

**Documentary Theatre and ESL Learning:
the Pedagogic Potential of Collaborative Documents**

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The document today is still conceived in light of its eighteenth century juridical status as an object that serves as proof of fact. In this conception, it is rooted in a culture of writing whose authority resides in the delimitation of experience through signs and their referents. The inscription of signs on durable media surfaces, such as a manuscript, title-deed, tombstone, coin, picture, etc., attached to a signature, time and place of production contributes to this authority.

Furthermore, the institutional capacity to safeguard documents by consigning them to the taxonomic regime of the archive continues to underwrite the epistemological boundaries of the document. In contrast, the ontological boundaries of the document - or what the document can be or do - tend to form in the interstices between institution and individual; in territories of cultural practice where experiment, reflexivity and risk are more prevalent. This is the case, for example, of the documentary theatre.

For almost a century, since Erwin Piscator's proto-documentary play *In Spite of Everything* (1925), and Brecht's contemporaneous work on *Lehrstücke* or Learning Plays, documentary practitioners have been experimenting with the didactic potential of collaborative document creation in their treatment of social and political injustices. Moreover, an important contribution to the work in this field was made in the 1970s and 1980s through theatre in education initiatives - particularly in the UK.

Drawing on scholarship in the fields of documentary theatre and drama in language learning, this paper will explore the pedagogic potential of documentary theatre in the context of ESL learning in Japan. What is a document in this context and what can it do? What is collaboration and what learning opportunities does it offer? The intention is to develop the framework for an undergraduate ESL course that adapts the documentary form as the core learning structure.