



**UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE**

FACULTÉ DE PSYCHOLOGIE
ET DES SCIENCES DE L'ÉDUCATION
Section des sciences de l'éducation



Conférence publique

Judi 20 février 2014, de 17h30 à 19h30

Uni-Mail, salle M1150

Mimetic learning at work

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Abstract

This presentation elaborates the nature and worth of learning through mimesis (i.e. observation and imitation) at work, associated personal epistemological practices and contributions that are collectively referred to as mimetic learning. This elaboration proposes that much of the moment-by-moment learning in which humans engage in (i.e. microgenetic development) arises through mimesis. The learning arising through engagement in everyday activities and interactions at work are no exception here. Mimesis is premised upon both inter-psychological (i.e. between the person and the world beyond them) and intra-psychological (i.e. the cognitive, sensory and neural processes that mediate what is experienced). Given to the need to account for these contributions and them going beyond observation and imitation (i.e. mimesis), the more inclusive term mimetic learning is adopted. An account of mimesis at work seems timely and necessary given that much and probably most of learning across working lives occurs outside of circumstances where direct interactions with others (e.g. being taught or guided) occurs, and with others and their intentions for what is to be learnt. Yet, many explanatory accounts of learning through work emphasise direct interpersonal interactions with others, more than learners' actions when working. However, recent considerations of individuals' dispositions, epistemological beliefs and epistemologies, and new findings and conceptual developments within anthropology and cognitive science offer contributions that warrant reconsiderations of concepts such as imitation, mimesis and mimetic learning. Procedurally, mimetic learning can come to assist our understanding of learning through everyday activities and interactions at and through work.

The presenter

Dr Stephen Billett is Professor of Adult and Vocational Education in the School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia and also an Australian Research Council Future Fellow. Stephen has worked as a vocational educator, educational administrator, teacher educator, professional development practitioner and policy developer within the Australian vocational education system and as a teacher and researcher at Griffith University. Since 1992, he has researched learning through and for work and has published widely in the fields of vocational learning, workplace learning and conceptual accounts of learning for vocational purposes. He was a Fulbright Professional Scholar in 1999. His sole authored books include *Learning through work: Strategies for effective practice* (Allen and Unwin 2001); *Work, change and workers* (Springer 2006) *Vocational Education* (Springer 2011) and edited books *Work, Subjectivity and Learning* (Springer, 2006) *Emerging Perspectives of Work and Learning* (Sense 2008), *Learning through practice* (Springer 2010), *Promoting professional learning* (Springer 2011) and *Experiences of school transitions: Policies, practice and participants* (Springer 2012). He is currently preparing a manuscript entitled the *Integration of Practice-based Learning in Higher Education Programs*. He is the founding and Editor in Chief of *Vocations and learning: Studies in vocational and professional education* (Springer) and lead editor of the book series *Professional and practice-based learning* (Springer) and lead editor for the forthcoming *International Handbook of Research in Professional and Practice-based Learning* with colleagues from Germany. He was awarded a 2009-2010 Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) National Teaching Fellowship that identified principles and practices to effectively integrate learning experiences in practice and academic settings. In June 2011, he commenced a four-year Australian Research Council Future Fellowship on learning through practice, which aims to develop a curriculum and pedagogy of practice. In August 2013 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Jyväskylä University (Finland) for his contributions to educational science.