Learning a culture

As a child, or

As an anthropologist
The anthropologist as child: my learning to hoe in a West African village

a story of humiliation and confusion
Becoming a diviner – without insight
Innate potentials

Observe
Innate potentials

- Play
- Observe
But humans are terrific imitators

• Imitation is an evolved adaptive specialization for learning from others—for acquiring *culture*.

• Requires specialized cognitive processes

• Based on specialized neural structures
Imitation of Emotion Faces

Green = right insula
Blue = right inferior frontal cortex
Red = left inferior frontal cortex
Correspondence between language and motor imitation areas

Yellow = language       Red = imitation       Orange-brown = exact overlap
Imitate

Observe

Play

Participate

Innate potentials
What if the child fails?
Imitate

Play

Observe

Innate potentials

Participate

No
Eventually they get the hang of it.
What’s learned this way has been called

- *Les techniques du corps or habitus* (Mauss 1936);
- *Praktognosia* (Merleau-Ponty 1945);
- *Knowing how*” (vs. “knowing that;” Ryle 1949);
- Procedural knowledge, skills, habits;
- Embodied knowledge.