

## **Beyond Imitation: Dialogue in Skills Learning of Artists in France and Japan**

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*One of the most challenging questions in philosophical and anthropological inquiries on skill learning is how skills can be shared and acquired among people, especially when they cannot be easily verbalized or written. This paper examines the process of skill learning among Western and Eastern artists of puppetry. They learn the skill generally by observation and imitation, typical of “informal” education. However, most of the highly developed contemporary arts have their own educational formats in which skills are shared and learnt systematically, albeit flexibly, through interactions between instructors and learners, comprising not only verbal instruction but also gestures and facial expressions. These interactions are considered a dialogue, which underpins and complements the learning by imitation. Going beyond the traditional pedagogical view, in which knowledge is assumed to be ready-made and translatable into words, this paper sheds light on how the instructor and the learner interact and influence each other and how the skill itself emerges afresh in the dialogue. The challenge also lies in rethinking education in the global age from the local and microscopic learning involved in dealing with the individual concrete body.*

**Keywords:** skill learning; non-verbal interaction; marionette; puppet

### **Introduction**

The learning of bodily skills has been cross-disciplinarily discussed, especially in the domains of philosophy and anthropology. Previous studies have focused on “bodily cognition” and the transformation of perception and consciousness from that of a novice into that of an expert (Andrieu, 2018). In the latter studies on the topic of “social learning,” learning is examined in the process of participation in a community of practice. One of the most challeng-

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ing questions in these fields is how skills can be learned by sharing when they cannot so easily be verbalized or written. Suggestive research on teaching methods has been conducted in non-Western cultures, which are often called traditional or preindustrial cultures. Contrary to school-based learning through a curriculum organized by teachers, most learning is based on observation and imitation, be it via habitual bodily usage such as chopstick manipulation or greeting gestures, or professions that require skill and expertise such as weaving or tailoring (Gaskins and Paradise, 2010).

Although these studies range across philosophical and ethnographical descriptions of various activities worldwide, they all have common suggestions for learning today. As global capitalism has existed for approximately 200 years, human lives (including modern education) have been systematized in character with the rich, industrial, Western democratic society and civilization (Henrich et al., 2010). Although school education has developed, it has also been plagued with a variety of problems, such as excessive competition over test scores, lack of physical exercise, mental health issues, and an overemphasis on intellectual ability in individuals.

In this context, the reconsideration of skills acquisition is an important issue, especially from an Asian point of view (Doganis, 2012). Skills acquisition in artists involves a highly sophisticated educational style, but focuses on practice rather than conceptualization or theorizing. This view seems to be applicable to some Western arts as well. In other words, alternative education can be found in practices that are not limited to merely “the non-Western” that anthropologists have commonly explored. They include opportunities for holistic engagement and learning that allow us to inherit and renew the values of community, which may provide hints for rethinking education today.

This paper examines the process of skills acquisition in Western and Eastern artists. The learning of artists is consistent with the characteristics discussed in “informal” education based on imitation and observation, but most of the arts, especially the highly developed contemporary arts, have their own “formal” education system. In order to describe the artist’s learning process, the theoretical background is reviewed, following which two concrete cases are examined based on the author’s fieldwork in Japan and France. In doing so, this paper considers the two fundamental concepts of imitation and dialogue in order to describe skills learning as a philosophical and ethnographical inquiry that can enliven and encourage contemporary educational practices in everyday life.

## **1. Skills Learning Beyond Imitation**

Imitation is often regarded as the fundamental principle of skills learning. According to cognitive science, imitative learning is one of the most important forms of learning, especially in infant development. A notable study by Tomasello (1999) has clarified the meaning of imitation by discerning it from other similar concepts of mimic and emulation. Mimicking is the reproduction of superficial behavior, emulation is the reproduction of the behavior’s result, and imitation is the reproduction of the intention. This definition informs the discussion in this paper. Imitation is effective as a form of learning, not only in infants but also in adults, although it requires multiple methodologies. Studies on social learning in small-scale societies have focused on multiple methods of learning, including those outside formal edu-

cation (Gaskins and Paradise, 2010). Studies on situated learning, such as the legitimate peripheral participation theory, emphasize that acquisition of expert skills such as weaving or tailoring can result from participation in and engagement with the community (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Specific teaching activities rarely occur because the novice acquires said skills through spending time with an elder member in the community of practice (Lave, 2009).

Focusing on the more specific theme of mastering a body movement while performing art, imitation is even more fundamental. Ikuta (2007) has previously reported on skills learning in the context of classic Japanese performing arts. In the classic performance of *kabuki*, choreography is a complicated matter as teaching physical movements may lend an artificial tone to the performance. In this learning process, verbal explanations are often avoided because explanations can sometimes interfere with the motion; being able to explain movements does not immediately improve them. Therefore, the novice engages in a long-term apprenticeship. Ikuta described the “teaching-less” or “minimum-teaching” method as one of the four characteristics of imitation. The others include having non-specific stages, non-transparent evaluations, and engagements with the world (Ikuta, 2007). Since verbal instruction is avoided, learning is possible in the form of opportunities where the master displays an example and the disciple “steals” from him or her.

In these studies, however, verbal instruction of skills involving physical movement has not yet been fully discussed (Dreyfus, 2002). Unlike children’s skills development, achievable through pure imitation, adults require intentional acts supported by explanation or verbal instruction (Merleau-Ponty, 2010). Mere imitation is not enough to improve learning skills.

This paper proposes the concept of dialogue to identify a principle that complements imitation. Dialogue is a two-way communication in which the speaker and listener are equally responsible for the exchange of meaning. Moreover, communication is defined here as interaction that includes gestures and facial expressions, as well as statements with definite meanings (Sugawara, 2010; Takada, 2016).

Ikuta’s research is also persuasive in terms of verbal instruction. She mentions that although direct instruction is rare, it requires a particular type of language if conducted; these non-analytical expressions promote mastery of the art. The “craft language” (*waza*-language) is a good example: it describes the angle of the arms in *kabuki* choreography (Ikuta, 2007). If a master uses a metaphorical expression such as “like receiving a snowflake fluttering down from the sky,” the disciple’s movements will improve. This has the effect of providing the disciple with a concrete image and helping them to successfully reconfigure their physical movements.

Although Ikuta’s discussion on verbal instruction is noteworthy, not all skill learning requires this poetic and sophisticated vocabulary. Interactions that promote learning between the instructor and the learner can involve communication that is sparse in vocabulary but rich in gestures (Okui, 2015). This takes the discussion beyond the modern pedagogical view of knowledge being assumed to be ready-made and translated into words that can be transmitted from person to person.

The following sections describe examples of communication during the artist’s training while answering questions about how imitation and dialogue work. Interestingly, imitation and dialogue have different functions in two different cultural contexts corresponding to the purpose of skills learning. While, in the first case, an artist in Japan aims to inherit the clas-

sics and reproduce the movements perfectly, the artist in the second case in France aims to innovate the classics and create new movements. Nevertheless, the concept of imitation and dialogue can effectively illuminate the fundamental principles of skills learning and highlight the experience of teaching and learning skills.

## 2. Traditional Japanese Arts

### 2.1. Transmission of Skills

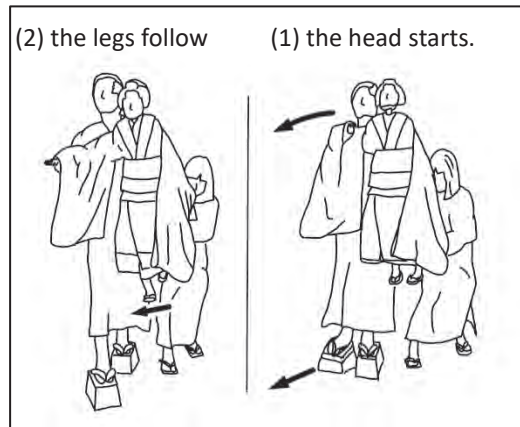
The Awaji Puppet Theater is a traditional performing arts style that has been passed down only through oral communication.<sup>1</sup> It originated from a puppet troupe established around the middle of the 16th century, and after being revived in the 20th century, it continues to operate on Awaji Island today as a form of “traditional” or “local” performing arts (Law, 1997). Thus, we can see that transmission is the most important mode of learning in the theater. Despite the troupe’s dynamic history, the puppet manipulation skills used therein have changed only slightly in at least the last 250 years. A single puppet is manipulated by three puppeteers, who hold onto the puppet’s legs, hands, and neck from behind and make it move.

The puppeteer undergoes “developmental stages” as part of skills learning. After spending time as an apprentice, they require about seven to eight years to master the skill of manipulating each puppet’s body parts (the legs and the left hand). A performer must spend at least 15 years to attain the role of head-puppeteer. More specifically, a newcomer working during the first one or two years does not engage in puppet manipulation. Instead, he or she concentrates on supporting tasks both on and off the stage, which provides them with an opportunity to learn the stage procedures and the puppet’s gestures through participation. The “career” of a puppeteer starts from their position as a legs-puppeteer. Crouching beneath the puppet, the legs-puppeteer grasps the puppet’s legs, one in each hand. The left-hand-puppeteer stands to the left of the puppet and holds the puppet’s left hand in his or her right hand. The head-puppeteer is responsible for manipulating the puppet’s head. Whether the puppet moves like a human actor or better depends on the skill of the head-puppeteer. Although the control of the puppet’s head and body requires a high level of skill, even more challenging is the collaboration with the other two puppeteers and control over the overall direction of the puppet play.

In this style of theater, most of the puppeteers’ learning is “situated” in their daily practice, which involves participation in stage preparation and performance, puppet construction and maintenance, or public workshops and social activities. However, this does not mean that there are never training sessions whose sole purpose is the mastery of a particular movement, including solo-training in front of the mirror. Intensive training can be held suddenly but spontaneously for a few days prior to performances, especially when a newcomer is about to take the stage, or when the theater changes the program. However, since the timing of this intensive training is unpredictable, researchers, such as the author, may not always be able to observe it. In this sense, even training session is *situated* (Okui & Legendre, 2021).

For example, during a typical training session, held a few minutes before rehearsal, the puppet is swiftly held in front of a mirror in order to check the puppeteers’ co-manipulation of the puppet’s legs. Normally, when the puppet “walks,” the legs-puppeteer must coordinate

Figure 1. Spontaneous training



the puppet's steps according to the proper form and tempo. There is also a basic rule that states that the legs must follow exactly the pace and order of the head-puppeteer's step, so as to provide the head-puppeteer with smoother control. In order to sophisticate their control, a short training session is important before going on stage, especially when a novice is manipulating the puppet's legs. This provides the novice with a learning opportunity. Thus, this example illustrates that (1) the senior head-puppeteer's movements must be followed while walking, and (2) the junior legs-puppeteer must follow the head-puppeteer and control the legs. If there is no problem with the movement of the legs, the checking finishes in silence with merely a nod of affirmation. It is a silent but profound moment.

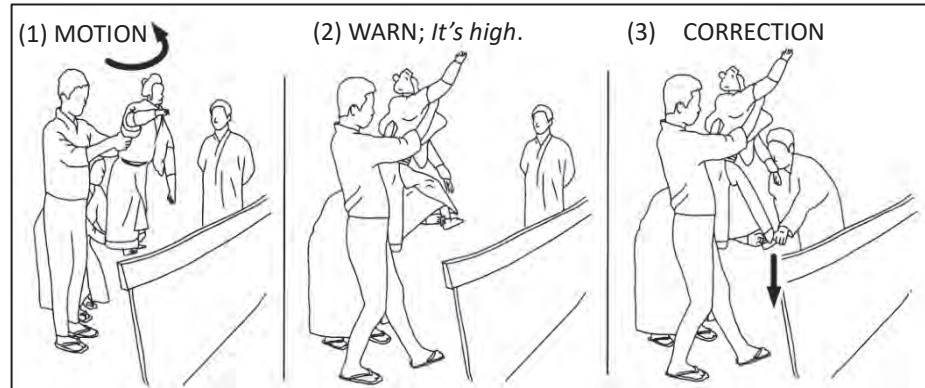
## 2.2. Dialogue Through Bodily Expressions

Let us examine more intensive training sessions and explore the notions of imitation and dialogue. Although imitation refers to the reproduction of traditionally fixed movements through copying an elder's movements, actual learning is more complex. Puppeteers have training opportunities, which include verbal communication, more often than reported (Irie, 1993). Such training does not comprise lexically-rich dialogue, but rather gesturally-rich interactions.

In one particular session, legs-puppeteer C learned dance choreography under instruction from head-puppeteer A and puppeteer B. Because puppeteer C already knew the choreography procedure, it was a question of whether she could adjust to head-puppeteer A's manipulation and maintain the exact form of the puppet's movements. They demonstrated this choreography by manipulating a puppet together. The scene consisted of three sequences: (1) head-puppeteer A started a dance gesture, (2) because a leg's position was slightly higher, the head-puppeteer A warned "It's high," (3) puppeteer B corrected the legs-puppeteer's motion by grasping the leg directly (Figure 2).

The point to be made here is that the elder puppeteer impinged on the demonstration

Figure 2. Intensive Training



only when the younger puppeteer made a mistake. Because the learning goal of young puppeteer C is to fully incorporate the choreography, conversation only occurs when imitation becomes impossible, and often includes the nuance of denial; they only speak when junior puppeteers make a mistake. The communication is thus mostly silent.

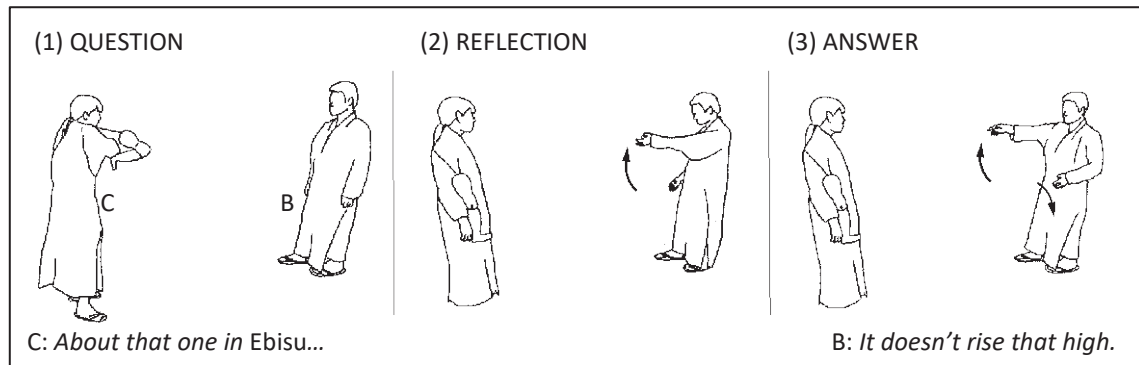
In terms of communication, research has shown an imbalance in the utterance rate between the young (novices) and the elders (masters) in the community of practice (Greenfield and Lave, 1982). Contrary to the veteran who easily commands the novice, the novice rarely asks for advice from the veteran. However, as long as the artists are close to one another in terms of professional positions, they may ask questions despite there being some form of hierarchy and despite it not simply being a matter of “stealing” through imitation. Let us examine an example of a dialogue in this regard.

After the previous training was completed, legs-puppeteer C stayed to practice moving the legs and spend some time on self-training in front of the mirror. While she was quietly practicing, puppeteer B, who had just been advising her, stopped repairing props at the back of the stage and came up to her, giving her more advice based on her manipulation. After the brief communication, legs-puppeteer C stopped moving, and turned to puppeteer B to ask a question about the choreography of another puppet named Ebisu.<sup>2</sup> She confessed that (1) she did not understand how far they should raise the puppet’s knees during the dance choreography. Puppeteer B quickly understood what she meant, but rather than answering her verbally, (2) he moved his hands as if manipulating the Ebisu puppet. Then (3) he answered, “It doesn’t rise that high.” He added, “If you raise it that way, it’s going to be too powerful.”

Noteworthy in this incident-based conversation is that puppeteer B moved his hands to recall the movement, which this paper calls embodied reflection.<sup>3</sup> It denotes knowledge as the action itself, and not as part of a top-down process of abstract thinking. The nature of this knowledge and oral-based instruction can be considered to have no reference other than to their bodies (Ong, 2002). Since the hands of puppeteer B help him to reflect on the correct manner of choreography, it is no exaggeration to claim that it was his hand that “comprehended” the choreography (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Puppeteer B’s gesture helps him to re-comprehend and renew his movement of the puppet’s legs. Comprehension here consists of thinking while moving, which means that moving and thinking are part of a single process in choreography.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 3. Question and Embodied Reflection



With regard to the communication between puppeteers B and C, learning can be understood as an opportunity to provide insights not only to the novice but also to the elder. Rather than a case of simple transmission, learning in Awaji can be understood as a dynamic process of discovering new meanings through movement. It is not accurate to regard teaching skills as passing down something ready-made from one person to another. Skills are not something that can be transported or removed; they are a type of knowledge that is always in motion.

### 3. Contemporary French Arts

#### 3.1. Creation of the Art of *la Marionnette*

Another principle of learning can be examined in the French National School of Puppetry (*l'École Nationale Supérieure des Arts de la Marionnette*: ESNAM). This is a good example to reconsider teaching and learning experiences from another context<sup>5</sup>. In France, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture have worked together since the 1970s to enhance the exchange between educational practices and artistic activities. ESNAM was established in 1987 and has become a pioneer in the art genre through the exploration of contemporary puppetry and other performances, collection and dissemination of information, and training of the next generation. The school offers a three-year course where students receive a diploma equivalent to a university degree upon graduation, whereupon an *artiste de la marionnette* is born. The number of students per intake is extremely small, approximately 12.

Education at ESNAM can be categorized as "formal education" according to the social learning theory. It is true that the learning is not embedded in a living community as far as the selection system, curricula, and degrees are concerned. However, it differs from general school education in that most of its classes consist of flexible lessons. Daily classes are based on workshops that take about two weeks to complete, and include other activities such as puppet production and preparation for major stage performances. The school invites professional artists to teach students the latest information and skills during workshops. The guest lecturers are artists with a variety of specializations that range from typical genres such as finger puppetry, string puppetry, and glove puppetry to kinship areas such as shadow puppetry, masked theaters and mime performances. In this respect, ESNAM's classes are akin to

“situated learning” in that the students work together with the artists to create the performance. Furthermore, it is also a process of gradually building a community, in that students often collaborate with artists they have met in class and perform with them after graduation. Thus, from a macroscopic perspective, this sort of learning has the characteristics of “legitimate peripheral participation.”

The following section focuses on the communication between the teacher and the students during a workshop. During class, while the teacher may introduce their own skills to the students, it does not mean that the skills are transmitted. Rather, the students are expected to derive their own answers by using and stimulating their own skills.

The guest teacher discussed here is a famous puppet artist from the Netherlands, called N in this article. During the workshop, N provided many types of exercises ranging from physical practice, creation of shows on specific topics, and a final theater presentation in front of an audience that included local people and other school staff. The puppets used, specially prepared by the teacher for the workshop, were approximately one meter tall and looked endearing. The puppet named “Zeno,” used consistently through the workshop, looked like an old man, but also boyish with its glass-bead eyes.

### 3.2. Collaborative Dialogue

Collective communication is used to understand learning in a workshop. It refers to the form of communication in which the teacher speaks to 12 students and they collectively respond. This is also a process of imitation but is underpinned by dialogue.

Let us consider one significant lesson sequence that N called “physical exercise”, which involved the manipulation of the puppet Zeno. At the beginning of the lesson, N explained the sequence of actions through demonstration, that is (1) the puppet appears on stage, (2) it discovers the audience and reacts to them, and (3) the puppeteer starts walking with the puppet whose eyes are fixed on one point amid the audience (Figure 4). According to N, the objective here was to maintain a fixed eye point while the puppeteer continues to move. This skill requires physical control of the puppet posture, which is more difficult than many may think. The teacher gave each student a turn to demonstrate. After everyone critiqued the movements, it was the next student’s turn.

In terms of learning, three significant observations can be derived from how N organized the exercise. First, although he explained the purpose and procedure of the movements, he

Figure 4. The teacher’s demonstration

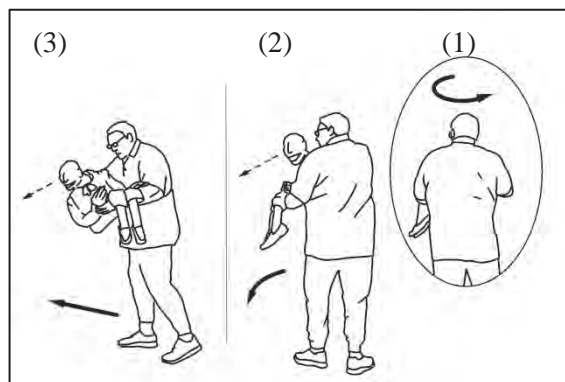
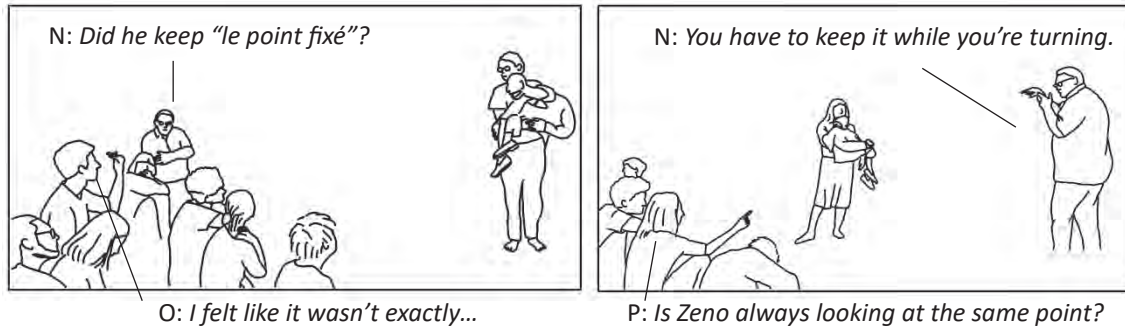




Figure 5. The examples of collaborative understanding



did not explain all the exercises before the students tried them out. Rather, he provided a detailed explanation after the student's demonstration in order to discuss what the student did. The dialogue had various patterns; for example, the teacher might turn to the spectating students and ask them if the demonstration was successful or not. Or he might stand in front of them, provide a supplementary explanation, and let the students respond by themselves (Figure 5).<sup>6</sup>

This is a collaborative process of clarifying and sharing points. N's question was the trigger for collaborative communication, which can also be understood as a process of thinking.

Second, although the teacher instructed the students to imitate his own motion, they gradually realized that it is important to control the puppet effectively and not just copy the teacher's movements. It is interesting that this point became apparent through the dialogue of the lesson. For example, when the teacher corrected a student's action, he referred to a new procedure that has not been mentioned before. For example: (1) when they start the action, it is the puppet, and not the student, who should move first. (2) When the puppeteer moves the puppet, they begin walking as if they are following the puppet (Figure 6). According to the teacher, this skill is used to draw the audience's attention toward the puppet instead of the puppeteer, and to make it seem as if the puppet is moving spontaneously. In terms of learning, the meaning and purpose of the exercise emerged during collaborative dialogue, as the students demonstrated and interacted. We call this process collaborative dialogue because the

Figure 6. An additional advice

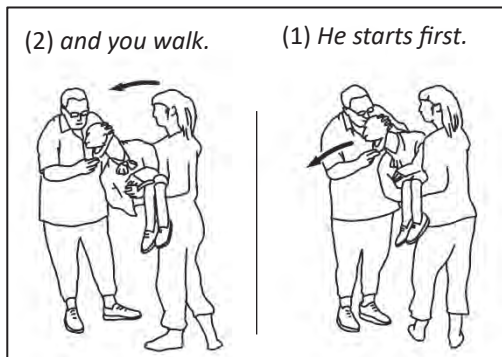
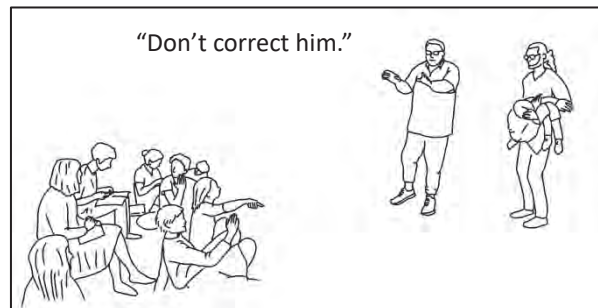


Figure 7. The teacher's facilitation



points to be imitated are shared through dialogue and reaction.

Lastly, although N called it a “physical exercise,” the goal of the lesson was not necessarily to “master a skill” or “acquire a technique.” Later in the lesson, when the students had become more discerning, they tended to offer a lot of advice about the movements during their peers’ demonstrations. When this happened, the teacher would stop them and say, “Don’t correct him” (Figure 7). He seemed to be saying that there are more important things than the reproduction of motion. However, what was he actually trying to say?

The answer can be found in his last remark during the workshop. As a summary of the lesson, the teacher gave the students a concluding speech:

What I am trying to teach you through this exercise is that you must constantly ask yourself where you want the audience to look, where should the attention of the audience be? This will determine what you do with the puppet. You will constantly confront this question at any show that you are going to perform in the future.<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, the teacher was trying to help the students understand the principles of movement rather than having them just blindly copy him. The skill of manipulation is a principal ability that students can use in different contexts. As the teacher says, the manipulation of the puppet changes according to “what is important” and “how you’re telling your story.” This skill contributes to achieving what the student is attempting to do. In this sense, getting caught up on the details might cause the students to miss crucial points. The phrase “[d]on’t correct him” demonstrates a willingness to abide by this principle, and the flexibility to overlook a few details.

This attitude could be observed throughout the lesson. Even though the teacher required imitation, he did not respond severely to the students’ mistakes. A little awkwardness was not only acceptable but might actually lead to the chance discovery of interesting movements that could also evoke new ideas even for the teacher. In a school that aims to innovate rather than strictly pass on the classics, this lesson served its purpose well.

#### **4. The Experience of Teaching and Learning Skill: How to Deal with the Body**

Let us summarize the learning activities of the two institutions. In the Awaji puppet theater, the meaning of imitation seems to be similar to Tomasello’s definition of mimicking, which is to perfectly reproduce or inherit the choreography of predecessors. Elsewhere, the purpose of imitation in ESNAM is to understand the principles that make the puppet movements more effective and not to copy the movements themselves. Although the mission of these two institutions appear to be different, they share the common challenge of how to deal with the body. The following is a brief discussion of the two central principles:

The first is about the meaning of dialogue. Dialogue is created when imitation ceases to function. If imitation (or following the model) works well, the participants can communicate without words. The dialogue here is also an opportunity for learners to go beyond imitation and encourage the awareness of physical techniques that they would not otherwise recognize when the vocabulary is sparse or the conversation is dominated by physical gestures.

Contrary to previous studies that have analyzed learning as a kind of progress or development from immaturity to mastery (Dreyfus, 2002), this paper demonstrates that the process

of proficiency involves opportunities that are not linear in development. Learning requires an aspect of intervention denial that is more dynamic than linear development. One of the difficulties of mastering a skill is that the acquired movement habits have coherence. Old habits can hinder newly acquired movements. However, these hindrances, that may have been optimal movements previously, are the lived experiences of the learner. In this sense, dialogue contains an aspect of “denial.” Dialogue in training is nothing but a thrilling attempt to challenge the moment; to destroy students’ previously constructed engagement with the world.

Second, we are now able to explore the deeper meaning of skill. In Awaji especially, we observed that even basic skills such as walking and dancing are components of a concrete stage performance. In other words, a skill is not abstract knowledge. It is embedded in the cultural context. The skills are not accumulated into a cohesive body of knowledge such as an archive, but are rather learned as a result of actual performance. The newcomer learns more of the puppets’ actions each time the performance program changes. For example, the choreography of stepping gestures is linked to a specific character like Ebisu. Thus, a skill is not a representation of knowledge that is detached from the original context and can be transmitted from person to person. It is not “a context-independent specification for behavior” (Ingold, 2000, p. 386).

This context-dependent specification or embeddedness can also be found in the teaching and learning in ESNAM. The students not only copy the teacher’s movements in their entirety, they also aim to reproduce the teacher’s intentions, corresponding to Tomasello’s definition of imitation in its emphasis on the principle of movement rather than movement itself. Interestingly, this imitation-based learning is linked to the exploration of a new context. The acquisition of skills is not simply the modification of the superficial action itself, but is also associated with learning values and the meaning of life. Learning by mastering an art includes understanding how to effectively perform on stage and how to behave there. Contemporary marionette is a classical art, but it is also an advanced field that is still being updated. Therefore, what they aim for in their lessons is not limited to the learning of predetermined skills. The school plays a role in the redefinition of the value axis of “excellence” and “beauty” to include not only puppet manipulation methods but also scriptwriting, direction, and stage design. In this sense, the teacher’s task is to stimulate the students’ creativity and pass on the necessary knowledge and skills, even if what the teacher builds may be denied and transformed. This is nothing less than an educational activity in which the teacher and the student influence each other, and where learning itself is born anew in the classroom.

These two initiatives differ in the positioning of skills and the artistic perspectives they aim to achieve. However, they share the challenge of sharing and teaching the evocation of senses that are difficult to verbalize. We can elicit a more profound understanding of their experience through detailed descriptions of their communication beyond imitation.

## Conclusion

The practice of skills acquisition, as discussed in this paper, has been carried out by very specific communities. Therefore, how these descriptions connect to the teaching and learning experience in traditional education requires exploration.

Although this paper does not provide a definite answer, it might presume a prospective

one. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) claims, the communication experience cannot be reduced to an individual's actions. Teaching and learning are not merely acts of transferring knowledge from one person to another according to a curriculum. Rather, as illustrated in this paper, teaching and learning include tense moments akin to those of performing a difficult drama, or being able to hold a conversation without a common vocabulary. When we are able to notice the workings of the body in this tactile dimension, we can fully benefit from the rich experiences of teaching, learning, and transforming.

What this paper has attempted to do through these descriptions is to explore artistic skill learning in depth. It is this micro-perspective that could be a breakthrough in countering the forces that impoverish the body's learning potential. For example, formal education today may turn learning into a highly controlled and boring experience. However, no matter how controlled the curriculum may be, as long as there is communication between the teacher and the learner, a lively exchange can take place. Learning is a process in which, not only the learner, but also the teacher transcends and transforms through communication with others. This aspect of learning is always present and fluid. For example, even in the case of a paper-based test that reinforces the manipulation of representational symbols, and even if it is far from the participatory educational system that is cultivated in small-scale societies, the learner still experiences learning as a living world during their micro and interactive exchanges with the teacher. If this is the case, it is necessary to continue describing such experiences by simultaneously pursuing both philosophical inquiry and field practices.

## Notes

- 1 The author has continued to conduct research in this field since their primary research for their doctoral dissertation.
- 2 Ebisu is a character representing a divine being in a popular theatrical performance. The choreography for this character consists of similar rhythmic steps such as the dance that puppeteer C was trying to master; therefore, she must have come up with the idea to use comparison to learn the two knee movements.
- 3 Although this can be associated with and influenced by the notions of "4E" cognition by Gallagher (2017), this paper does not aim to "overcome" the mind-body dualism. There is actually no dualism in the experiences of puppeteers. The term "reflection" here denotes the function of helping the body to explore the gesture itself, rather than being an intellectual and abstract activity.
- 4 To deviate from the point of this paper, the concepts of "comprehension" or "reflection" are neither workings of purely thought, nor workings of purely the body; in short, we must begin our discussion from an unrelated place to that of mind-body dualism. In this respect, this paper explores the possibility of advancing Merleau-Ponty's theory of the body.
- 5 The author had the opportunity to conduct research at this school during post-doctoral research work in France (2015-2018) by means of an introduction from the host researcher. The research has been ongoing since then. The French word "*marionnette*" refers not only to string puppets, but to puppets in general.
- 6 Because N is a native English speaker, this workshop was conducted in English. Although some of the students required interpretation from other students occasionally, most of the workshop was conducted without any language issues. Therefore, the transcriptions here are done directly in English.
- 7 N concluded the session with this remark before lunch break. The author transcribed N's speech with some minor additions.

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