

Chutti Classroom: The Experience in reflecting on the Learning of Kathakali Chutti (Makeup) at Kerala Kalamandalam

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ABSTRACT

The paper is a part of ongoing PhD research. The purpose of this study was to explore the hand on learning of craft practice which were Kathakali chutti (makeup) and costumes making by employing the tacit theory of Harry Collin: relational tacit knowledge, somatic knowledge, and collective knowledge into analysis process and discussion. The data collection was through immersive learning as a deep study by immerse self to practice and to learn with students at Kerala Kalamandalam. The result of exploration indicated that while the learning of younger students may be through emulation and repetition, the practitioner's knowledge is gained through self-conscious means of logical thinking and mathematic approximation, gaining the somatic tacit knowledge that the teacher has. Also, collective tacit knowledge is relevant, because during interacting with cultural background and society, it is very different from the practitioner's previous experience, and yet through the immersive experience, the practitioner is able to gain the knowledge and skills not otherwise available to an outsider

Index Terms

Kathakali Chutti, tacit knowledge, craft practice, immersive learning

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Introduction

The paper is based on ongoing PhD research. The “immersive learning” employed as a learning process in craft practice for the research method. In this context craft practice means, *Kathakali chutti* and costumes making which teach in Kerala Kalamandalam.

The researcher immerse self as a tool to the subject and the *Kathakali* community for the dept understanding of all context, especially learning process in *chutti* classroom. The self-practice is the journey of research in order to understand the significance of tacit knowledge in craft practice.

In this content *chutti* is the three-dimensional makeup of *Kathakali* with the various stylized of paper placed on the performer's face. There are six main types of *chutti* according to paper cutting and pattern: *Paccha*, *Kathi*, *Chuvana tadi*, *Vella tadi*, *Karutha tadi*, and a special character such as *Narasimha*.

Research Objective

The purpose of this study was to explore the hand on learning of craft practice which were *Kathakali chutti* (makeup) and costumes by employing the tacit theory of Harry Collin: relational tacit knowledge, somatic knowledge, and collective knowledge into analysis process and discussion.

Craft: Hand, Skill, And Knowledge

If Craft is essentially defined as physical involvement and making things by hand. In *Craftsman* [7], Richard Sennett studies the connection between hand and mind. Evidence shows that the sense of touch is more powerful than visual perception, and the coordination of hands, eyes, and brain will help to position perfect skills. Sennett cites Immanuel

Kant saying that “the hand is the window on to the mind [7].” He claims that the “hands make the most varied movements, movements that can be controlled at will,” and the “hand’s varied ways of gripping and the sense of touch, affect how we think [7].” Rudolf Arnheim [9] also discusses that the “touch and imprint of the human hand” is valuable as an individual quality of skill which cannot be replaced by machine [9] so that in craft, hand is a significant part of the body, which is connected to the way one creates an artwork. He states that “among the organs of the human body the hand has the most refined motor behavior to be encountered anywhere in nature [8].” The sense of touch is the most powerful perception that we use to develop our skill, and as Charles Bell points out that, “the brain receives more trustworthy information from the touch of the hand than from images in the eye (Bell in [7], 150).” The practice of making things in art, craft, and design, therefore, depends on the “repeated exercise of the hands [6].” Sennett adds that “the skill of physical concentration follows rules of its own, based on how people learn to practice, to repeat what they do, and to learn from repetition [7].” While the sense of touch and making things will affect to the way we think and perceive knowledge, the craft is greatly based on skill and the accompanying ideas of perfection.

Glenn Adamson claims that “skill [is] conceived as knowing how to make something [1].” The ‘beauty’ of the thing, which is made by hand, has been judged from different perspectives due to individual background, experience, and knowledge. One of the main perspectives is that to reach perfection, one has to practice and repeat the skill. Adamson says that the “crafts skill never comes for free: it must be learned [1].” The skills and technique in craft is a form of knowledge that is not always easily articulated in verbal language.

This is called tacit knowledge— a term coined by philosopher Michael Polanyi. He said that “we can know more than we can tell (Polanyi in [2]).” Tacit knowledge

was used to explain especially knowledge related to skill, such as art, craft, design, music, and performance. It is a kind of knowledge that is “indeterminate, in the sense that its content cannot be explicitly stated. We can see this best in the way we possess a skill [5].” Also, for Polanyi, all knowledge is tacit. He said: “While tacit knowledge can be possessed by itself, explicit knowledge must rely on being tacitly understood and applied. Hence all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge [5].” A lot of knowledge relies on skills and intuition, or the ability to understand a thing without using logic. Polanyi sees this as the “mechanism that produces

discoveries by steps we cannot specify [5].” This is supported by Louis Arnaud Reid, who says that while the “concept of knowledge is much wider than that of intuitive knowing... there can be no knowledge at all without the presence, at some stage, of direct intuitive knowing [3].” This is a very strong position—one that can be evidenced in the way we learn skills by interacting with others, and by making things with one’s own hands.

Harry Collins takes an opposite position on tacit knowledge and intuition, one that makes the concept less rigid. He says that tacit knowledge can become explicit and not remain uncommunicative. He also claims that intuition is “the ability to make good judgments. It is seen as ‘wisdom based on experience,’ and ‘can be gained through practice and socialization [2].’” So, intuition is related to conscious judgment, and not something we cannot tell. Collins proposes three areas of tacit knowledge: relational tacit knowledge, somatic knowledge, and collective knowledge. Relational tacit knowledge has “to do with the relations between people that arise out of the nature of social life;” somatic tacit knowledge is that which is “inscribed in the material of body and brain;” and collective tacit knowledge is that which “the individual can acquire only by being embedded in society [2].” In reflecting on the learning of *Kathakali* makeup (*chutti*), it seems that it involves all three parts of tacit knowledge. The PhD learning through the process that Collins describes as “explicit knowledge...transmitted by the close proximity between teacher and learner along with guided instruction [2].” While the learning of younger students may be through emulation and repetition, the practitioner knowledge is gained through self-conscious means of logical thinking and mathematic approximation, gaining the somatic tacit knowledge that the teacher has. Also, collective tacit knowledge is relevant, because during interacting with cultural background and society is very different to the practitioner’s previous experience, and yet through the immersive experience, the practitioner able to gain the knowledge and skills not otherwise available to an outsider.

Immersive Learning

A. Immersive Learning Approach

Immersive learning, the term used in educational pedagogy mainly is in e-learning. It is considered as active learning encourage a student to engage and involve in the subject [11]. The online course focuses on building the environment and design activity for the learner to engage in the subject, rather than face to face learning. Taking an example, the

learner enters the 3-dimensional virtual world of nanoscale which set up in the computer program. The learner experiences different views of the subject matter. In this sense, it means of immersive learning that learner experiences the new world. In contrast to the general term, The researcher employs “immersive learning” in much the same idea of engagement to the subject, but not distance from the teacher.

According to the different nature of subject learning, craft practice is different from e-learning. Craft involves the physical movement and making thing by hand. The learning process engages with the perception of learner so that the real environment and the body are important for “immersive learning” in gaining craft knowledge. Samie Li, Raafat, and Danielle [10] suggested: “three primary perspectives at which immersive learning is utilized: in an experiential environment, through a constructivist method, and via active collaboration.” The researcher applied the idea of three primary areas into the reflective of *chutti* learning classroom.

- Experiential immersive learning: Students experience the environment and the lesson in the real world by senses such as the sense of touch, the sense of visualizing, the sense of listening.
- Constructivist method: Students learn at their own pace. It is the self-motivation of individual that eager to learn such as the practice *chutti* by themselves apart from the classroom.
- Social and collaborative learning: Students share and learn from each other. The classroom of *chutti* has a senior student. They pass on the knowledge not only from teacher to student, but it is from student to student as well. It seems like the primary area of immersive learning is already existed in *chutti* class in Kerala Kalamandalam learning process. Even though immersive is one of the various ways of learning but immersive is an effective learning process especially for the knowledge of the craft.

B. Chutti classroom

Kerala Kalamandalam is the one of remain Gurukulam academic institution in India. Behind the foundation of this institution is that pupils have to live near or with the guru, like living with family. In fact, the students live and stay on the campus or school during their study. Moreover, Kerala Kalamandalam is an institution of art and performing art school, therefore, focusing on practice and practical class is mandatory for the students. It is necessary to have an early morning class for special exercise and body movement. In this way, students have to remain their discipline. Living in the campus is the way that the student can devote themselves to that art. The admission accepts a student from the young age of 12 to 13 to start the class. Kalamandalam has the course until the degree certificate and higher education. All classes are related to classical dances and theatre forms like *Kathakali*, *Koodiyattam*, *Nangiar kootu*, *Ottattullu*, dance; *Mohiniyattam*, *Kuchipudi*, *Bharatanattam*, *Panchavadyam*; *Mizhavu*, *Maddalam*, *Chenda*, *Iddaka*, vocal *canarttic* music, and *Kathakali chutti*. Nowadays the class combines practical class in the morning and general academic class in the afternoon whereas in the old-time they studied full-day the practical class only.

The documentation and practice though immersive learning process where the researcher attended class and practice with students at Kerala Kalamandalam was from 2016 until March 2018. In class, the sitting position was related to the seniority. In general, a first-year student sits at the right side facing the door. Next to the first-year student is a second-year, a third-year student and so on respectively. These sitting positions revealed the hierarchy concept in their society. At the same time, it is about the class system and learning process within their community as well.

The first-day class begins with the process of controlling rice paste lesson. Students sit on the floor with terracotta pot in front of them. The terracotta pot has painted with green colour on the bottom of the pot which is flipped upside down. It paints in the form of *pachha* character. The student draws the borderline of painting with rice paste. It is the basic step to learn from the first *pacha* character. The rice paste has the ingredient and process to make with the right proportion. It combines rice paste and lime in 3:1 proportion. In the right proportion, the rice paste can be controlled. The rice paste is not too thick or too thin. A student has to practice to draw and spread the borderline with rice pasted neat and skilled enough before further to the next lesson. At the same time student has to practice to draw *Kathakali* characters with extra time out of the class with his seniors or teachers. The drawing practise helps students to understand the proportion of the facial structure and the aesthetic construction of *Kathakali* characters. The next lesson after a student can control rice paste well, is paper cutting. The paper process has a pattern and sequent to follow. Teacher or in Malayalam called *asan*. *Asan* teaches a student step by step. One teacher will teach one student closely. In the paper cut process, student dose it without a specific calculation, hence the student has to observe and use their intuition to learn. The paper shape cutting cannot be copied by placing one paper on another, on the other hand, the student has to cut a new paper every time of practicing to make one character. The reason for cutting a new paper every time because the student has to learn to observe the curve, the line of the terracotta pot. In this practice, a student can gain enough skill to practice with a human face which is more complicated in the real situation. Human faces differ in curve and line so that the practice helps a student to notice and adept technique in various situation. In the basic practice, here are three layers of paper placed on *pacha* character. The papers are three steps in size. The three layers of papers will be placed on the white border line of rice paste that student practice to draw in the previous stage. After the student gains the skill of practice on the pot. They are allowed to practice on fiberglass model and then step to the real human face. In the human face practice, students will practice with their friend in the class or with other *Kathakali* students. Sometimes students will practice with their friend as their homework. Apart from *chutti*, the student has to learn how to make costumes at the advance level year of study. Student of *chutti* class have to study and practice all the main *chutti* characters in order to succeed in the lesson.



Fig.1 Chutti classroom,2016

Tacit knowledge in Kathakali chutti

There are two types of knowledge according to Knowledge Management (KM) which is explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge refers to the knowledge which can be codified and digitized in books, documents, reports and memo. It is easily articulated, identified, shared and employed. Tacit knowledge related to personal wisdom within the mind of people. It is embedded in the human mind through experience and practice. Moreover, tacit knowledge is difficult to articulate in verbal language. It is more difficult to extract and codify. These also include insights, intuitions.

Chutti is the art of *Kathakali* three-dimensional makeup. It can categorize as a craft practice related to hand skill. To learn *chutti*, is the repetitive practice. A student has to gain skill from each lesson. Student deals with the nature of each material which employed in making process such as coconut stick, rice paste, paper, wood, gold sheet, wool, jute, etc. A teacher teaches students by demonstrating or doing the sequencing process. The student will not know the weight of hands, the measurement of the material that teacher performs during demonstration therefore with observing and intuition only help them for the learning process. However, this is not completely the repetitive practice but with the consciousness, the student aware and improve themselves for the better.

Harry Collin (2010) posits tacit knowledge in three different forms. He explains that "Collective tacit knowledge turns on the nature of the social, somatic tacit knowledge turns on the nature of the body, but relational tacit knowledge is just a matter of how particular people relate to each other."

• Relational tacit knowledge

The *chutti* class felt into relational tacit knowledge in the way that the student and teacher come from the same cultural background. At the same time as it is tacit which required direct communication. It cannot pass by the third person as Collin mentioned "the tacit is communicated by "hanging around" with such person." It is the tradition that students of Kalamandalam have the opportunity to observe the real situation of the performance. The green room is the backstage area providing for performers to prepare makeup and dress. The student of *chutti* and *Kathakali* will hang around the green room to observe artist work. Observation is a part of their learning that student is around to help senior artists or their teacher. Some of the knowledge which passes

on only their community can be learned by joining their group. In such knowledge that hidden will be learned by close to the master.

• Somatic tacit knowledge

Somatic tacit knowledge relies upon the body or we can say that the body remembers. In Collin example of bicycle riding, such he said: “we do not learn bicycle riding just from being told about it or reading about it, but from demonstration, guided instruction, and personal contact with others who can ride...”. This kind of knowledge is permanent. “Once learn is never forget” [2].

Student of *chutti* class has been practiced at least 3-4 years to complete all the *chutti* characters. They understand the nature and quality of material that they employ. With experience, the movement of hand and body come automatically like an intuition.

• Collective tacit knowledge

Collective tacit knowledge is the strongest tacit in Collin's view. Collective tacit knowledge relies on the social or the region. Collective tacit knowledge is difficult to articulated due to cultural and society boundary. The knowledge of practice *chutti* is understood within their community by senses and intuition. However, for the craft practice where the outsider learner spends enough time with the gurus and their community, he/she can gain knowledge as much as the people who are from the same community and cultural background. The more time that outsider practitioner spends with gurus, the more he/she adapts and adopts self to become a part of their community. Therefore, the hidden collective tacit knowledge reveals when the practitioner immerses self to the practice for the length of time.

Result

The result of exploration indicated that while the learning of younger students may be through emulation and repetition, the practitioner's knowledge is gained through self-conscious means of logical thinking and mathematic approximation, gaining the somatic tacit knowledge that the teacher has. Also, collective tacit knowledge is relevant, because during interacting with cultural background and society, it is very different from the practitioner's previous experience, and yet through the immersive experience, the practitioner is able to gain the knowledge and skills not otherwise available to an outsider.

Conclusion

Making *chutti* and costumes of *Kathakali*, according to the norm of the institution, intuition is the main cognition and learning process to gain knowledge. Craft practice, which is related to culture as such *chutti* practice, cannot replace by the machine. The value of art form relies on individual practice and the deep understanding of their craftsmanship. Nevertheless, to understand the art and acquire knowledge, as it is tacit, immersive learning is necessary for the learner.

As Polanyi pointed out that “the tacit is communicated by hanging around with such a person.”

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