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Revisiting Japanese Multimodal Drama Performance as Child-Centred Performance Ethnography: Picture-Mediated Reflection on ‘Kamishibai’

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Abstract

Educators have long known that stories are an effective cognitive tool to extend the imagination (Egan, 2005). This paper discusses ‘Kamishibai’ (paper drama performance), a form of dramatic story-telling popular among young children in Japan. A Kamishibai story is composed of a series of picture cards, which teachers read aloud and use to involve children in the world of the story. Our team of researchers set up a play-based workshop called ‘Playshop’ (Ishiguro, 2017) in order to study the significance of play for children. Children who participated were expected to extend their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) through rich bodily play experiences. We adopted ‘the formative experimental method’ (Vygotsky, 1960–1979) in which children are free agents in a roughly preset environment. This paper details two forms of Kamishibai we observed during Playshop: adult-initiated collaborative story-making and child-initiated story-telling. In the first, adult facilitators helped children assemble separate images (their own drawings) into a cohesive, shared story. The process of making a story shows children that the meaning of a story can change according to the author’s way of composing it. The children experience this first-hand

as they assume authorship in the making of their own story. The second, child-initiated Kamishibai, takes this a step further as individual children begin to internalise the collaborative process and make it their own. Both adult- and child-initiated Kamishibai proved effective ways to foster imagination and aid children's self-expression. The observations here thus have significant implications for the pedagogical application of Kamishibai.

5.1 Introduction

This study introduces a popular form of Japanese drama called 'Kamishibai', meaning 'paper drama' (de las Casas, 2006). It is 'a form of story-telling, or performance art that developed in Japan in the late 1920s' (McGowan, 2010). In this multimodal drama, actors use series of pictures to narrate or perform the story. Kamishibai is often used as a form of story-telling in kindergartens and nursery care institutions. The performer is usually an adult—a teacher, parent, or other facilitator.

Reading picture books aloud to children is known to have a positive effect on young children's academic performance (van den Heuvel-Panhuizen et al., 2016). The teacher usually involves the children in discussing the content of the book and supports their learning of vocabulary, conceptual development, comprehension, and content knowledge (Panayota and Helen, 2011). Kamishibai can be similarly effective for children's cognitive development. This study focuses on two forms of Kamishibai: adult-initiated collaborative story-making and child-initiated Kamishibai. The pedagogical application of Kamishibai for children to make their original story is not common practice in Japanese preschool institutions but a few practitioners do promote this activity in their daily program. Recently, Kamishibai is being recommended for school children even outside of Japan (de las Casas, 2006; McGowan, 2010).

5.1.1 Kamishibai as Performance Ethnography

Kamishibai is a kind of drama performance in which characters act out a story that is represented on a series of pictures. It is a popular form of performance art in Japanese early childhood institutions because it is inexpensive and easy to perform even for a non-professional. Kamishibai might be the first arts-based pedagogic activity that most Japanese children encounter. Adults perform ready-made Kamishibai for audiences of children. Arts-based pedagogy does not simply mean grafting artistic materials and

technology onto pedagogy; it must also mean accommodating art's critical perspective. Art activities in school are not merely an effective sweet food to temper the more bitter subjects. Finley describes arts-based inquiry as 'performing revolutionary pedagogy' which demands transformation of the world of oppression, as follows:

Arts-based inquiry, as it is practiced by academics doing human social research, fits historically within a postmodern framework that features a developing activist dynamic among both artists and social researchers. (Finley, 2005)

Art is considered as a critical public pedagogy, which considers 'how art can be used or created to help learners as creators of art, or as viewers to engage in a challenging dominant ideologies or to engage in social issues', is proposed by Zorrilla and Tisdell (2016). In Playshop, young children enact simple Kamishibai stories while adults facilitate (Ishiguro, 2017). The resulting Kamishibai is not an excellent artwork, but the process disrupts the traditional asymmetrical relation between adults as producers and children as consumers of art. Children are conceived as valuable producers who reflect on their shared experiences and collaborate in the making of Kamishibai for their enjoyment. In Playshop, we observed two forms of Kamishibai that emphasise the children's role as *participants* in pedagogical Kamishibai. The first was adult-initiated Kamishibai. An adult facilitator showed the children pictures they had drawn in previous sessions and asked for their ideas. It was a collaborative effort, and the medium of pictures drew out the children's reflection on their drama performance. The facilitator then assembled the children's ideas into one cohesive story. We employed collaborative Kamishibai as a way to enable children to comment on their daily activities. We found it was a way to advocate children's internal voices. Following the adult-initiated Kamishibai, during the conversational phase at the end, a few children began telling their own stories. They became active agents sharing their own ideas with others in what we've called child-initiated Kamishibai.

Kamishibai can be conceived as a kind of performance ethnography. Performance ethnography is the hybrid of performance studies and ethnography. McCall contends that a performance ethnographer is required to write a script, cast it, and stage it on the basis of his or her field notes (McCall, 2000). The resulting performance ethnography is called 'a performance installation' (Jones, 2002). In our study, the adult facilitators wrote collaborative field notes in order to share what was happening and how the participants felt and thought about their daily activities at Playshop. We also videotaped the

activities and collected the pictures drawn by the children. These records proved important resources for understanding the children's perspective. We performed our own Kamishibai stories that resulted from the collaborative efforts of the children to reflect on the original Kamishibai story they had heard. 'By utilizing an experiential method such as performance ethnography, those who seek understanding of other cultures and lived experiences are offered a body-centred method of knowing' (Alexander, 2005). Kamishibai is thus a way to connect to children. It is very difficult to know what young children think and feel during their activities. Kamishibai-making and performance can mediate the children's experiences and make them more accessible to adults. The use of fiction in Kamishibai also differs from typical social science field notes in its particular ability to draw out children's emotional experiences. The children's voices collected during Kamishibai cannot be gained by interviews or questionnaires.

5.1.2 Brief Sketch of Kamishibai

Kamishibai is a popular cultural resource for telling stories to Japanese children in early childcare institutions. Its root was called 'Utushie' in the Edo era. (Minwaza, 2016). 'Kami' is the Japanese word for paper and 'shibai' refers to drama performance. Kamishibai, then, is a multimodal performance that combines picture cards with the performer's narration. Japanese pre-schoolers are very familiar with Kamishibai.

The Kamishibai I will be discussing here is called 'Kyouiku (pedagogic) Kamishibai' in contrast to 'Gaito (street) Kamishibai.' Pedagogic Kamishibai is usually performed in early childhood institutions, children's centres, and public libraries. Street Kamishibai is enacted by professional performers who sell candies to the audiences of children who gather to watch the performance (Tokyo City, 1935). Street Kamishibai requires a 'Butai (stage)' which is a wooden frame for the cards, but in pedagogic Kamishibai, teachers usually hold the cards in their hands instead.

Yone Imai, who established 'Kamishibai-Kanko-kai' (Kamishibai publisher) in 1933, is said to be the first person to use Kamishibai for pedagogical purposes. She was a Christian and used Kamishibai to teach Bible stories such as the Christmas story. Her activity is widely viewed as the inception of pedagogic Kamishibai (Bingushi and Taneichi, 2005). As television grew in popularity, street Kamishibai began to decline from 1953 forward (Shimokawa, 2002). As for pedagogic Kamishibai, however, it was referred to as one of the most important activities in the Ministry of Education's

Pedagogic Guidelines for Kindergarten. When the guidelines were revised in 1967, Kamishibai was excluded from the official school program. But it has remained a popular pedagogic tool for many practitioners in early childhood institutions.

Kamishibai uses sequential picture cards that make up a story. Each card has a picture on the front side and the story text on the back with a miniature replica of the front-facing pictures. However, the information on the back does not correspond to the front picture as the cards are stacked, but usually to the information for the next picture cards. This allows performers to keep track of which picture they are performing. The performers are recommended to perform the cards rather than reading them directly, like theatre. One of the most important actions in the telling of a Kamishibai story is the displacement of the paper cards (Horio, and Inaniwa, 1972). Through displacement, audiences can watch the physical transformation of the character or environment and, therefore, of the psychological transformation of the atmosphere. The action is very effective at getting the audience to empathise with the story. For example, when a performer reveals only part of the next card, the audience begins to imagine what happens, what the rest of the card will reveal.

The displacement procedure also involves the colour and composition of the picture. Figure 5.1 shows a scene from *Alice in Wonderland*. Alice is experiencing a transformation of size after eating a mushroom¹ (Paatela-Nieminen, 2008, p. 98). The background colour of half showing the bigger Alice is yellow and the background colour of the smaller Alice is red. When the performer begins to draw the card but stops before the entire



Figure 5.1 A card depicting the transformation of Alice in *Alice in Wonderland* (Paatela-Nieminen, 2008).

¹I refer to *Alice in Wonderland* because of its international popularity. There are many Kamishibai that portray traditional Japanese stories.

picture is revealed, the audience can only see the bigger Alice. When the performer suddenly shows the left part of the card, the audience is surprised at Alice's transformation. Consider another example: each card represents one stationary moment of an event. If a performer shakes the card, the shaking may represent confusion.

Kamishibai enables children to understand a story from the perspective of an external narrator. Horio & Inaniwa argue that Kamishibai has a fundamental organizing structure, that is, a specific dramaturgy: 'hajimari' (arising), 'agari' (development), 'chouten' (peak), 'sagari' (calming), and 'owari' (conclusion) (Horio and Inaniwa, 1972). The text accompanying the pictures is composed of descriptive and conversational sections. The audience needs to be able to differentiate the characters' voices from the narrator's voice in order to understand the story in Kamishibai. This is often difficult for younger children. Furthermore, in conversational sections, it is difficult for them to differentiate which character is speaking. In other words, the audience is required to actively imagine the scenes and the story in Kamishibai in a different way than in a puppet show or a bodily drama play. These constraints may strengthen cognitive function for children. Other multimodal media are expected to provide the same effect in similar way. Animated cartoons and manga, which look similar to Kamishibai, are even more explicit in their identification of who is acting and speaking. For example, there are speech balloons in manga, and the actors' bodies move according to their dialogue (de las Casas, 2006). Japanese children generally are very familiar with Kamishibai, animated cartoons, and manga from their early years. Their experience of these media might lay a foundation for multimodal learning.

5.2 Materials and Methods

This study examines two kinds of Kamishibai—adult-initiated, collaborative story-making process, and child-initiated story-telling—collected from 'Playshop' (Ishiguro, 2017), a play-based workshop and experimental research site designed to study preschoolers' after-school programs and the psychological significance of play for child development. Practically speaking, it is a play place for participants ages 3 to 6, and uses a situation-based, negotiable curriculum. Playshop was held once a week for about two hours as after-preschool program in a kindergarten. The program began in the fall of 2003 in Sapporo, Japan. Graduate and undergraduate students participated as facilitators for their own research. Kindergarten teachers also participated

as part of their in-service training, and observed aspects of their children they had not seen during the course of regular school activities.

Playshop's daily program included four phases: Picture-book reading or Kamishibai performed by an adult facilitator, the children's dramatization in collaboration with the adults, drawing pictures based on the story, and discussion about the day's activities. Kamishibai was intentionally used twice: First, when the teacher performed the picture drama, which was related to the theme of the day. The Kamishibai story reminded children of the previous day's activities and foreshadowed the next phase of the day: the dramatization. The Kamishibai in this phase was prepared by adults but often included the pictures drawn by children in the previous week. Then, the final phase—in which the children discuss the preceding phases—included Kamishibai-making activities. The facilitator encouraged the children to collaborate on a story using the pictures that they drew. In this phase, a few of the older children unknowingly began to perform their own Kamishibai, thus introducing a third, unanticipated phase of Kamishibai into the day's activities. The textual data shown in the following analysis was extracted from Playshop in the fall term of the 2004 school year. There were 25 children and 5 adults, including myself. I supervised all Playshop activities, especially design, implementation, and recapitulation. Three graduate students acted as assistant facilitators. The graduate student Sako (not her real name) sat in front of the class as a main facilitator while the others assisted her. One undergraduate student supported children as well. We obtained and documented research permission from all parents and the school principal with an investigation-request letter.

5.3 Results and Discussion

During the second week of the second term, 2004, I began to observe two kinds of Kamishibai play: adult-initiated and child-initiated. The drama we adopted for our theme that term was 'The Ant and the Grasshopper' from Aesop's fables (Ishiguro, 2005). The children were asked to draw their experience of drama in the third phase. We thought that they would be able to reflect on their experience of the drama through their drawings. When we found that some of pictures did not have any relation to the dramatization, we soon learned that their pictures did not relate to the day's activities. The children gathered in a circle to share their reflections during the last phase. We asked the children to give a verbal account of their experiences, but most of the younger children were not able to express themselves in

this way. Even among the older children, only a few were able to comment on their experiences. We decided to ask the children about their pictures in order to help them express their experience. We could observe two kinds of improvised Kamishibai during circle time.

5.3.1 Collaborative Story-Making with Children’s Drawn Pictures

Sako, one of our assistant facilitators, collected the children’s drawings. Figure 5.2 shows the pictures she chose to help them create their story during the discussion phase. She showed the pictures to the children one at a time and asked them to explain each one. Some of the adults had drawn pictures with the children during the third phase, and these drawings were used as necessary to fill out the story. The children might not have been aware of the connection between their comments on the pictures, but in collaboration with the students, Sako tied all the pictures and children’s descriptions together into one coherent story. The whole discourse using the four pictures indicated by Figure 5.2 is shown in Discursive Protocol 5.1. Table 5.1 indicates the main story lines which Sako drew from their discussion about the pictures. Each picture introduced a new piece of information

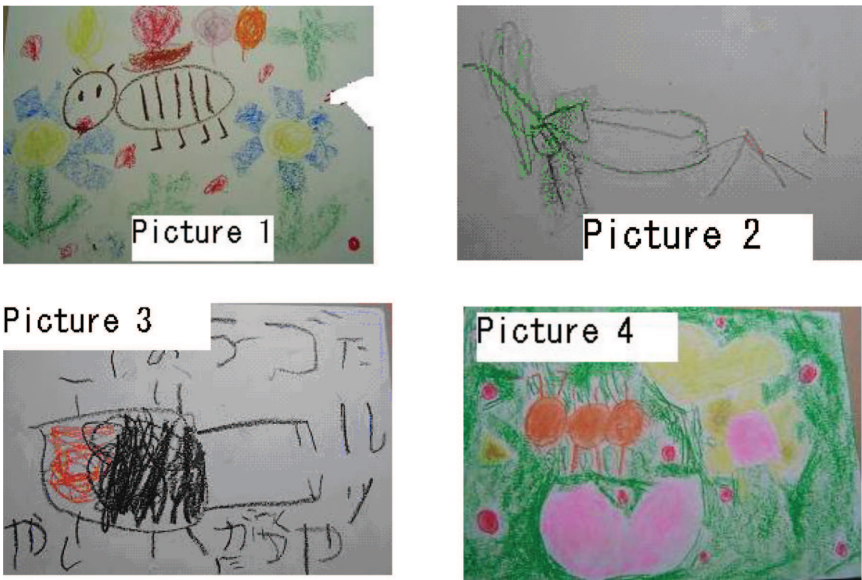


Figure 5.2 Pictures drawn by participants to reflect the story of the day.

Note: Picture 1 was drawn by an adult assistant facilitator.

Discursive Protocol 5.1 An adult-initiated story making process

1. Sako (showing the first picture [picture 1] to participants): All of you see this. How do you feel about it? What does the ant do? It looks like it is walking on the warm ground. **An ant was walking on the ground.**
 2. Sako (turning to picture 2): Oh, the ant met a green insect. What is this? What insect is it, all of you?
 3. Fen & Machi (children): Grasshopper!
 4. Nasshi (child): An ant. A strange ant!
 5. Sako: Is it a strange ant? Ok, **the ant met a green strange ant.** (Then, turning to picture 3): Oh, what is this? The ant met a green strange ant, and then what is it doing?
 6. Dachi (child): He read letters that were written in the paper and he said them one by one.
 7. Asa (child): Ra, Go, Ta, Ru, Tu, Ya, Kuwagata (a stag beetle). (All participants laughed.)
 8. Sako: A stag? **A stag beetle came, too.**
 9. Dachi: A stag beetle is not good!
 10. Sako: Is it a problem?
 11. Dachi: Yes. It was drawn with Satoshi's advice.
 12. Sako: Ok, **an ant and a green ant were talking to each other.**
 13. Dachi: No! It is not an ant but a grasshopper.
 14. Sako: I see. Then, **an ant and a grasshopper were talking to each other.** What are they talking about?
 15. Machi: [Whispers something to Maka (facilitator).]
 16. Maka (on Machi's behalf): They said, 'Shall we play?' The grasshopper said, 'Shall we play?'
 17. Sako: **The grasshopper said, 'Shall we play?'**
 18. Maka (addressing Machi): How about the ant?
 19. Dachi: It said, 'No!'
 20. Sako: Ok. **The grasshopper said to the ant, 'Let's play', but the ant said, 'No'.** (Turning to picture 4): **And the grasshopper said, 'I'm sorry' and walked away.** Then it arrived here. What was it doing?
 21. Dachi: Who drew this picture?
 22. Fen: The ant is carrying.
 23. Sako: The ant is carrying something. What is it carrying?
 24. Dachi: Takoyaki
 25. Sako: **The ant is carrying Takoyaki.**
 26. Yashi: Does it eat the Takoyaki?
 27. Sako (after showing the next picture): Then, oh, a grasshopper appeared again. What is the grasshopper doing?
 28. Machi: It said, 'Shall we play?'
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Notes: The names are anonymous. The sentences in bold became the main story line.

Table 5.1 The shared story, initiated by an adult facilitator

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1. **An ant was walking on the ground (picture 1 of figure 2).**
'Hajimari' (arising); introduction of protagonist and the initial state
 2. **The ant met a strange green ant (picture 2 of figure 2).**
'Agari' (development): happening
 3. **A stag beetle came, too (picture 3 of figure 2).**
'Agari' (development): happening
 4. **The ant and the grasshopper were talking to each other.**
'Agari' (development): happening
 5. **The grasshopper said, 'Shall we play?' (picture 4 of figure 2).**
'Chouten' (peak): peak of happening
 6. **The grasshopper said to the ant, 'Let's play,' but the ant said, 'No.'**
'Chouten' (peak): peak of happening
 7. **And the grasshopper said, 'I'm sorry and walked away.'**
'Sagari' (calming): end of the happening
 8. **The ant is carrying 'Takoyaki'.**
'Sagari' (calming): end of the happening
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Note: 'Takoyaki' is an octopus pancake popular among Japanese children.

for the story text. Picture 1 introduced 'an ant'. Picture 2 introduced 'a green strange ant'. Picture 3 introduced 'a stage beetle'. A 'grasshopper' appears in line 14, without the prompting of a new picture, because when Sako said, 'an ant and a green ant were talking to each other' (line 12), Dachi (anonymous name) immediately said, 'No! it isn't an ant but a grasshopper' (line 13). That is, the grasshopper was already introduced as a green ant (picture 3, line 5).

The story they created, represented in Table 5.1, follows the formula of Kamishibai prescribed by Horio and Inaniwa, (1972) except for the conclusion: 'hajimari' (arising), 'agari' (development), 'chouten' (peak), 'sagari' (calming) and 'owari' (conclusion). Of course, this does not mean that the children were conscious of the formula. They might have simply been responding to each picture and then Sako connected them into coherent story. Some of the coherence may have derived from the fact that the pictures were drawn based on the cohesive story the children had already heard during the first phase. Sako scaffolded (Wood et al., 1976) in such a way that the children could be in touch with the dramaturgy even when they lacked the competence or consciousness to formulate it themselves. This textual formula is one of basic elements of literacy learning. Children can perceive the formula when they watch Kamishibai performed by an adult facilitator, but this may be an insufficient stimulus. The advantage of adult-initiated Kamishibai is that the children are directly involved in the process of making a coherent story.

This kind of active engagement may also be a key to inspiring child-initiated Kamishibai, as we will discuss momentarily.

Visual information can provide common ground and facilitate understanding. Vygotsky's discussion of pseudo concepts notes that a word meaning can be negotiated (in terms of its materiality) between a child and an adult (Vygotsky, 1934/1987). Thus a visual resource can promote discursive competence by giving children an image to attach their thoughts to. Sako used pictures to stimulate children's imagination and promote discussion. When she asked the children straightforward questions about the drama experience, she found it was difficult for them to talk about their play. But when Sako asked the children not about their experiences but about the *pictures*, the children were able to talk. The pictures serve as a point of reference. For example, Nasshi said, 'a strange ant' to describe the figure drawn in picture 2 (line 4, discursive protocol 5.1). Then Sachi said, 'Ok, the ant met a strange green ant' at the line 5. Dachi immediately disputed this, saying, 'No! It is not an ant but a grasshopper'. Here picture 4 functioned as a point of reference to help the children remember their shared experience of drama play. Multimodal performances, such as Kamishibai, give children a chance to enjoy the story even when the younger ones cannot exactly understand it only through text.

Sako picked up the children's ideas by asking, for instance, 'Is it a strange ant?' after Nasshi's utterance as 'A strange ant!' (line 3) and composed them into one coherent story. The children talked more about their own ideas in this discourse than they did during the discussion phase at the end of the routine. Sako often repeated the main story line so that children could follow the story that they were making. In this way, the adult facilitator advocated for the children's voices. Another facilitator, Maka, sat among the children so she could pick up their small voices. Some children are not comfortable talking to groups but will tell their ideas to others on a one-on-one basis. Machi whispered to Maka (line 15) and Maka spoke on Machi's behalf: 'They said, shall we play?' The grasshopper said, 'shall we play?' (line 16). In this way, Sachi and Maka provided the scaffolding on which the children built their Kamishibai story.

5.3.2 Child-Initiated Kamishibai

Children often imitate adults' behaviour. Vygotsky points out that a child's imitative behaviours indicate their upper line of proximal development.

Children may not be able to do certain things alone, but they can do them with the aid of adults. Vygotsky explains this in the context of play as follows:

Looking at the matter from the opposite perspective, could one suppose that a child's behaviour is always guided by meaning, that a preschooler's behaviour is so arid that he never behaves spontaneously simply because he thinks he should behave otherwise? This strict subordination to rules is quite impossible in life, but in play it does become possible: thus, play creates a zone of proximal development of the child. In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development. (p. 102) (Vygotsky, 1978)

When the children who participated in Playshop shared their experiences through collaborative Kamishibai-making, some of the children went beyond the collective activity. A few of the six-year-olds unknowingly began to perform their own original Kamishibai by combing their own drawings with the pictures of their peers. This behaviour can be conceived as the internalization of the collaborative activity. Discursive Protocol 5.2 shows the case of Satoshi, who—among the three children who performed their own Kamishibai—seemed to enjoy themselves the most.

Some of Satoshi's language represents conventional story-telling phrases, like '...in a place, there was a grasshopper and a stag beetle' (line one), which echoes the classically familiar 'once upon time in a land far away'.

Discursive Protocol 5.2 Satoshi's Kamishibai

1. Satoshi (after the cheering and clapping of the participants): In a place ... (Then, louder): In a place ... there were a grasshopper and a stag beetle. ... The grasshopper already—the grasshopper ... [unintelligible].
 2. Unidentified child participant: Too fast!
 3. Satoshi: I see.
 4. Satoshi: The grasshopper became a larva from an egg ... and ... the ants and the stag beetle together ... the monster's ... the monster also ... together ... [unintelligible] bore eggs and ... They felt easy ... all of them ... very ... when the spring comes ... when the spring comes ... all of them tried to find foods.
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Note: An ellipsis "... " indicates a pause on the part of the performer.

He also organised his story according to the compositional formula of Kamishibai: 'In a place, there were a grasshopper and a stag beetle. The grasshopper became a larva from an egg and the other insects bore eggs. When the spring came, all of them tried to find food' (portions of the story omitted to illustrate the story line). The logical connection between the parts was incomplete, but we can see that he made an effort to coherently organise his propositions. It is also evident that Satoshi was conscious of his audience, because he replied, 'I see' to the audience member's request 'Too fast' in line 3. This indicates that he did not consider textual composition alone, but was also conscious of the audience's perception of his performance. Textual cohesion and comprehensibility are very important in Kamishibai, and by engaging these elements, children are building a foundation for academic literacy in their future studies.

The children in Playshop were active producers of Kamishibai as well as consumers. They enjoyed learning the literacy skills that are woven into the formula of Kamishibai, including the children could not verbalize the compositional formula or speak conventional expressive words well. Most expressions in storytelling are attributed to written words. Written language thus has a character akin to that of scientific concepts, which derives the concrete from the abstract. An abstract word is acquired at first without a concrete referent but subsequently comes into the sense that it implies in any context (Vygotsky, 1934/1987). Vygotsky emphasises that scientific concepts are learned in collaboration with adults, especially teachers. Wertsch comments that 'scientific' concepts for Vygotsky are apt to be understood as 'academic' or 'scholarly', and that 'Vygotsky saw the relation between conceptual discourse and the social institution of formal instruction' (Wertsch, 1990). Vygotsky points out the weakness and the strength of the scientific concept as follows:

The weakness of the scientific concept lies in its verbalism, in its insufficient saturation with the concrete. This is the basic danger in the development of the scientific concept. The strength of the scientific concept lies in the child's capacity to use it in a voluntary manner, in its 'readiness for action'. This picture begins to change by the 4th grade. The verbalism of the scientific concept begins to disappear as it becomes increasingly more concrete. (Vygotsky, 1934/1987)

The formula and conventional words are set in place first by imitative performance and then children may begin to incorporate them into their

everyday conceptions, fostered by the imitative experience. This is how Vygotsky puts it: ‘the scientific concept blazes the trail for the everyday concept. It is a form of preparatory instruction which leads to its development’ (Vygotsky, 1934/1987). Even if children play in their bodily drama, they are not always aware of what they are doing and they do not reflect on it by themselves. Adult collaboration (asking questions and connecting the dots) helps the children understand their experience. On the flip side, if children only watch Kamishibai and perform it with bodily dramatization, they might fall into verbalism because the experience depends so heavily on spoken and written language. In Playshop, children watched Kamishibai, dramatized it, illustrated their experiences, and made and performed their own Kamishibai reflecting the original story. The compound activities of the Playshop program promote the intersection between concrete experience and linguistic experience. Vygotsky notes that the intersection between the two concepts usually occurs at around fourth grade. But the present study might indicate that the intersection can and does happen much earlier. This might depend, however, on the quality of play collaborated on with an adult. The time period should be verified in further studies. Play and learning activities with Kamishibai can nonetheless make a good learning environment for child development.

5.4 Conclusion

The experience of dramatization is a rich source for imagination. But it does not necessarily help children to reflect on their experience of the story. This paper details what Playshop taught us about Kamishibai and its application in pedagogy. Adult-initiated Kamishibai proved an effective way for the children to reflect on and express their experiences. Since we used the original story line and the drawings the children made in previous sessions, the story continued to develop week by week. This experience even led a few of the older children to mimic the role of the adult facilitator and perform their own Kamishibai. They became agents in what we have dubbed ‘child-initiated Kamishibai’.

Kamishibai gives kids an important linguistic toolkit for understanding and reflecting on their experience. Those children who performed their own Kamishibai stories might also go so far as to consider appropriate performance expressions for their audience. They might not be able to critically reflect on their performance and story composition, but they may gradually become conscious of its effect on the audience by discerning discrepancies

between their own Kamishibai-making experiences and the adult-facilitated activities. Knowing that their own stories do not have to correspond to any rigid facts also affords children the opportunity to create new meaning and experience genuine authorship in a way that is less intimidating, because it is facilitated by the visual framework. Moreover, kids enjoy the activity. Multi-modal media such as Kamishibai offer the possibility to promote emotional ability in addition cognition for children. This study focused on only a few cases, so more cases will be considered. The applicability of the circulated program of bodily dramatization and collaborative Kamishibai-making will be further examined as well.

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