.g., Talk about Japanese customs with your partner). It began with a genuine request (i.e., Tell me about your hometown) and led to a student giving an example of a local custom that seemed relatively unforced. There may be something important about not forcing a topic and not having strong teacher expectations about what students should say about a specific pre-planned topic.

I think it is also important both to expect that an interesting idea will emerge and to be willing to slow down and be patient. Sometimes ideas emerge immediately, but sometimes it takes a couple of minutes of silence, as in the case above. But the result will likely be on target with students' interests. When something does emerge, it is good practice to accept it enthusiastically and keep developing it as you explore tangents deeply. The class can follow the emerging ideas wherever they lead. The teacher can re-cast and negotiate meaning frequently. In my experience, students will often join the discussion to correct me if I misunderstand their idea and if I ask for clarification. It is helpful to keep working on an idea until we have a clear understanding of it.

Although I cannot be sure, as no attempt was made to measure student learning during this activity, this exchange could be an example of learning by doing. Language acquisition can be defined as "the (mostly) implicit process of building a linguistic system by making form-meaning connections from the input. Basically, acquisition is what happens to you while you are busy understanding messages" (Henshaw & Hawkins, 2022, p. 3). The activity was based on communicative need and interaction. The emphasis was on the functionality of language rather than an explicit focus on grammatical forms (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009).

It is useful to contrast emergent language with target language. This is based on the belief that acquiring a language is “not a linear process whereby linguistic items are introduced and learnt one after another in a set pattern. Instead, language is learnt through interaction with others and the world around us” (Chinn & Norrington-Davies, 2023, p. 13). The exchange above contains simple present, present perfect, simple past and other grammatical forms that could have been isolated and presented as the target language of an explicit grammar-focused lesson. However, research indicates that “explicit instruction is not necessary for acquisition” (Henshaw & Hawkins, 2022, p. 77). Moreover, “robust, reliable evidence from SLA research findings” shows that explicit knowledge of the L2 does not form the basis for language learning (Jordan & Long, 2023, p. 130).

Specific intervention techniques have been identified by Chinn and Norrington-Davies (2023) as a way to work with emergent language and scaffold student learning. They (2023, p. 54) offer a list of ten intervention techniques that may be initiated by the teacher or other learners. The example from the exchange above may be an example of a gentle clarification request that scaffolds student speech and learning:

Student: There are spiritual spots.

Teacher: Spiritual places?

Student: Shrines, Daruma.

Several weeks after the Daruma lesson, I purchased a small Daruma. To begin a lesson, I showed students the Daruma, told them it was my first one, and asked them to explain the procedure for making a wish and coloring the eye. A student lent me a marker, and I made a wish and colored in Daruma’s eye while standing in front of the class. The activity was naturally communicative and hopefully meaningful to students to again share a part of Japanese culture with their teacher.

## Additional Examples

According to field notes, I recorded only twelve instances of spontaneous classroom moments throughout the semester. It is worth noting that even when explicitly focusing on this research topic, my lessons were not very spontaneous as a whole. Most lessons were characterized by traditional coursebook-based activities, often with supplementation and expansion, but they did not lead to unpredictable outcomes in most cases.

“Tell Brad something he doesn’t know” was implemented seven times during the semester with five classroom groups. The first three attempts were detailed above to shed light on the nature of classroom improvisation in this context:

Take 1 - The Tables are Turned

Take 2 - Same Birthday

Take 3 - Daruma from Funabashi

Take 4 - Split Personalities

Take 5 - Blood Types (Featuring Mysterious Blood Type M)

Take 6 - Do you sleep on the train?

Take 7 - Pusuke the Parakeet

Freeform activities such as “Tell Brad something he doesn’t know” may appear to lack structure, but there is always an underlying structure (Sawyer, 2011), even if it is unknown exactly what will happen next. During a lesson, teachers have different structures to choose from, such as individual work, pair work (free or with assigned speakers and listeners), small group work, and whole-class discussion. Add to this basic patterns such as question and answer, or more specialized communication like negotiation of meaning (e.g., So, are you saying that...?). Often a simple “Tell me more about X” is the best way to move things forward. The logical next structure often seems to suggest itself. For example, in “Take 5 - Blood Types” when the topic of blood types emerged, it made sense to have students separate into groups based on their

blood type and write the supposed personality traits connected with each type on the board (the connection between blood type and personality is a common topic of discussion in Japan). In "Take 6 - Do you sleep on the train?" the class found itself separated on two sides of the room according to their agreement or disagreement with the proposition that "money equals happiness." I decided to have students do a mini-debate, although that was not in my normal repertoire of activities. In "Take 7 - Pusuke the Parakeet," one student introduced an idea that I thought other students could relate to: childhood pets. After a whole-class discussion, I asked students to talk about their childhood pets in pairs for a few minutes before coming back to a whole-class discussion which featured new participants. The activities can emerge along with the topics. There is not only one correct path, as multiple directions could all lead to successful outcomes. Other examples of notable improvised moments are included below to add detail about in-the-moment decision-making.

### An Emergent Activity

When starting a new textbook unit about politeness, the lesson was uneventful until someone jokingly said, "Shut up!" to a classmate. I could have ignored it, but instead, I had students write on the board as many phrases as they knew to say "be quiet," ranked in order from most polite to most rude. Several students came up to the board and added phrases. It turned out that most of the phrases except for one sounded quite rude: "Would you mind be quiet? [*sic*] / Please be quiet. / Could you be quiet? / Can you close your mouth? / Zip your lips! / Save your breath. / Go away! / Shut up!" We worked on the one phrase by adding a reason and mitigation strategies until we got an acceptably polite request: "Would you mind keeping it down a bit? We're having an important meeting. Thank

you so much." Even with that, it could still come across as somewhat impolite. It is an incredibly difficult speech act to ask someone to be quiet in a way that does not offend. We also had fun with ridiculous phrases like, "Excuse me, but would you mind shutting your mouth?" Several students took pictures of the boardwork.

The emergent activity seemed to be in line with students' needs based on their initial responses being overall quite impolite. The students' needs emerged along with the activity. A teachable moment emerged and was followed by an in-class needs analysis and targeted awareness-raising follow-up. One weakness of this example was that it was decontextualized. There is recent emphasis in language teaching to present authentic discourse in context to attempt to increase students' pragmatic awareness of face-threatening speech acts such as disagreeing (e.g., Charlebois, 2023). It may have been useful to set a short homework task of finding a short video example of a similar "be quiet" request to compare to our classroom example. Overall, the outcome seemed satisfactory in this case, but how might I have handled the same situation as a novice teacher? There is comfort and safety in sticking to a lesson plan. It has to be considered that this kind of improvisation may not be advisable for every teaching context, but in many cases, it could be worth the risk.

### Changing Materials on the Fly

In one instance, I had a speaking prompt on the projector that said, "Does anyone have an interesting story?" This was after a short pair-work task about unlucky or lucky things that had happened to students. The topic was related to a coursebook activity. Students in this class could sometimes be a bit reluctant to speak out. No one seemed to want to share with the whole class during this activity. I asked one student who was making eye contact if she had an interesting story. She said she had a

story, but it was not interesting. I immediately deleted the word “interesting” from the slide and got a positive response from the class. Everyone seemed to relax and two students shared their stories, although I wish we had time for a few more.

Many aspects of the lesson, materials, or environment can be modified in real-time to produce spontaneity. I find myself writing and re-wording prompts more and more to match students' needs and interests as the lesson unfolds. In this case, deleting a single word from a slide was sufficient to produce a lively reaction and cause a boost in classroom atmosphere and mood. That being said, there is also the danger of appearing unprepared in front of students. If students see a teacher modifying or writing a prompt during the lesson, it could be seen as laziness or lack of preparation. This is a legitimate concern that must also be considered.

### Exploring Others' Work

Dogme ELT has its supporters, myself included, but it has always been polarizing, and some teachers seem reluctant to speak positively of the approach to seemingly avoid being labeled as some kind of extreme “dogmetist” who does not plan their lessons. Dogme ELT was not solely focused on spontaneous communication and improvisation, but it also came with a rejection of a perceived over-reliance on materials and technological aids that can get in the way of meaningful communication and learning (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009). I have observed that teacher discussions of Dogme ELT often suffer from it being talked about in false and all-or-nothing ways, for instance, that there either should be a coursebook and materials or there should basically be no materials (e.g., Gill, 2000). Critics say that Dogme ELT is simply “winging it elevated to an art form” (Meddings & Thornbury, 2003) even though a Dogme approach does not reject planning and preparation. Dogme ELT has been

dismissed by Dellar (2017) because “it’s a lovely idea, but it’s really bloody difficult to do.” He adds that “[basically] Dogme doesn’t exist outside of Scott Thornbury’s head a lot of the time, I think.” It is easy to see why teachers might have strong feelings about this imagined approach.

Teachers need to begin with the teaching and learning context, but in my view, whether the teaching approach includes a coursebook or is “materials light,” the principles of Dogme ELT should be considered. Dogme ELT principles are powerful; for instance, they focus on interactivity, make space for the learner’s voice in lessons, and focus on emergent language (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009). Whether technology is used frequently or not, I think space should be made for interesting things to emerge during lessons. Teachers are not neglecting their professional duties if not every part of the lesson is pre-planned – if there is a bit of room to breathe. It does not benefit anyone to reject spontaneity and improvisation along with the Dogme ELT package because it is perceived as too radical, idealistic, or difficult.

A planning-centric view of teaching and teacher education may give the impression that a good lesson is a well-planned lesson. While analyzing fourteen general methods textbooks used by pre-service teachers, DeZutter (2011) found only one text that used the word “improvisation” and only a handful of brief mentions of the improvisational nature of teaching. This is in contrast to one hundred pages on teacher planning. She is not arguing against a focus on teacher planning, but she concludes that there is “a sense that what is most important is to have one’s lesson carefully planned out, perhaps even scripted, prior to engaging with students” (p. 40). She observes that these books give the impression that:

The important teacher’s decision making is in the past, having occurred when the lesson was

planned. Such descriptions also create the sense that the teacher is the only one who is shaping the direction of the lesson, because it is almost never made explicit that the flow of the lesson emerges from collaborative classroom dialogue. (p. 40)

In my opinion, lesson planning, or more accurately, lesson preparation, is essential, but teachers should not be expected to plan all classroom interactions. When space is made, authentic communication can emerge, along with the language, topics, activities, student needs, and the syllabus.

### *A Principled Approach*

Expert teachers have been observed improvising in response to student needs even in subjects like Mathematics (e.g., Borko & Livingston, 1989). However, there is a danger that “if teachers stray too far from their lesson plan, students do not learn the material” (Erickson, 2011, p. 115). In ELT, our material and our subject can be the communication and interaction that happens between the people in the classroom. We may have more freedom to let tangents and ideas develop as they can make lessons more in line with the communicative aims of the course. A quotation from Allwright fits nicely here: “The importance of interaction is not simply that it creates learning opportunities, it is that it constitutes learning itself” (Allwright, 1984, as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 43). However, teachers still need to have a principled approach. Sawyer (2004) talks about disciplined improvisation and the balance of structure and improvisation that always must be negotiated. Similarly, Brereton and Kita (2020) discuss the idea of principled creativity and an article by Richards (2013), who uses the term “mis-placed creativity,” or creativity without a solid knowledge base or theoretical grounding. Richards (2013) humorous example of a misguided colleague

developing a technique called “Sponting” serves as a warning of how things can go wrong (p. 5). Even the act of creating materials is not synonymous with creativity (Brereton & Kita, 2020). Kita (Brereton & Kita, 2020) emphasizes that “there’s a difference between being creative and just being different” (p. 11).

Having a principled approach with a theoretical rationale is important as teachers become comfortable taking risks in the classroom. A basic theoretical foundation could be based on Nation’s (2007) four strands of learning conditions that run through a language course: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. A well-designed activity could easily check a few of these four boxes. If a primary aim of an activity is to devote more time to meaning-focused output during classroom discussions, that is a strong start. If the activity is driven by the desire for meaning-focused output, it is even better.

Giving students more control over course topics and content is another important principle that gives purpose to classroom decisions. Fostering spontaneity in the classroom is a worthwhile aim in itself. Other goals may include making lessons more learner-centered, taking advantage of teachable moments, customizing lessons to match students’ needs, and adding a personal element (Richards, 2013). Creating opportunities for meaningful interaction between the teacher and students should be a primary principle, but it is too often forgotten and replaced by teacher talk that mostly involves giving instructions or setting up activities. Teachers claim to have a communicative approach, but how often do we talk *with* our students? With these principles in mind, teachers can have the confidence to step into the unknown.

### *Insight from Other Fields*

As DeZutter (2011) and others have pointed out, there is a wealth of knowledge

to tap into from fields with improvisational traditions, such as jazz music or unscripted theater. What can teachers learn from the Charlie Parker quote on the first page of this article? Another piece of wisdom from Maley and Underhill (2012) is that “mistakes in jazz are not fatal. They may even be a doorway into something new” (p. 7). This mindset could be valuable when teaching as it looks for opportunities wherever they can be found, instead of framing missteps as mistakes. I would like to add that improvisational music is not limited to jazz, although it is the most obvious example of music that has an improvisational tradition. Not everyone appreciates jazz music, but other genres are also often improvisational: blues, bluegrass, rock, and funk, for example. Even classical music has a forgotten history of improvisation. Nowadays, classical pianists attempt to play a piece exactly as it is written on the page, but the actual composers “were all improvisers.” “Bach, Mozart and Beethoven all thrilled audiences with their spontaneous improvisations. But today’s classical pianists have lost the art [and] performances suffer because they are so dependent on the printed score” (Steibelt in Alberge, 2020). I think there may be parallels between this example and teaching. The focus on lesson planning has diminished my ability to go beyond the script and the lesson plan. Musicians often talk about the nature of improvisation with other musicians and they have also talked about it during interviews. While music is not the same as teaching, the improvisational element seems to be quite similar, much like the observation that actors in unscripted theater and members of corporate work teams collaborate in surprisingly similar ways (Sawyer, 2017, p.17).

Sawyer (2011) writes about the common misconception that “improvisation means anything goes; for example, that jazz musicians simply play from instinct and intuition, without conscious analysis or understanding. There are parallels between this misconception and the teacher artistry

perspective” (p. 12). This mirrors the mischaracterization of Dogme ELT as no planning, no materials, and no technology. He explains that “jazz requires a great deal of training, practice, and expertise – it requires many years simply to play at a novice level [and] requires of the performer a deep knowledge of complex harmonic structures and a profound familiarity with the large body of standards – pieces that have been played by jazz bands for decades” (p. 12). What if improvisational music was never attempted because it was “too bloody difficult to do?” This relates to Dellar’s comments on Dogme ELT (2017) highlighted above. The balance between structure and improvisation always must be skillfully negotiated (Sawyer, 2011). To become a more improvisational teacher, it may take some time to practice and reflect. After sixteen years of teaching, it often seems like I am only just beginning to figure it all out.

### Limitations

The purpose of this study was to document my initial attempts to implement a new approach to lesson planning and teaching as I engaged with the literature, experimented in the classroom, and reflected on my practice. The results attempt to show what improvised moments look like and how a shift toward spontaneity and improvisation can promote teacher development. The purpose of the study was not to make generalizations about the suitability of the approach to other contexts. I only sought to paint a picture of spontaneous classroom moments in one context from my point of view as the teacher. The results are not intended to be strongly reliable or reproducible. The methodology is tentative and the focus is on finding potential areas for future study that include more rigorous data collection and analysis. Notably absent from the study is direct data from students about what they thought about the spontaneous moments. There were hints that unplanned lesson moments may have been effective on

some level, but it is unknown whether students on the whole found value or enjoyment in the classroom activities. One study found that students valued Dogme ELT-style lessons for natural speaking practice, but they also valued coursebook-based lessons which they perceived as more effective for learning grammar and test preparation (e.g., TOEIC) (Worth, 2012). Whether that dichotomy is actually true is a separate question worth investigating.

### Conclusion

I suspect that there are quite a few teachers out there improvising at a high level but not talking much about it. McLaughlin (1999), when talking about the intuitive appeal of reflective practice, asks, “Who, after all, would want to champion the unreflective practitioner?” A similar question can be asked in this case: Who, after all, would want to champion the

unimprovisational teacher (or unresponsive teacher)? The teacher who sticks to the lesson plan at all costs. The teacher who stifles spontaneity. The teacher who is unwilling to change course in response to emerging student needs and interests. To me, the appeal is intuitive, and it is surprising that improvisation is so rarely discussed. The unplanned moments are the highlights of the semester for me as the teacher, and I hope, for students.

I would like to continue my exploration in future classrooms. As a language teacher, I am interested in teaching in the moment and facilitating the kinds of classroom interaction that could only happen with a specific group of individuals at a specific point in time. Much like music, the possible interactions, outcomes, discussions, speech acts, activities, topics, and journeys seem nearly infinite. We can make space, but we cannot completely plan it.

### References

- Alberge, D. (2020, June 6). Why today’s musicians should follow classical greats ... and improvise. *The Guardian*.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/jun/06/why-classical-musicians-need-to-learn-how-to-improvise>
- Ananthaswamy, A. (2022). Astronomers might see dark matter by staring into the void. *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com>
- Biesta, G. J. J. (2007). Bridging the gap between educational research and educational practice: The need for critical distance. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 13(3), 295–301.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13803610701640227>
- Berliner, D. C. (2011). Forward. In R. K. Sawyer (Ed.), *Structure and improvisation in creative teaching* (pp. xiii–xvi). Cambridge University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511997105>
- Borko, H., & Livingston, C. (1989). Cognition and improvisation: Differences in mathematics instruction by expert and novice teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 26(4), 473–498. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312026004473>
- Brereton, P. (2019, May 12). *Teacher response-ability* [Conference presentation]. ExcitELT 2019, Tokyo, Japan.
- Brereton, P., & Kita, S. (2020). Exploring teacher creativity through duoethnography and reflection. *Teacher Development Academic Journal*, 1(1), 7–19.  
<https://tdsig.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/TDAJ-V1N1-BreretonKita.pdf>
- Charlebois, J. (2023). Developing L2 pragmatic competence through project-based learning. *The Language Teacher*, 47(1), 20–24. <https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTTLT47.1-4>
- Charlie Parker. (2022, September 22). In *Wikiquote*. [https://en.wikiquote.org/w/index.php?title=Charlie\\_Parker&oldid=3168448](https://en.wikiquote.org/w/index.php?title=Charlie_Parker&oldid=3168448)



- Cornwell, S. (2011). Interview with Ken Wilson. *The Language Teacher*, 35(4), 19–23. <https://jalt-publications.org/files/pdf-article/plen4.pdf>
- Dalke, A., Cassidy, K., Grobstein, P., & Blank, D. (2007). Emergent pedagogy: Learning to enjoy the uncontrollable—and make it productive. *Journal of Educational Change*, 8, 111–130. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-007-9021-2>
- Dellar, H. [Teaching House]. (2017, July 27) Teaching House Presents - Hugh Dellar on Speaking [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsko2by2xsY>
- DeZutter, S. (2011). Professional improvisation and teacher education: Opening the conversation. In R. K. Sawyer (Ed.), *Structure and improvisation in creative teaching* (pp. 27–50). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511997105>
- Erickson, F. (2011). Taking advantage of structure to improvise in instruction: Examples from elementary school classrooms. In R. K. Sawyer (Ed.), *Structure and improvisation in creative teaching* (pp. 113–132). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511997105>
- Gill, S. (2000). Against Dogme: A plea for moderation. *IATEFL Issues*, 154.
- Jordan, G., & Long, M. (2023). *English teaching now and how it could be*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Henshaw, F., & Hawkins, M. (2022). *Common ground: Second language acquisition theory goes to the classroom*. Hackett Publishing Company.
- Kasperek, N. (2017). Creativity through dialogue writing: Letting it get a bit weird. In J. Leslie, M. Livingston, M. Y. Schaefer & D. Young (Eds.), *New Directions in Teaching and Learning English Discussion*, 5, 172–181. <https://rikkyo.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/16186>
- Kasperek, N. (2024). Playfully studious teaching as a reparative affective replacement for microfascism, *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 21(2), 201–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2022.2107587>
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (1994). Intake factors and intake processes in adult language learning. *Applied Language Learning*, 5(1), 33–71.
- Lowe, R. (2012). *Self-reflection* [Unpublished article]. Rikkyo University.
- Maley A., & Underhill, A. (2012). Expect the unexpected. *English Teaching Professional*, 82, 4–7.
- McLaughlin, T. H. (1999). Beyond the reflective teacher. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 31, 9–25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.1999.tb00371.x>
- Meddings, L., & Thornbury, S. (2003, April 17). Dogme still able to divide ELT. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2003/apr/17/tefl.lukemeddings>
- Meddings, L., & Thornbury, S. (2009). *Teaching unplugged: Dogme in English language teaching*. Delta Publishing.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2007). The four strands. *International Journal of Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 1(1), 2–13. <https://doi.org/10.2167/illt039>.
- Nunan, D. (1992). *Research methods in language learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C. (2013). *Creativity in language teaching*. <https://www.professorjackrichards.com/wp-content/uploads/Creativity-in-Language-Teaching.pdf>
- Sassi, A. (2011). How “scripted” materials might support improvisational teaching: Insights from the implementation of a reading comprehension curriculum. In R. K. Sawyer (Ed.), *Structure and improvisation in creative teaching* (pp. 209–235). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511997105>
- Sawyer, R. K. (2004). Creative teaching: Collaborative discussion as disciplined improvisation. *Educational Researcher*, 33(2), 12–20. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033002012>

- Sawyer, R. K. (2011). What makes good teachers great? The artful balance of structure and improvisation. In R. K. Sawyer (Ed.), *Structure and improvisation in creative teaching* (pp. 1–24). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511997105>
- Sawyer, R. K. (2017). *Group genius: The creative power of collaboration*. Basic Books.
- Thornbury, S. (2000). A dogma for EFL. *IATEFL Issues*, 153, 2.  
<http://nebula.wsimg.com/fa3dc70521483b645f4b932209f9db17?AccessKeyId=186A535D1BA4FC995A73&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>
- Worth, A. (2012). A dogme based approach from the learners' perspective. *The Journal of Kanda University of International Studies*, 24, 77–99. <http://id.nii.ac.jp/1092/00000604>

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Peter Brereton for his invaluable support. The first I heard anyone talk about teaching and improvisation was at his session at the ExcitELT Conference in Tokyo in 2019. After concluding his talk, he demonstrated his improvisational prowess in real-time when he found out he still had 20 minutes left. Without Peter's insight and ongoing feedback, this project would not have been possible.

### About the Author

Brad Barker teaches at the Center for Foreign Language Education and Research (FLER) at Rikkyo University in Tokyo, Japan. His main research interests are spontaneity and improvisation in the language classroom, Dogme ELT, emergent language, and process syllabi. [bbarker@rikkyo.ac.jp](mailto:bbarker@rikkyo.ac.jp)