Chapter 14
Learning Through Verbal Interactions in the Workplace: The Role and Place of Guidance in Vocational Education and Training

Laurent Filliettaz, Isabelle Durand, and Dominique Trébert

This chapter seeks to explore some aspects of the complex relations existing between learning and work. It investigates how individuals engaging in production tasks may encounter learning opportunities in the workplace and how these opportunities may best be recognised, understood and reproduced for training purposes. These considerations have become of particular interest as increasingly aspects of professional practice are being connected to educational purposes. These connections certainly have a long tradition and history, particularly in western apprenticeship programmes, where the workplace is conceptualised as a legitimate and rich context for the development of professional competences (Fuller and Unwin 2013; Gonon 2005). These connections between learning and work have also been under particular scrutiny in the context of tertiary education, where an increasing number of vocational training programmes are engaging students with practicum experiences. These experiences, which complement formal teaching periods, occur in the circumstances of practice and are subject to complex forms of learning outcomes, which are highly dependent on individual and contextual factors (Akkerman and Bakker 2012; Billett et al. 2013; Tynjälä 2008). Hence, vocational training programmes appear as highly concerned by the conditions under which learning arises in and through professional practice itself. These concerns have certainly been extensively addressed in Anglophone research traditions, but they have also attracted a lot of attention in the Francophone research fields related to training and work.

More specifically, the chapter focuses on the role and place of guidance and mentoring in learning as it may occur in the circumstances of work. The recent literature in the field of workplace learning has stressed the importance of guidance in the process of learning in and from practice (Billett 2001a, b; Fuller and Unwin...
Workers do not only learn just by conducting specific tasks individually; they learn when adequate resources are afforded to them and when more experienced workers are able to share their knowledge and skills and assist them in their practice. Hence, it is important to investigate the specific qualities of guidance at work so as to understand how novice workers engage with these resources. In this particular context, the chapter advances two main ideas. The first is to consider that a close examination of the conditions under which mentors and students engage in face-to-face interactions provides a relevant theoretical basis for exploring the relational interdependences between these actors (Billett 2001a). The second is that these interdependences may be described and analysed as “interactional participatory configurations” that provide helpful conceptual bases for describing empirically how the provision of guidance emerges, unfolds and transforms in the circumstances of professional practice.

These theoretical and methodological considerations are explored here in the occupation of early childhood education and more particularly in the provision of initial vocational education and training to early childhood educators in the context of Switzerland. In the Swiss VET system, early childhood educators are trained at tertiary level, in what is called higher vocational education. Students move back and forth during periods of being taught in vocational schools and periods of practical training in institutions caring for pre-school children. During their practicums, students are supervised by mentors, who assist them in their early days at work and make sure they meet the pedagogical objectives assigned by the curriculum. In this chapter, we will use empirical material collected in a research project to understand (1) how mentors are shaping specific participation configurations for students as a way to mediate their access to professional practice and, reciprocally, (2) how students are able to align to these configurations and make use of the opportunities afforded to them and (3) how these participatory configurations are constantly being renegotiated within and during work activities.

To achieve these goals, the chapter first briefly refers to the existing literature about the role of mentoring and guidance for learning through the circumstances of work (1). The second section is designed to provide the reader with a synthetic understanding of a specific theoretical perspective, which proposes to see guidance as an “interactional accomplishment” (2). Key concepts and principles of such an interactional perspective are exposed, and the concept of “interactional participatory configuration” is defined, as a methodological resource for exploring ways guidance may be accomplished in practice. In the next section, an empirical illustration of these claims is provided: by using audio-video material collected in

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the research programme. Through that project, specific interactional patterns are identified and illustrated, by which guidance is provided to students in the context of early childhood education training practices (3). Finally, in a concluding section, the theoretical and practical implications of the presented approach are discussed (4), and more general considerations about the relations between learning and work are developed.

14.1 The Role of Guidance and Mentoring in Professional and Vocational Education

When considering the body of knowledge available in the literature, one first aspect that draws attention is the rather paradoxical position of the topic of guidance in vocational education practices and research. The paradox lies in the mismatch that exists between theoretical assumptions that have become largely dominant within sociocultural approaches to learning and the relatively low level of empirical knowledge available on naturally occurring mentoring practices in the conditions of work. On the one hand, there is a large body of research that assumes the configuring role of “the other” in learning processes. The Vygotskian framework (Vygotsky 1978) and its famous concept of the zone of proximal development or Bruner’s concept of “scaffolding” (Wood et al. 1976), for instance, emphasise the idea that individuals do not learn on their own but only when interacting with more experienced partners. These claims have deeply influenced research conducted in vocational and professional education, where it is now widely assumed theoretically that workers do not learn just by engaging in work production tasks, but when adequate resources are afforded to them by co-workers. But on the other side, little empirical knowledge seems to be available to date regarding the specific conditions in which guidance is provided in the conditions of professional practice. In many workplaces, the fact that experienced workers assist newcomers in the profession is taken for granted and not necessarily seen as an activity per se, associated with specific and complex forms of actions and skills. Workers are often expected to be competent “guidance providers”, but they are not necessarily trained and qualified to do so. Consequently, there is often a lack of social recognition attached to the role of mentors and insufficient understanding of the specific skills attached to such roles.

Amongst the scholars who have recently attempted to go beyond these evidences and shed light on empirical aspects of guidance and mentoring at work, Anglophone anthropologists and workplace learning theorists have certainly brought significant contributions. It is noteworthy that insights from Francophone traditions such as professional didactics (see Mayen 2015) also provide useful and complementary resources for conceptualising the role and place of guidance in vocational and professional education.
One first significant contribution to the literature on the role of guidance in vocational and professional education is that guidance should be conceptualised as related to professional practice itself and as a dynamic and transformative process. This idea has been put forward by Lave and Wenger (1991) and their concept of “legitimate peripheral participation” (LPP). The concept of LPP suggests that access to professional practice constitutes a precondition for learning. It is by engaging in professional practice progressively that newcomers access and experience the body of knowledge associated to the practice itself. And it is by transforming the conditions in which participation occurs over time that newcomers experience changes in the ways they are socially positioned within specific communities. From that perspective, guidance can be defined as the process through which newcomers navigate a community of practice and are progressively invited to become full members rather than peripheral participants.

Closely aligned to Lave and Wenger’s conceptions, Kunégel (2011) also attempted to account for the practical and dynamic nature of guidance in the workplace. In his PhD study, conducted within the framework of Francophone professional didactics (Pastre 2011; Pastré et al. 2006), Kunégel observed and described in detail how mentors provide guidance to apprentices in the context of small-size car mechanics workshops in France. The research findings inform the description of a set of basic actions through which guidance may be exerted and expressed in context (e.g. instructions, prescriptions, demonstrations, evaluations, etc.). They also illustrate the dynamic and transformative nature of these actions as they evolve over time. Kunégel’s work, for instance, establishes a model capturing the sorts of relations between apprentices and mentors at various stages of the apprenticeship pathway. Six successive steps are distinguished, including a phase of “familiarisation”, a phase of “instruction” and a phase of “attribution of work production tasks”. At each step, the relation between mentors and apprentices is expected to take a different shape and displays specific properties. The main interest of this model is to show that there seems to be a strong alignment between the level of competences apprentices are expected to have acquired and the sorts of verbal and nonverbal interactions existing between apprentices and their supervisors. The other interesting contribution of this model is that it proposes to see these interpersonal configurations as evolving in time and not as given or static realities.

Another particularly interesting contribution to reflections on guidance can be found in Billett’s work dedicated to workplace learning. Billett conceptualises the ingredients to learning in the workplace as “relational dependencies” (Billett 2001a, b). In line with sociocultural approaches, learning is conceptualised as related to “participatory practices” by which workers gain access to specific actions in workplace contexts. But, as pointed by Billett (2001a), “it is inadequate to believe that learning simply by just doing it will suffice” (p. 7). Both social and personal factors may either support or on the contrary hinder learning opportunities. Social factors are designated as “affordances”. Affordances include, for instance, the sorts of guidance provided to novice workers, the type of expertise available or not and more globally the range of resources workplace contexts are able to make available.
to learners. Personal factors are referred to as “engagement”. Engagement is related to the specific ways individual workers elect to make use of the resources afforded to them in the workplace. These individual factors include, for instance, personal values, prior experiences and personal epistemologies. Affordances and engagement are seen as key determinants of learning in the workplace and as shaped by a relation of interdependence. From that standpoint, the provision of guidance plays a significant role in workplace learning, but not a sufficient one. It is significant in the sense that it constitutes a key resource for learning, but not sufficient in the sense that workers have to engage with these resources to make progress and learn.

14.2 Guidance as an Interactional Accomplishment

As mentioned above, strong and convincing conceptualisations exist in the Anglophone literature that have proposed to see guidance as a practice, related to participation in social action and as a dynamic and reciprocal process involving both individual and contextual ingredients. However, there is a need for understanding in more detail how participation and the relational dependencies that relate to it unfold in everyday situations and how they may be enacted in specific workplace contexts. However, contributions also emanate from Francophone conceptions.

In earlier work dedicated to apprenticeship in the Swiss dual VET system (Filliettaz 2010a), we have proposed to approach the provision of guidance as an interactional accomplishment, namely, as a social, cognitive and semiotic process that is mediated through the ongoing performance of verbal and nonverbal interactions between learners and mentors. Over the last couple of years, we have attempted to bring numerous illustrations on how such verbal and nonverbal interactions unfold in the context of guided learning at work (Filliettaz 2010b, c, 2011a, b, 2013).

In what follows, we introduce a range of complementary theoretical and methodological ingredients that are closely aligned to a sociocultural perspective on guidance and that may contribute to our understanding on the role of guidance in vocational and professional education. First, we make explicit how practice can be conceptualised as interaction. Second, we specify such an interactional perspective by defining the notion of “interactional participatory configuration” and its conceptual ingredients.

14.2.1 Conceptualising Practice as Interaction

Conceptualising guidance as an interactional accomplishment consists in considering that the provision of learning resources to novice workers cannot be regarded as an abstract process that takes place independently from naturally occurring
practices. It is by providing or receiving instructions, by sharing views or solving problems and by displaying interpretations or evaluations of other conducts that experienced workers assist newcomers in their work. In other words, it is in and through ordinary everyday interactions between participants that guidance may be accomplished and provided. Adopting such a perspective refers to a body of literature that builds on the work of anthropologists, sociologists, sociolinguists and discourse analysts, who have adopted the concept of interaction as a central category for understanding social practice. In what follows, we specify some of the key ingredients of an interactional perspective, by referring to the concepts of situatedness, indexicality, coordination in action, sequential organisation, linguistic mediation and multimodality.

14.2.1.1 Situatedness and Indexicality

The first idea that lies at the core of an interactional perspective is that social practices take shape in visible actions, such as they are accomplished by individuals in specific contexts when they participate to situated interactions (Heath et al. 2010; Suchman 1987). Situated interactions are said to be indexical with these contexts in the sense that they entertain multiple and complex relations with the social and material conditions in which they are accomplished. On the one hand, visible actions are often seen as being shaped by these contexts in the sense that historic, cultural and material arrangements exert a form of influence on the ways actions are performed. But, on the other hand, visible actions are also shaping these contexts in the sense that participants may use their behaviours as resources to make visible how they interpret specific contextual arrangements. In observing the concreted actions amongst members and describing how these members communicate and interact, interaction analysis examines what members produce together, what they hold each other accountable for and how they make sense of actions of others. In doing so, they identify patterns of practice that make visible what members need to know, produce and interpret to participate in socially appropriate ways. Such ideas have been formulated by Harold Garfinkel and his founding contribution to ethnomethodology. These ideas are currently widely applied and further developed in fields such as workplace studies or ethnomethodological studies of work, in both Anglophone and Francophone traditions (Mondada 2006).

14.2.1.2 Coordination and Sequential Organisation

A second central idea is that interactions go beyond the sphere of influence of single and isolated individuals but are collectively accomplished in the form of joint actions (Clark 1996). This requires a dense and finely tuned coordination process in which participants have to adjust their contributions and align to each other to produce a common ground for their actions. These dimensions of social interactions have been thoroughly investigated by conversation analysis and
ethnomethodologists, through the concept of *sequential organisation* (Sacks 1992; Schegloff 2007). By exploring the organisation of sequences in interaction, conversation analysts understand that social actions jointly accomplished by a plurality of participants do not unfold in an arbitrary way but reflect a specific social order. To align to this social order and to make it visible, participants engage in fine-grained coordination procedures in which they take turns, use adequate places for leaving the floor to co-participants and orient to the successive steps by which action is accomplished. From there, conversation analysts consider the sequential organisation of talk-in-interaction as the dynamic process through which participants make their actions publically accountable and shape interpretations about what they perceive as relevant in the context. The machinery of turn-taking in interaction becomes a resource for interpreting how participants orient to each other and accomplish a joint understanding of their actions.

### 14.2.1.3 Language Use as Meditational Means

A third idea that is widely spread across interactional analysts is that situated interactions are mediated processes, in which language use plays a significant role. It is by producing and interpreting linguistic forms that participants’ interactions accomplish the fine-grained cooperation process related to their joint actions. These ideas have been shared and developed in a wide range of traditions, including, for instance, interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982), the ethnography of speaking (Hymes 1984) or mediated discourse analysis (Scollon 2001). These traditions view language not only as a way of conveying information from speakers to recipients, but as a historically and culturally shaped medium through which individuals take actions, achieve cooperation, align identities and participate in social events. Francophone research in discourse analysis (Bronckart 1997; Filliettaz and Roulet 2002) has also contributed to these traditions by conceptualising the complex relations that link social actions with language. These relations are associated with two distinct and interdependent functions that are frequently associated with language use in regard to social actions. On the one hand, language use endorses “representational” functions and can be regarded as a means for describing and referring to past, present and future actions. On the other hand, language use also assumes “pragmatic” functions in the sense that it materialises specific actions – speech acts – that have a transformative effect on the contexts in which they are performed.

### 14.2.1.4 Multimodality

The sequential organisation of interaction and its contribution to the joint accomplishment of situated actions does not exclusively rely on talk and linguistic units. On the contrary, it also involves a wide range of other semiotic systems participants may use as resources for coordinating their participation. To refer to this multitude...
of semiotic resources combined in interaction, the concept of multimodality has recently emerged as a solid reference point within interaction analysis. Multimodal discourse and interaction analysts originate from a variety of subdomains of linguistics such as conversation analysis (Goodwin 2000), mediated discourse analysis (Levine and Scollon 2004; Norris 2004) or social semiotics (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996). These various disciplines have developed distinct approaches to discourse and interaction, but they also share a shift away from a logocentric view of interaction. The concept of multimodality relates to the plurality of semiotic modes combined in human behaviour (gestures, gazes, body movements, spatial displays, images, objects, voices, texts, etc.) and to the local arrangements through which they are used as tools for accomplishing social actions. For multimodal discourse and interaction analyses, participants are constantly engaged in complex meaning-making processes in which they have to produce a joint understanding of their actions. It is by using and combining a plurality of modes that they produce and interpret meaning in context and that they elect (or not) to orient to specific resources. These choices are not arbitrary. Instead, they are to some extent, shaped by the specific potentialities of these resources themselves and the conditions in which they are used. Moreover, participants also express forms of agencies through the specific ways they make use of semiotic tools in interaction.

14.2.2 Conceptualising Interactional Participatory Configurations

Elaborating on this earlier work and on an interactional perspective of social practice, it is proposed here that the relational dependencies and workplace participatory practices associated with the provision of guidance can best be described through the emergence of “interactional participatory configurations”. Interactional participatory configurations are specific forms of local arrangements, through which participants to social encounters establish the principles that shape how they interact with each other. These rules set rights and obligations to participants and have to be recognised by them as resources for organising participation in the context of joint actions (Losa et al. 2014; Filliettaz et al. 2013, 2014; Durand et al. forthcoming). From there, interactional participatory configurations are based on a plurality of components. They result from (1) the specific nature of activities accomplished in context and the purposes attached to these activities, (2) the situated identities endorsed by participants when they engage in these activities (3) and finally the conditions under which participants access specific positions from which they may or may not communicate with each other. Concepts borrowed from the field of the microsociology of everyday life – activity frames, roles and situated identities and interactional participation frameworks – provide useful references to elaborate these ingredients.
14.2.2.1 Activity Frames

First, how participants engage in interactions is highly dependent on the sorts of activities they recognise as being accomplished in context. This aspect of participation in interaction has been particularly well investigated, analysed and discussed in Erving Goffman’s work dedicated to what is called “frame analysis” (Goffman 1974). Goffman’s theory stresses the idea that the meaning of ordinary perceptions and human behaviour is highly premised in light of natural and social “frames”. These “frames” include culturally acquired knowledge about social and natural phenomenon and their particular meaning. Individuals constantly make use of this knowledge to answer the question “what is going on here?”. They rely on these premises to interpret social reality and to adapt their own conducts to such interpretations. In other words, it is by applying “frames” to these experiences that individuals may participate adequately to the sort of activity they interpret as being accomplished in context. Building on William James’ and Gregory Bateson’s phenomenological thinking, Goffman (1974) considers that these framing processes are complex and dynamic. These processes are complex in the sense that, in a given situation, multiple actions may be going on at the same time and, consequently, numerous activity frames may be relevant to interpret what is going on. Another way to illustrate this complexity is to recognise that, apart from “primary frames”, which may be recognised directly and without reference to another meaning system, a large number of activities observable in social life rely on “transpositions” or “transformations” of more elementary frames. This is the case, for instance, in simulations or in drama plays, where multiple levels of interpretation must be recognised, to adjust an adequate frame to the ongoing activities. Apart from being complex, framing processes are also conceptualised by Goffman (1974) as never given or fixed; they are vulnerable to change. People may misunderstand the meaning of contextual arrangements; they may also be abused or influenced to produce false interpretations; finally, they may also revise the meaning they attribute to the reality they experience in social life. From such a dynamic perspective, “frames” can be seen as the result of a process of “framing” through which participants jointly negotiate how to interpret the conditions in which social action takes place.

14.2.2.2 Roles and Situated Identities

Relatedly, the experience of social life, interactional participatory configurations are also shaped by the specific roles and situated identities attached to the sorts of activities accomplished in interaction. This particular aspect has also been scrutinised by social theorists, as a way to understand how participants to interaction position themselves according to each other and with regard to broader cultural and institutional arrangements. Following Goffman (1974) again, these processes of positioning are not perceived as determined by preexisting social roles, but endorsed by participants in interaction itself (Goffman 1961; Sacks 1992; Bucholtz and Hall 2005). It is by “doing being” a person of a certain kind (e.g. doctor, teacher, mentor, etc.) that participants endorse particular identities in social action
and that they place co-participants in a reciprocal position (e.g. patient, student, mentee). Situated roles, when they are endorsed, project specific expectations regarding what is recognised as a valuable and relevant form of engagement. It is by adopting the conducts related to these expectations – or by failing to do so – that participants endorse these specific roles and display their ability to behave according to these norms and values.

14.2.2.3 Interactional Participation Frameworks

Finally, participatory configurations as they are accomplished in and through interaction also rely on the conditions under which participants gain access to talk and broader communication processes in context. Goffman (1981) referred to these aspects of interaction as “footing”. The concept of footing develops the idea according to which participants to social encounters have to position themselves according to each other and with respect to what they interpret as going on in interaction. This footing problem is made particularly complex in the sense that social encounters are not always clearly delimited portions of reality and may involve a large number of participants endorsing various and specific reciprocal positions. With regard to such a complexity, categories referring to language and talk deserve to be reconsidered. For instance, in a social encounter gathering more than two individuals, participants may not only endorse alternatively the roles of “speaker” or “hearers”. They may simultaneously speak and hear, or be addressed or unaddressed recipients, identified as ratified participants or not. They may also be mere “bystanders”, observing or “overhearing” what is going on. In other terms, it is proposed by Goffman (1981) that social encounters are shaped by “participation frameworks” and that these frameworks specify the positions participants may or may not endorse depending on the context of interaction and its local meaning.

From there, it appears that what we call interactional participatory configurations combine practical, social and communicational ingredients. Interactional participatory configurations emerge when participants apply activity frames to their encounters, when they endorse specific identities related to such frames and when they align to positions related to specific participation frameworks. These arrangements are neither given nor determined or fixed. They are locally accomplished in interaction and collectively established by participants themselves.

Referring again to the context of mentoring in early childhood education, specific empirical questions emerge from such a theoretical perspective: what are the typical interactional participatory configurations through which guidance occurs in the workplace? To what extent do mentors and students contribute to the establishment of such configurations? How do these configurations unfold in time? And through what specific semiotic means are they accomplished and transformed? These questions, we believe, bring relevant insights to our understanding of the “relational dependencies” associated with “participatory practices” in workplace learning (Billett 2001b).
14.3 Exploring Interactional Participatory Configurations in Early Childhood Education

To address this set of research questions in an interactional perspective, specific methodological procedures have to be conducted (Heath et al. 2010). These include access to empirical fields in which students are being trained and the production of audio-video data documenting naturally occurring work and training practices. It is assumed that audio-video data and the specific analytic potentialities it affords bring useful resources for the study of interactional participatory configurations. Video data make available for analyses how participants adopt specific conducts in context, how these conducts evolve in time and unfold in sequential order and how semiotic resources of different sorts are used and combined in this dynamic unfolding. It is precisely by capturing processes that are observable that participants share mutually acceptable frames for their encounters and negotiate the various ingredients composing the participatory configuration through which they shape interaction. Some of these ingredients are highly observable.

To fulfil these requirements, specific sorts of audio-video material have been collected, in the context of a vocational training programme addressed to early childhood educators. As indicated in the Fig. 14.1, three students were followed and observed during their first year of training, in the context of a practicum taking place in institutions caring for pre-school children aged between 0 and 4 years old.

In the ways described above, each student (A, B, C) was observed three times during a period of eight weeks, equivalent to the duration of their placement.

**Fig. 14.1** Audio-video data available
Students were video recorded in specific contexts, in which they conducted educational activities with children. These recordings document both play activities, during which students supervise children playing freely, and more directed activities consisting, for instance, in craft, structured games or psychomotor activities. These activities were prepared and conducted by the students, in presence of and with support from their mentor.

Complementary to these video recordings, two sorts of interview data were also collected as a way to enrich our understanding of guidance provision at work. The first sort of interview data consisted in audio recordings of pedagogical meetings, held on a weekly basis between students and their mentor. These meetings are planned in the curriculum and provide space for students and mentors to reflect about their practical experience, to assess learning objectives and to plan future activities. In each site, three pedagogical interviews were recorded, between each different activity observed. The second sort of data collected comprised that gathered through reflexive interviews conducted by researchers at the end of the observation process. In each institution, students and their mentor were confronted to excerpts of video recordings of their activity and could comment on their strategies, difficulties and emotions or make explicit the rationale underlying their contributions to interactions as they were observable in the video data.

This procedure was replicated a second time, with the three same students, during another practicum taking place on the third and last year of training, briefly before the final exams. In sum, the complete data set includes approximately 22 h of video recordings of activities, 13 h of pedagogical interviews between students and mentors and 7 h reflexive interviews led by researchers.

A close examination of the video data and detailed transcripts based on these data provide a rich empirical base for examining how mentors afford guidance to students and how students engage with these resources when leading activities with children. In a recent work conducted on these data, three main “interactional participatory configurations” were identified, placing the participants in distinct and specific participation positions (Filliettaz 2014; Filliettaz et al. 2014). In the following paragraphs, we will briefly mention these distinct participatory configuration and their main characteristics. We will then use a case study to illustrate how these configurations may be enacted empirically and how they are constantly transformed and reshape as interactions unfold.

### 14.3.1 Emerging Forms of Interactional Participatory Configurations

When carefully analysing the data set available, it appeared that interactions occurring between mentors and students in the workplace recurrently took the shape of three distinct interactional participatory configurations. In what follows, these configurations will be defined and specified.
14.3.1.1 The Observation Configuration

One first interactional configuration through which guidance may be accomplished in the conditions of work can be referred to as observation. In such participatory configurations, mentors set themselves outside an educational activity conducted by the student. They observe the students from an external position and provide feedback, either during or after the activity. A complex and visible layering of activity frames usually emerges from the ways participants engage in interaction in such configurations. Mentors afford autonomous participation spaces to students and remain outside educational activities carried out with children. They display typical behaviours associated with the specific social role of a “trainer”. For instance, they may keep at distance from the educational activities conducted by the student and take notes in a notebook. In doing so, they bring visibility to activities that are distinct from an educational frame but that refer to vocational training purposes. Mentors enacting an observation configuration usually endorse specific participatory positions in which they are not acting either as speakers nor as addressed recipients. They are usually witnessing what is going on and endorse the position of ratified bystanders according to Goffman’s (1981) terminology. Students and children “know” mentors are present, but they are not primarily addressing them explicitly.

14.3.1.2 The Joint Action Configuration

A distinct form of guidance provision can be observed in participatory configurations in which mentors are not positioned as external observers but actively engage together with students in educational activities addressed to children. Such an interactional participatory configuration can be designated as joint action, considering that both students and mentors jointly accomplish educational activities in which training and learning opportunities may occur. Similarly to what happens in observation configurations, mentors afford active participation spaces to students and a direct access to educational activities. However, in the case of a joint action configuration, mentors also endorse the situated identity of an “educator” towards children. In other words, students are not alone in leading the activity, but they engage in a complex coordination process with mentors. This has significant implications with regard to the participation framework. In the joint action configuration, mentors are not only endorsing the position of a ratified bystander. They are also speakers and addressed recipients, and they are often recognised as legitimate participants by both students and children. Interestingly, training purposes are not absent from this joint action configuration. By playing an active role, mentors attenuate the complex and unpredictable nature of educational activities such as they are often experienced by novices in their early days at work. In doing so, they provide a form of assistance to students. But what makes the provision of guidance distinctive here is that it is accomplished from within the educational
activity frame itself. Consequently, guidance provision delivered in the form of a *joint action configuration* appears as almost invisible or transparent as it takes shape through the accomplishment of professional practice itself.

### 14.3.1.3 The Demonstration Configuration

Mentors and students work collaboratively in accomplishing educational activities with children in the childcare centre. Sometimes the unfolding of such activities provides opportunities to demonstrate ways of doing and bringing ostensibly to the attention of the students’ specific resources for their actions. Such interactional participatory configurations are distinct from the other two previously identified and can be referred to as *demonstrations*. In the case of demonstration configurations, it is the mentors who take a form of leadership in the educational activity. Childcare students are placed in an observing position in which their direct contribution to the educational activity frame is limited. They are not primarily addressing children directly, and they are usually not addressed by them. In that sense, it is the students who endorse a ratified bystander position in that case. Within demonstration configurations, it can often be observed that students identify the displayed resources and reproduce them at a later stage of their practicum. Interestingly, these reproductions are often more than mere imitations. Students are also adapting the resources displayed to them by mentors to the local contingencies of the situation. These mechanisms illustrate that the sharing of repertoires is based not only on demonstration and imitation but also involves a process of appropriation and recreation.

### 14.3.2 The Dynamic Unfolding of Interactional Participatory Configurations

Contrary to what may be implicated by the definitions provided above, interactional participatory configurations are not static or rigid settings in which interactions unfold. They evolve constantly as interaction progresses, and they have to be conceptualised as dynamic and temporary constructions. To illustrate how interactional participatory configurations are enacted empirically and how these configurations are dynamically renegotiated by participants themselves, empirical evidence is drawn from the data.

This case study refers to one of the three students followed during the research (student A) and takes place in a day-care centre for children aged between 3 and 4 years old. The data were recorded in 2011 during a practicum at the end of the first year of training of the student. The observed activity consists in a so-called gathering, where children sit in a circle and listen to stories told by educators. At the end of the last story, the children are split in two groups. One of the groups will
participate to a painting activity conducted by the student, whereas the rest of the
group will go to the playground. The sequence that will be used for the analysis is
precisely the moment of transition that takes place between the end of the “gath-
ering” and the beginning of the painting activity. The analysis will focus on the
ways the student and her mentor engage in interaction at different moments of this
transition between activities and the specific interactional participatory configura-
tions that emerge from these forms of engagements.

14.3.2.1 Reshaping a Demonstration into an Observation

The first excerpt of data takes place at the end of the “gathering” activity. Children
have greeted each other, and the mentor (MEN) has told a number of tales, using a
blackboard and drawing significant ingredients of the story on the board. At the
beginning of the excerpt transcribed below, she finishes telling the story of “The
Magic Apple Tree” and starts to clean the blackboard while the student (STU) is
sitting with the group and observing.

(1) « I leave you the floor » (P-A1, 0:23:18 – 0:24:11)²

1. MEN: [#1] so this is the end of the story of the magic apple
tree\ ((MEN takes a sponge and starts cleaning the
blackboard))
2. Guillaume please sit down for two more minutes I have
something to tell\...
3. BEN: don’t clean the blackboard\
4. MEN: you don’t want me to clean it for now/
5. BEN: no\
6. MEN: so I will leave it like that for now\ and .. I-
7. BEN: I want to hear the story of the three little pigs\
8. KAI: yes another story please\
9. MEN: next time I will use the flannelgraf which is on the
other side\ Daniel asked me to use the flannelgraf and I
will do so another time\.
10. but now Lily ((name of the student)) will do an activity
with some of you ((MEN and STU gaze at each other)) and
Patrick ((name of an auxiliary member of staff)) will
go to the playground with another group\.
11. so Lily I leave you the floor ((MEN looks at STU and moves
to the background)) [#2]
12. STU: OK so I will do a painting activity with three of you if
you feel like\

²Transcription conventions are listed in the Appendix, at the end of the chapter.
Diverse participatory configurations emerge here as interaction unfolds. At the beginning of the transcribed excerpt (1), a storytelling frame is activated and participants are endorsing the typical situated identities associated with such an educational activity: the mentor acts as a storyteller and the children play the role of the public. These situated social roles are accomplished through the expected behaviours observable in this particular setting. In this instance, the mentor is producing a narrative and the children are listening to it. Specific participatory positions in interaction are associated to this storytelling frame: the mentor adopts a speaker’s position and selects the children as addressed recipients. At this stage, the student is not taking leadership over the educational activity. She observes the storytelling activity conducted by the mentor and, similarly to the children, endorses the role of the public by listening to the story as a recipient or as a ratified bystander. The specific interactional participatory configuration that emerges in this local context takes the shape of what we have proposed to see as a demonstration configuration. The educational activity is indeed in the hands of the mentor, who uses the storytelling frame as a means for displaying training resources to the student. The student is placed in an observer’s position and does not address children directly at this stage.

Quickly in this excerpt, a number of cues are produced that indicate participants are orienting their attention to another activity frame. In line 1, the mentor explicitly mentions that the story has just ended (“so this is the end of the story of the magic apple tree”). She also performs typical actions, such as the cleaning of the blackboard, that materialise the practice of a closure and a transition. In line 2, the mentor produces a directive speech act (“Guillaume please sit down for two more minutes”) and an announcement (“I have something to tell”), in which she endorses a situated role distinct from that of a storyteller. It is noteworthy that a number of children express forms of resistance to this activity change and the related situated identities attached to the storytelling frame. In particular, one of the little girls, named Bennie, asks the mentor not to clean the board (3) and asks for another story (7); another girl sitting next to her (KAI) echoes this request (“yes another story please”, 8). These resistances bring the mentor to delay the closure of the storytelling frame. Some requests are ratified (“so I will leave it like that for now”, 6), and some others are reshaped as promises for future actions (“next time I will use the flannelgraf which is on the other side Daniel asked me to use the flannelgraf and I...
will do so another time”, 9). After several attempts, the mentor then moves forward and announces that the next activity will be carried out by Lily, the student (“but now Lily will do an activity with some of you and Patrick will go to the playground with another group”, 10). This activity is discursively described, but not yet specified. During this transition sequence, the student maintains her observer’s position. She is referred to explicitly by the mentor, who establishes a visual contact with her, but does not engage directly with children at this stage. The conditions are progressively prepared for a change in the participatory configuration, in which the student will endorse distinct situated roles. In such a local context, the demonstration configuration no longer shapes how participants engage in interaction.

It is on line 11 that the mentor explicitly hands the activity to the student (“so Lily I leave you the floor”). In doing so, she selects the student as the legitimate next speaker and displaces her from the recipient and bystander position in which she was placed previously. This has important consequences in terms of situated identities. By inviting the student to take the floor, the mentor affords a participation space in which the student will be able to endorse an educational role towards children. Reciprocally, the mentor steps down from the front stage and stops to act as the leader of the gathering activity, as also indicated by her move to the back of the group (see #2). The student immediately engages with the participation space afforded by the mentor and specifies the next activity frame (“OK so I will do a painting activity with three of you if you feel like”, 12). She takes the floor, addresses the children directly and selects them as ratified recipients. In doing so, she endorses the situated role of an educator and takes the lead in the gathering activity. A new and distinct participatory configuration emerges here, very close to what we have defined as the observation configuration: the student is placed in an active and leading position, whereas the mentor progressively participates to interaction from an external observer’s position.

14.3.2.2 Reshaping an Observation into a Joint Action

The next excerpt transcribed below immediately follows.

(2) « please stay seated it is Lily who asks you to come »(P-A1, 0:24:12 – 0:24:49)
13. KAI: I want/
14. STU: I propose that-
15. KAI: me:: me:: ((other children rise their hands and want to take part to the painting))
16. STU: unfortunately not everybody will be able to take part today\ those who don't come with me will go with Patrick to the playground\ [#3]
17. KAI: I want to stay here\
18. STU: Audrey (name of the mentor) will stay here with me. and those who do not do painting today will do it another day.

19. BEN: I want to do painting (stands up and approaches STU and MEN)

20. MEN: please stay seated it is Lily who asks you to come ((MEN stops BEN and sends her back to her seat)) [4]

21. STU: I had already proposed to Elisa

22. KAI: I want to do painting ((starts crying))

23. STU: so Elisa do you want to come with me/

24. ELI: yes ((stays seated))

25. MEN: so Elisa come here and stay near Lily ((MEN guides ELI and offers her a seat next to STU))

26. STU: Alice do you feel like painting/

27. ALI: ((ALI stands up and approaches STU))

28. MEN: Alice/ please sit down on the other side

29. STU: and Katia do you want to do painting Katia/

#3: The student explains the painting activity while the mentor observes

#4: The mentor stops BEN and sends her back to her seat

The beginning of excerpt 2 confirms the establishment of the observation configuration identified previously. The student continues to endorse an active educator’s role by addressing the children directly and by identifying the participants to the painting activity (“I propose that-”, 14). Reciprocally, children recognise the student as the legitimate leader of this activity and select her as a ratified recipient. They align to this new activity frame by displaying willingness to take part to the painting activity (13, 15, 17). Finally, the mentor remains ostensibly in the background and does not address children directly anymore. In doing so, she endorses a visible observer’s role (see #3). Two distinct activity frames emerge in such a setting: (a) an educational role, shaped by the student in interaction with children, (b) and a training frame, in which the mentor takes the student’s activity as an object of observation.

When engaging with this new activity frame and preparing for the painting activity, the student is quickly faced with a practical problem: a large number of children express interest for the painting and wish to be selected as participants. This is particularly the case for the little girl, named Kaila (KAI), who performs
various attempts to become a member of the painting group (13, 15, 17, 22). In response to these demands, the student provides various arguments for the activity frame. She states all the children will not be able to take part this time (16); the mentor will stay with the painting group (18); the children from the other group will go to the playground (16) and will be able to do the painting “another time” (18). The student then goes on by selecting three girls who will be invited to participate to the painting activity: Elisa (21), Alice (26) and Katia (29). These three girls ratify their position of selected participant to the painting activity, whereas other children express forms of resistance to become members of the other group: KAI, for instance, insists to be included in the painting group and starts crying (22); other children spontaneously stand up and want to sit next to the student (15, 19). Faced with these persistent and increasing difficulties, the mentor progressively becomes more active again within the educational activity frame. She, subsequently, asks children who spontaneously stand up to remain seated (20) and invites the selected participants to change their position in space and to sit next to the student (25, 28). She also becomes more engaged with regard to her body posture and performs touching gestures towards children (see #4). In doing so, she self-selects herself as a legitimate speaker again and addresses the children directly. She also endorses an educational role towards the group of children she was observing previously.

These observable transformations bring important changes in the ways participants shape interactional participatory configurations. Ingredients of a joint action configuration are noticeable, in which the mentor progressively moves away from an external observer’s position but accomplishes complementary contributions to the educational activity initiated by the student. Similar and interdependent roles emerge here between the student and the mentor in the transition activity. The student lists the name of the selected participants to the painting activity, whereas the mentor is ordering the groups and placing children in space depending on the participant category to which they belong. Both the student and the mentor endorse speaker’s positions and select children as addressed recipients. Training purposes are not absent from such a setting, in the sense that the mentor assists the student in a difficult situation. By placing the children in space according to their participant status, the mentor takes in charge aspects of the transition activity that are difficult to cope with and contributes to attenuate the complex and unpredictable nature of educational activities. But these training resources are not delivered from an external observer’s position but from within the educational activity frame itself.

This empirical case study underlines the dynamic nature of interactional participatory configurations as they emerge in naturally occurring work and training practices. As shown in the two brief excerpts of data analysed here, the provision of guidance takes shape in specific and temporary configurations that evolve in time, as interaction progresses. In this particular case, a demonstration configuration is progressively reshaped into an observation configuration, before being transformed again into a joint action configuration. These configurations are neither given nor fixed. They emerge through the ways participants elect to engage in interaction and assign specific positions to their partners.
Beyond this particular situation, it is also interesting to observe how, in relation with plans and agreed activity frames between mentors and students, gaps or discrepancies may emerge when it comes to enact these plans in situated interactions. From the data and analysis, it can be observed how participation spaces afforded by mentors to students are often associated with local challenges that may result in significant changes in the ways participants see their roles and specific positions. A mentor may endorse an external observer’s position for a while, before being invited again to engage in a joint action configuration. From there, referring back, to a distinction made in Francophone ergonomics (see Durand and Poizat 2015; Filliettaz et al. 2015; Mayen 2015), we see that “prescribed” participation configurations may be quite remote from the ways these participation configurations are “accomplished” in real conditions.

14.4 Doing Guidance as Interactional Competence

This chapter has attempted to make the ordinary practices of mentoring students in the workplace more visible by understanding how mentors afford learning opportunities in practice and how students engage with these resources. To do so, mentoring practices have been conceptualised not as abstract categories, but as interactional accomplishments, namely, fine-grained situated and visible conducts enacted through verbal and multimodal interactions, as demonstrated in the analyses above.

Approaching mentoring practices as situated interactions emphasises the complex framing process going on when mentors and students are “doing guidance” in the circumstances of work. More specifically, the approach adopted illuminates the complex ways educational practices involving adults and children intersect with vocational training purposes involving novices and experienced professionals. What makes these sorts of settings particularly rich and potentially profitable in terms of learning is the fact that, as we saw from the data analysis, two layers of framing are constantly shaping the ways participants engage in interaction: (1) an educational frame addressed to children and taking the form of a wide range of activities (painting, playing on a playground, being split in groups, etc.) (2) and a vocational training frame involving the student and the mentor and enacted through specific and distinct educational purposes (learning how to tell stories by using a blackboard, learning how to initiate an activity and to split children in groups, etc.). These two layers are constantly intersecting when it comes to train and learn in the circumstances of practice.

The collected data and analyses suggest that participants bring local and distinct responses to these complex framing issues. Some of the mentors observed set themselves outside the educational frame and endorse an observer position to accomplish training practices. Some others participate in these activities and position themselves as partners of a joint action collectively conducted together with students. Finally, some other mentors use these joint actions to share their repertoires of resources and make these resources ostensibly visible to students.
These ways of “doing guidance” are not only attributes of specific mentors. They can be dynamically combined, as illustrated in the case study presented here, within one same setting and evolve in time as interaction unfolds.

In sum, what we have proposed to refer to as “interactional participatory configurations” can be regarded as specific resources used by participants for navigating the contextual complexity they are faced with. It is by negotiating shared participatory positions that they reconcile the premises and expectations associated with both learning and work.

As this chapter argues, interactional competences, namely, the capacity participants have to engage in complex coordination procedures in context, play a significant role in the establishment, negotiation and constant transformation of participatory practices in vocational education. Recognising the importance of these interactional competences may serve relevant purposes for early childhood educators in general and for workers endorsing mentoring functions at work in particular. For instance, this could illuminate the high expectations in terms of contextual adaptability faced by both mentors and students when they experience training situations in the circumstances of work. Moreover, considering training practices through the lens of interactional competences can also help understanding why mentoring practices are sometimes so difficult to observe and why so little attention has been paid to the empirical conditions in which they unfold. From what we see in the data, this lack of visibility can be explained by the fact that mentors do not always endorse training roles by producing explicit sorts of guiding instructions. They often give to the provision of guidance the shape of professional practice itself and exert guidance through the affordance of participatory positions. If guidance is difficult to observe empirically, it is then, to some extent, because it is framed in interaction as transparent and invisible by participants themselves. From that perspective, using interaction analysis as research method or as a resource for training could bring additional visibility and social recognition to mechanisms that are central to learning through work but are yet to be fully understood.

Appendix: Transcription Conventions

| CAP   | accented segments                      |
| /     | raising intonation                     |
| \    | falling intonation                     |
| XX   | uninterpretable segments               |
| (hesitation) | uncertain sequence of transcription |
| :    | lengthened syllable                   |
| .    | pause lasting less than one second     |
| ..   | pause lasting between 1 and 2 s        |
| Underlined | overlapping talk                      |
| ((comments)) | comments regarding nonverbal behaviour |
| [#1] | reference to the numbered illustration in the transcript |

laurent.fillietaz@unige.ch
References


