Negotiating Social Legitimacy in and across Contexts: Apprenticeship in a 'Dual' Training System

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NEGOTIATING BOUNDARIES AT WORK

Talking and Transitions

Edited by Jo Angouri, Meredith Marra and Janet Holmes

EDINBURGH University Press
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Negotiating Social Legitimacy in and across Contexts: Apprenticeship in a ‘Dual’ Training System

Stefano A. Losa and Laurent Filliettaz

I. Transitions from school to work in a ‘dual’ apprenticeship system

This chapter advances a new perspective for approaching the role of discourse and interaction in vocational education and training (VET), a perspective that sees these ingredients not as peripheral components of the training curriculum, but rather as central mediating tools for vocational learning.

The chapter focuses on apprenticeship programmes in the context of Switzerland, where the dominant form of training consists of a complex combination of school-based and practice-based learning. According to such a ‘dual’ training system, apprentices experience a plurality of training sites. They move back and forth between vocational schools or training centres, where they are introduced to both technical and general content, and ordinary workplaces, where they acquire practical skills and encounter the specific requirements of work performance. For many years, apprenticeship programmes following the scheme of the dual system have regularly been reported as efficient strategies for securing employment and supporting smooth transitions from school to work (Dubs 2006). However, recent research also shows that accomplishing the transition between learning sites such as vocational schools and workplaces is not always a benign experience, but provides apprentices with numerous challenges and, often, contradictory expectations. Depending on the occupations and the geographical areas, between 20 per cent and 40 per cent of apprentices who enter the dual VET system do not complete their apprenticeship within the stated terms of their contracts (Stalder and Nägele 2011). Of these, 9 per cent change occupation, 11 per cent have to repeat a year, 7 per cent change training company, and 7 per cent drop out from the apprenticeship system without having any immediate alternative pathway. Recent studies have investigated the causes leading to young people dropping out or making changes in apprenticeship programmes (Lamamra and Masdonati 2009). These studies depict a nuanced portrait of the dual VET system and show that transitions from school to work are often far from smooth and unproblematic. They conclude that poor working conditions,
low support by trainers and unsatisfactory workplace relations emerge as the main causes leading to dropout.

In this particular context, we propose that apprentices are not only exposed to vocational knowledge in the range of contexts in which training takes place, they also encounter specific discourse practices and face numerous and often implicit or invisible expectations regarding the ways these discourses may be enacted and conducted. It is by engaging with these discourse practices that apprentices gain access to knowledge, develop practical skills and may adopt legitimate social positions within the multiple communities they belong to during their training. These language and communication skills are neither transparent nor self-evident. Like other components of vocational training, they must be observed and, most importantly, learnt. Some apprentices are very successful in identifying and acquiring the specific discursive demands underlying the range of practices included in their training programme. Others are not and may encounter challenging experiences in their journey to a VET qualification (Filietta et al. 2013; Losa et al. 2014).

In a research programme conducted at the University of Geneva, these various ideas were elaborated and discourse analytic methods were implemented to address vocational education issues (Filietta et al. 2008; Filietta et al. 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). Analysing discourse and verbal interaction among apprentices, trainers and workers, it is proposed, can contribute to a better understanding of the complex learning processes associated with initial vocational training and illuminate the multiple challenges faced by apprentices when accomplishing the transition from school to work.

In this chapter, we focus on the relationship between trainers and apprentices within dedicated training centres and workplaces, and wish to highlight how discursive and interactional processes can lead participants to establish legitimate, recognised and valued social positions within specific communities of practice. Adopting an interactional perspective on social recognition and impression management, we address the following range of questions. How do apprentices negotiate their participation in communities of practice? How do they actively contribute to their legitimacy in face-to-face interaction? What kinds of semiotic resources do they use to do so? Reciprocally, we are also interested in investigating the perspective of trainers and experienced workers. How do trainers shape interactional participatory practices for apprentices? What sorts of resources are afforded to them and how may these specific resources support or hinder social recognition for apprentices?

A contrasted data analysis based on audio-video recordings recently collected in the Geneva area shows how various apprentices may respond differently to the specific requirements set towards communicative tasks. Depending on the contexts in which they engage, complex social expectations emerge, regarding how apprentices should participate in interaction. By contrasting the contexts of a training centre and a workplace, we question the continuities and discrepancies between learning experiences, and illustrate how the ‘crossing of boundaries’ is very much a matter of interactional accomplishment by participants themselves.
and training communities emerge across several dimensions, such as boundary crossing, actors' non-engagement within their roles, multiactivity, and so on.

In this regard, Akkerman and Bakker propose adopting a new perspective on learning conditions at the crossing of boundaries (boundary crossing) between school and work:

the notion of boundary crossing urges us to consider not only how schools prepare for students' future work practices, but simultaneously how current work experiences of students during school trajectories are exploited for learning to become a professional. Consequently, work is not to be seen as a context outside the educational practice, but as part of the schooling process. Thinking about boundary crossing leads to questions about how and to what extent continuity is maintained despite sociocultural differences between school institutes and local workplaces. (Akkerman and Bakker 2012: 155–6)

According to Akkerman and Bakker, this approach aims to foster elements of continuity rather than difference and leads to taking into account two dimensions in particular: the 'epistemic culture' within schools and workplaces; and the 'identity positions' of apprentices in and across the two contexts. Epistemic cultures may encounter tensions between schools and workplaces, where attitudes often consider the overly theoretical perspective of teachers as disconnected from more applied, practical and implicit forms of knowledge as they are used in professional practice. Thus, 'From a boundary-crossing perspective then, the challenge is to find a way to interrelate these different types of epistemologies in favour of the learning process of the apprentice' (Akkerman and Bakker 2012: 156). Regarding identity positions as well, it is necessary to consider the ambiguous or even paradoxical position of the apprentice (learner vs. worker) as a potentially privileged mediating position to navigate between the two communities of practice. As suggested by Akkerman and Bakker (2012: 156), 'This ambiguous position can lead to insecurity, but also creates the potential to act as a broker, meaning that one can introduce elements of one practice into another.'

By adopting a close look not only within specific training contexts but also beyond and across contexts, the boundary-crossing approach allows for renewed attention to practices and modalities of participation that apprentices and other participants are required to produce in learning situations. In particular, such an approach takes account of the fact that participation practices are diverse and should not be seen as bound to one specific community of reference, whether the school or the professional context. Instead, discourses, practices and values may cross different contexts, depending on the ways they are enacted by participants. Therefore, it seems necessary to consider the complexity and plurality of standards that can be locally mobilised by apprentices and other participants involved in vocational training. More specifically, if the distinction between vocational schools and workplaces has institutional validity, it seems appropriate to question such a 'duality' from the perspective of the participants themselves and their participation practices. To what extent do their participatory practices differ or coincide between and across these institutional contexts?

2.2 Participation and learning in and across contexts

In the field of vocational education and training, the issue of participation has mainly been approached in terms of identity positioning and belonging to a professional community of practice. This is particularly apparent in Lave and Wenger's (1991) core concept of 'legitimate peripheral participation'. This concept provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice. (Lave and Wenger 1991: 29)

Participation is thus addressed in terms of the identity process unfolding over a certain period of time and depending on the progress of the learner (newcomer) in its formative path within the community of practice up to his or her recognition as full member. Learning is deeply connected to becoming a legitimate member of a community of practice. For apprentices, this requires participation in joint activities and being able to 'position themselves' in a complex network of relations involving other apprentices, teachers, trainers and co-workers (Filletaz 2010a: 30). Here, legitimacy is about the recognition and the acceptance of the apprentice's novice identity from an old-timer trainer. In other words, trainers expect apprentices to act in a consistent and relevant way according to their ratified learner position. Thus, individuals involved in a learning process need to interactively align themselves to what is normatively expected according to the social role they take on. This draws attention to the fact that groups or communities of practice that are organised around professional practice – whether in training situations or work environments – not only share a repertoire of learning resources such as language, peculiar sensitivities, tools and specific skills, as mentioned above, they also share a repertoire of normative and behavioural expectations including norms, beliefs, values, attitudes, and individual and role-based engagement. Depending on these expectations, specific ways to talk, to communicate and to participate with others and within the group are perceived as more appropriate than others.

Developing these perspectives, Billett (2001, 2004) shows how individual engagement and agency are central components of participation and learning within communities and workplace environments, and how these components interact with social and contextual conditions. In particular, Billett's work pays attention to contextual and social conditions that may have an impact on learning opportunities. He focuses on the forms and qualities of guidance processes through which experts provide support to newcomers in work production tasks and considers learning as the consequence of 'participatory practices' enacted by learners and through which they may get access to work opportunities allowing them to progress. Following Billett, participatory practices consist of two interdependent factors: social factors and individual ones. Social factors are characterised by the range of resources afforded by work environments (i.e. forms of guidance and expertise, material resources). Individual factors relate to the ways novices elect to engage with work activities and with the resources afforded
people engaging with each other in actual face to face interaction has been neglected’ (Jacobsen and Kristiansen 2009: 51). By focusing on the trainer-trainee relationship within vocational training centres and workplaces, we intend to explore legitimacy and legitimisation as face-to-face recognition processes. To understand recognition as driven by ‘interactional, situational or interpersonal’ factors (Jacobsen and Kristiansen 2009: 51), we adopt a Goffmanian perspective on social recognition. Goffman (1959, 1963) distinguishes between ‘cognitive recognition’ and ‘social recognition’. The former refers to ‘a process by which one individual “places” or identifies another, linking the sight of him with a framework of information concerning him’ (Goffman 1963: 112–13). The latter is more concerned with ‘the process of openly welcoming or at least accepting the initiation of an engagement, as when a greeting or a smile is returned’ (Goffman 1963: 113).

Applied to vocational educational and training contexts, these two forms of recognition seem particularly suited to investigate legitimisation processes occurring in and across contexts. Such legitimisation processes involve both cognitive and social dimensions. Indeed, in vocational training relationships, apprentices, teachers, trainers, mentors, and so on are cognitively recognised and ‘placed’ within relevant categories (i.e. as members of specific communities of practice). They are cognitively recognised as persons of a certain kind: an apprentice, a vocational teacher, a workplace supervisor, and so on. Cognitive recognition is thus ‘the process through which we socially or personally identify the other’ (Goffman 1963: 113). However, since these individuals belong to several communities of practice in which different roles and identities are mobilised and different values, positions and norm expectations are referred to, social identifications may be perceived as inadequate or displaced. Consequently, participants have to locally negotiate or navigate between these multiple identities and/or references. Such negotiations are particularly relevant for learners in vocational education and training programmes because, as described by Akkerman and Bakker (2012: 156), they are ‘at the periphery of both practices and face simultaneously a “neither/ nor” and a “both/and” situation of belonging to communities’. For learners, such an ‘in-between’ position could potentially generate contradictions. Indeed, apprentices find themselves in an ambiguous position, being a student and novice who is learning yet at the same time a professional who is expected to know and act’ (Akkerman and Bakker 2012: 156). Therefore, it is possible that an apprentice is recognised as an ‘expert’ of his or her work in the context of the school community and at the same time as a ‘novice’ in the workplace context, or vice versa. Regarding trainers, similar tensions may arise, when, as noted by Lave and Wenger (1991), trainers feel their authority threatened by apprentices becoming full participants.

The ways participants identify others is directly linked with how they interact with them or about them. Participants are expected to socially recognise each other and align their behaviour to ‘social, ceremonial and indeed interactive rules and norms of engagement with others in actual social interaction’ (Jacobsen and Kristiansen 2009: 59). In other words, according to the relevant context, specific cognitive recognition outputs and identifications may be face-threatening if revealed or made explicit without any form of tact. Thus, legitimisation processes are largely based on the symbolic interplay between participants and the management of their ‘faces’. Adopting
Goffman’s perspective, participants in social encounters display a certain valuable image of their self and consistently work to orient the impression they make on other participants. Individuals are able to act as a certain type of person or enact specific roles through verbal and body language especially. However, when acting, people also give off expressions that are mostly involuntary or uncontrolled. Conveying and maintaining the self-image they want to display appears to be complex work, particularly because the recognition of one’s face largely depends on others’ judgement.

Using this framework, our aim is to apply a microscopic approach to vocational education and training participatory practices. By adopting an interactional analysis perspective on legitimation/delegitimation participatory practices, we see engagement and participation in activities and social interactions within communities of practice as key contributions to learning as well as to the construction of legitimate identities.

3. Analysing apprenticeship in a ‘dual’ training system: methodology and data

To investigate legitimation practices in vocational training interactions, we adopt a discursive and interactional perspective. Such a framework combines several analytic frameworks and disciplines. As mentioned above, Goffman’s dramaturgical and interactional perspective (Goffman 1959, 1963, 1974) provides a means to finely describe the ways through which participants shape their relationship and negotiate a joint understanding of the local context in which they engage. Highlighting interactional processes of contextual recognition and legitimation can thus be described and analysed as impression management. From this standpoint, Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective (Goffman 1959, 1963, 1974) provides analytic tools of particular importance for our analysis. First, the notions of ‘face’ and ‘face work’ highlight how individuals in interaction are bound to the symbolic recognition they will afford one another and to the need to consistently negotiate their self-impression. Second, the concept of ‘participation framework’ captures the interactional involvement of participants and the ways this involvement may be constantly reframed. In addition to Goffman’s analytic categories, contributions from the ethnography of speaking and interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982) are also central to our analysis. This latter perspective enables us to account for the complex relations linking contextual information with participants’ interactional behaviour in general and the production of speech in particular. Gumperz emphasises the contextual dimension not determined by external aspects but rather constructed by actors themselves through ‘contextualisation cues’ that manifest to others how the ongoing encounter is interpreted and understood. Moreover, insights from pragmatics and interactional linguistics (Filippitza et al. 2008; Mondada 2004) are used to analyse and understand how speech and language convey meanings that are necessarily situated and emerging from the ongoing interaction process. Finally, multimodal discourse analysis (Kress et al. 2001; Norris 2004; de Saint-Georges 2008) is also used to take into consideration the wide range of semiotic resources used by participants as a complement to verbal communication (gestures, gaze, body positions, interactions with objects and the material environment, etc.). Although these different methodological frameworks come from various disciplinary currents, their articulation

is widely compatible and complementary due to the same epistemological orientation centred on an empirical approach of language practices in their contextual usages and because of their underlying ethnographic approach to data production.

Empirical material used in this chapter is part of a larger research project (Filippitza et al. 2008, 2009, 2010; Filippitza 2010a, 2010b, 2010c) that aimed at tracing contrasting trajectories of participation in order to better understand the processes of learning and identity construction in the context of transition from school to work. Data collection involved ethnographic observations of a cohort of forty apprentices engaged in three different technical trades: car mechanics, automation and electric assembly. This ethnographic perspective allowed us to observe and document situations of vocational training in naturally occurring conditions in the Geneva area and in the various settings involved in the dual training system: vocational schools, private training centres and workplaces. With the consent of participants, ordinary training activities were video-recorded by researchers. In addition to audio-video recording and ethnographic observations, other empirical sources of information were collected, consisting primarily of field notes, research interviews and various written documents. Special attention was paid to training interactions in which apprentices were involved in vocational learning tasks with a variety of experts, ranging from vocational teachers working in vocational schools, to dedicated trainers hired by training centres, to experienced employees available in the workplace. Apprentices were mainly male adolescents, aged between fifteen and eighteen years old. They were observed during both the first and fourth years of their apprenticeship, namely at the beginning and at the end of their training programme.

4. Examples of legitimation through participatory practices

In this section, a detailed analysis of excerpts of data will illustrate how participation in interaction may consist, for apprentices and experts, of negotiating legitimate positions through legitimation and delegitimation participatory practices. To this end, we use two case studies selected from the available data set. The two case studies refer to two different apprentices – Rodrigo (ROD) and Victor (VIC) – both enrolled in an apprenticeship programme in automation, but observed in two different training sites during their first year of training: a training centre in the first case; and the workplace for the second. In addition, in order to illustrate the diversity of the two training sites, both case studies were selected to show how apprentices may face difficulties or unforeseen events that challenge their positions in training centres as much as in workplaces. By illustrating how ROD and VIC interact with different sorts of experts in these diverse training contexts, we demonstrate how participants manage their mutual relationship and achieve recognition and legitimacy in interaction.

The data and analysis aim to identify diverse and constantly changing participation formats and to understand how these participation formats exert an influence, in terms of both (1) access to work-related knowledge and (2) the position of participants in specific communities of practice. Using this process, we question the ‘boundaries’ between these learning sites and observe how participants themselves may or may not cross these boundaries in and through their interactions.
4.1 Negotiating a legitimate learner’s position in a training centre

The first case study refers to the context of a training centre in which first-year apprentices in automation spend the first six months of their apprenticeship programme, before experiencing the production conditions of workplaces. The objective of the training courses is to provide apprentices with basic technical skills in mechanics, electronics and electricity. The sequences of interaction we use occur approximately three to four months after the beginning of the training course. They relate to a period of training specifically dedicated to the learning of electric wiring. The activity setting underlying these sequences can be described as an individual practical exercise consisting of producing a basic electric command system named ‘motor controller’ according to explicit technical specifications. Apprentices are asked to build a command system, starting from an electric diagram. This kind of exercise is based on typical tasks that automation specialists are expected to accomplish in the workplace.

The analysis focuses on the interaction between the trainer in charge of the electricity workshop (MON) and an apprentice (ROD). ROD is not progressing as quickly as other apprentices in the workshop. Moreover, the quality of the work he is producing is often not positively assessed by the trainer. In the period of time preceding the transcribed excerpts, MON observed the command system produced by ROD and considered that the wiring was not properly aligned and did not follow the given instructions (see Figure 6.1). He asked ROD to start the wiring all over again. A couple of minutes later, MON comes back to ROD’s desk and congratulates ROD for his improvements. This is where excerpt 1 starts.

Excerpt 1 ‘we will go and see how your boss works’ (218, 39:54-40:17)

1 MON: ((approaches ROD and observes his work)) yes that’s much better than before
2 ROD: i am doing it properly now
3 MON: did you see the electric unit next-door/ ((points with his right thumb toward the electric station of the workshop)) [Figure 6.2]
4 ROD: no
5 MON: you want me to show you the electric unit next-door /

The first excerpt shows how, through mechanisms of legitimation and delegitimation, changes in the interactional participation practices locate learners in specific communities of practice. Consequently, it also shows how identities are locally built and socially accomplished through micro-negotiation of participation practices.

At the beginning of the excerpt, the trainer (MON) positively assesses ROD’s work (‘yes that’s much better than before’, line 1) as accomplished so far, although tacitly suggesting that improvements are still possible. In line 2, ROD ratifies MON’s statement but reframes the trainer’s assessment by self-evaluating his own work as ‘proper’ (‘i am doing it properly now’). In turn, the trainer reframes ROD’s self-evaluation by suggesting that he watch a real electric unit, located in the electric station of the workshop (‘did you see the electric unit next-door’, line 3). After admitting not having looked at it yet, ROD identifies and categorises (‘a Scheffer one’, line 6) the electric unit as the one built by Scheffer, the name of the company that has hired ROD as an apprentice. Responding to the sudden reference to the workplace community of practice, the trainer MON instigates an interesting reframing of ROD as a member of such a community (‘yes and you work for Scheffer don’t you’, line 9). Then, after ROD’s confirmation about his membership in Scheffer (line 10), MON invites the apprentice to visit the electric station (‘come on then we will go and see how your boss works’, line 11).

Interestingly, significant changes in the participatory configuration appear at this moment. ROD’s wiring activity is suspended by the trainer’s proposal that he watch the electric unit, and the activity frame of a wiring task carried out individually is momentarily interrupted. In this new activity frame, ROD is offered an ‘observer’s’ position, guided by the trainer, and located in a different space.

This shift in the participatory practice has important consequences in terms of social recognition and legitimation processes. What at the beginning was labelled as an ‘electric unit’ is categorised at the end of the excerpt as ‘how your boss works’. By reframing ROD’s self-evaluation and inviting him to discover what a ‘real’ electric unit looks like, MON places the apprentice in a specific position, within the community of learners in the training centre: his work is certainly remote from professional standards as they apply in practice; it is still at the periphery of what it should look like. At the same time, as will be seen in greater detail in excerpt 2, the trainer also positions ROD as a member not only of a learners’ community of practice, but also of a community of workers. His identity as an employee of Scheffer is explicitly made visible (‘you work for Scheffer’) and reference is made to ‘how the boss works’.

After entering the electric station of the workshop, the trainer opens the electric unit and draws ROD’s attention to various properties of the device.
in the context of the learning task: ‘right it’s not exactly the same as your own wiring earlier is it’ (line 36).

Pointing to the aesthetic aspects of the electric unit also has important consequences in terms of social recognition and legitimation. By categorising ROD’s work as ‘not the same’ as the real electric unit on display, MON is positioning the apprentice as a legitimate peripheral participant within the learners’ community of practice of the training centre. Interestingly, ROD ratifies sequentially the trainer’s assertions: ‘oh yeah’ (line 32); ‘yeah yeah’ (line 35) ‘no it’s not the same’ ((laughs)) (line 37); ‘yeah’ (line 39). In doing so, he seems to align to the legitimate but peripheral position assigned to him by MON. Moreover, through explicit reference to the workplace community of practice and by comparing ROD’s work with Scheffer’s professional wiring, the trainer also implicitly positions the apprentice as a peripheral participant within the workplace community of practice. This repositioning appears as particularly salient when ROD expresses how he understands the content of the electric unit. By responding ‘oh yeah wouaou the same height’ (line 32), ROD ascribes specific categories to the wiring and to what he sees as a professional way to arrange wires. Interestingly, the trainer does not recognise such a statement as fully relevant and orients towards distinct features of the electric unit: the fact that loops are used as a reserve in case additional wire is needed (line 33). ROD’s learning and workplace peripheral participation in particular is definitively made relevant by the trainer with his final statement: ‘so that’s the kind of work your boss expects’ (line 47).

In terms of legitimation processes, it is also interesting to notice how the trainer performs such a repositioning of the Apprentice. Indeed, before the explicit assessment of ROD’s work as ‘not the same’ (line 37), MON avoids direct face-threatening acts such as direct orders (for example, ‘you must do this or that’). Instead, he sensitively draws the apprentice’s attention to other models of work and prompts him towards a means to transform his own way to wire. Expressions such as ‘oh yeah wouaou’ could then be considered as ways for ROD to express relevant learning-driven discoveries.

In sum, the trainer acts as ‘broker’ (Wenger, 1998; Akkerman and Bakker, 2012) in this particular context: through his participation in interaction, he crosses the physical and symbolic boundary of the training setting and uses the material artefact of the ‘real’ electric unit as a way to invite the workplace inside the learning situation. By doing so, MON relates ROD’s developing skills to professional standards, with his reference to ‘how your boss works’. ROD’s learning identity is clearly challenged at this point by the community of the workplace, a community he does not yet belong to, but whose material accomplishments are exhibited as resources for learning to work.

4.2 Keeping the apprentice in a workplace marginal position

If vocational training situations are not hermetic to workplace contexts, it should also be observed that workplace training practices may borrow participation formats that are typical of learning and instruction processes. To illustrate this, we turn to a second case, observed in the same trade of automation, but related to the training context of the workplace. The situation involves Victor (VIC), a first-year apprentice, and an experienced technician, Norbert (NOR). NOR is not a professional trainer but an
ordinary worker, who supervises the work of the apprentice during a three-month internship in the production department of a large industrial company producing electric generator devices.

In the two sequences transcribed below, VIC and his supervisor work together at the end of the production line in an area where the electric generators are tested before leaving the production site. The testing procedure comprises a long list of routine tasks and measures that have to be accomplished in a strict order to make sure all the parts of the generator produced are functioning properly. In the analysis, we draw attention to how VIC and NOR jointly accomplish the testing procedure and how they negotiate specific legitimate participant positions in interaction.

Excerpt 3 takes place at the very beginning of the testing procedure. The apprentice and his supervisor are standing in front of the generator and the apprentice prepares to switch on.

Excerpt 3 ‘what’s the problem?’ (220, 05:30–07.35)
1 VIC: can i switch on now? ((VIC touches the main switch and looks at NOR))
   [Figure 6.4]
2 NOR: first you should check the battery here
3    now you can press on the green button,
4 VIC: OK\ ((VIC presses on the main switch, but nothing happens))
5    a time relay/
6 NOR: no no it should be on now\ . try again/
7 VIC: ((VIC presses on the green button again, but nothing happens))
8 NOR: ((NOR steps into the electric generator and makes verifications)) [Figure 6.5]
9 VIC: what’s the problem/
10 NOR: ((NOR goes back into the electric generator and makes verifications))

In the first part of the sequence, the apprentice (VIC) has direct access to the testing procedure. He attempts to start the generator under the supervision of an experienced worker (NOR). The leading position of VIC in carrying out the activity is made possible through the strong guidance provided by NOR. Indeed, VIC elicits justification from NOR before taking action ((can I switch on now?, line 1), and NOR responds by providing instructional guidelines (‘first you should check the battery here’, line 2; ‘now you can press on the green button’, line 3). Such a participation configuration has important implications for VIC in terms of his identity and membership of the professional community of practice. By affording him the opportunity to lead the ongoing activity, NOR recognises VIC as ‘worker’ in the making. As stressed by the close guidance provided by NOR and his configuring role in the ways the testing procedure unfolds sequentially, VIC’s participation appears as largely ‘attenuated’ or mediated by the expert. In other words, VIC seems to be recognised as a legitimate participant in the testing procedure, but peripheral to the community of practice and, thus, still in a ‘learner’’s position.

At the precise moment when the apprentice switches the start button, an unanticipated ‘event’ occurs: the generator does not turn on (line 4). Interestingly, the emergence of such an event transforms the participatory practices of the apprentice and his supervisor. To deal with the current situation, NOR, the supervisor, adopts a leading position and takes over a close investigation of the generator (line 8), whilst the apprentice (VIC) stands back and becomes an ‘observing’ of what is happening. NOR no longer produces verbal instructions oriented towards VIC and does not respond to VIC’s questions (‘what’s the problem’, line 9). The reframing of the participation practices between VIC and NOR produces a redistribution of the roles and the situated identities endorsed by participants at this stage. NOR re-enters the role of ‘worker’ while VIC loses access to the ongoing task. In other words, VIC is placed aside of the work production task and he is not addressed any more as a guided learning worker by his supervisor.

During the next five minutes, NOR keeps on checking the electric generator visually without saying a word but observed by VIC. In spite of his efforts, the generator still does not switch on. After a while, NOR explains to the apprentice that a more systematic troubleshooting procedure has to be conducted. He grabs a folder including the electric diagram of the generator as well as an electric meter device and starts to test all the connecting points in a specific order.

Excerpt 4 ‘i think it comes from the print’ (220, 13:12–14.45)
12 NOR: [Figure 6.6] until here it’s OK now we will check XT-122.4
13 VIC: yes\ 
14 NOR: ((NOR uses the electric meter device to check the contact))
   here you have nothing\ . OK that’s normal\ 
16 VIC: mmm\ 
17 NOR: the contact is open\ . press on now/
18 VIC: ((VIC presses on the main switch but nothing happens))
19 NOR: still nothing\ 
20 VIC: right so the problem comes from here\ 
21 NOR: ((points to the electric diagram)) here you have the 26\ so the problem comes either from the button
22 VIC: yes\ 

Figure 6.4 VIC touches the main switch of the generator and addresses NOR: ‘can i switch on now’.

Figure 6.5 NOR steps into the electric generator and makes verifications.
specific concepts related to it (Billett 2001). In other words, NOR affords a learning opportunity to VIC in the sense that he does not exclusively address a practical production problem individually, but deploys numerous resources to transform this production problem into a meaningful experience addressed to the apprentice.

In terms of social positioning and legitimacy, complex situated identities are endorsed by participants in excerpt 4. NOR, for instance, positions himself as an experienced worker within the professional community: he displays expertise in dealing with a complex production situation. At the same time, however, he endorses a trainer’s role as he shapes the activity as interpretable to the apprentice. Reciprocally, VIC is also led to endorse multiple positions in this excerpt. While he is positioned as a marginal member within the professional community of practice since he no longer has direct access to the relevant work, he is nevertheless recognised as a legitimate participant within the community of learners trained in the workplace.

This second case study clearly illustrates that participatory practices, as observed in workplace contexts, do not necessarily consist of strict work production tasks. Participants may invite training and learning practices within workplace contexts, even when carrying out routinised work procedures. As illustrated by the data and analysis, there are several ways for participants to transform production practices into learning opportunities: trainers may guide learners through the experience of conducting work-related actions (see excerpt 3), or they may display these actions as meaningful experiences for apprentices, by making encapsulated work-related knowledge visible (see excerpt 4). However, while work is certainly permeable to training practices and learning opportunities, it should be emphasised how fragile the conditions for crossing such boundaries are. As illustrated by the unexpected event emerging during the testing procedure, the real conditions in which work unfolds in practice can quickly challenge legitimate learners’ positions and marginalise the role of apprentices in real work production tasks.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Whether in training centres or in workplaces, acting in a valuable and legitimate way for an apprentice results from a complex process of negotiation and co-construction, involving teachers, trainers and/or the supervising workers. Through the two selected case studies, our analysis shows that apprentices often have to face difficulties or unexpected events in training situations. For example, their work can be assessed as inappropriate, as in ROD’s case, or technical troubles may emerge and interrupt routinised work scenarios, as in VIC’s experience. These events or difficulties often introduce changes in participation practices and in the roles and positions endorsed by apprentices in the ongoing activities. More specifically, they often initiate a shift from direct access to practice towards observers’ positions in which apprentices are addressed as recipients of explanations or demonstrations. Interestingly, these changes in the participation configuration have implications in terms of legitimacy because they transform the ways apprentices are recognised and positioned with regard to ongoing activity frames.
Thus, it appears that participants involved in training and/or in work interactions are provided with access to a plurality of identities, which place them in different communities of practice. As shown with the two apprentices of our case studies, legitimate participation may involve both the community of learners and the community of workers. Reciprocally, professional trainers or workplace supervisors also alternate between workers’ and trainers’ positions, depending on the ways in which they engage in ongoing activities with apprentices. In other words, the negotiation of social legitimacy in and across contexts often leads participants to cross boundaries. In the first excerpt, taken from the context of a training centre, MON, the trainer, explicitly brings to the apprentice’s attention work-based references and norms. In the second excerpt, taken from the context of a workplace, the supervising worker, NOR, turns a troubleshooting procedure into a training opportunity for the apprentice, VIC.

By adopting a fine-grained interactional analysis, it appears that the forms of participation across institutional boundaries are not individually intended and enforced but rather constantly negotiated between participants involved in the ongoing interaction. Such boundaries are not fixed and linked to specific places but rather constructed by the participants who give them contextual saliency. Our analysis shows how participants use discursive and multimodal resources in interaction to establish links between the different epistemological spaces and to cross borders. Such resources can be mobilised in different ways: (1) by referring explicitly to institutional categories related to specific communities of practice (‘so that’s the kind of work your boss expects’); or (2) by accomplishing specific forms of participation in interaction.

Finally, the interactional approach adopted here brings new perspectives to the social issues related to transitions from school to work and to the difficulties often faced by young people when engaging in apprenticeships. Indeed, apprentices in a dual training system are not only confronted with different institutional spaces associated with distinct normative expectations, they are also expected to navigate across permeable borders even within these institutional settings. Such considerations point to the complexity of participation practices and identity positioning at work within a dual training system. If transitions are not as smooth as expected for an important proportion of apprentices, it is perhaps because the process of crossing boundaries in and through discourse and interaction requires complex skills and competences, which are neither taught nor explicitly detected. The precise contribution of a discursive lens to vocational education and training is to give greater visibility to the sorts of hidden challenges faced by youths when negotiating boundaries at work.

**Transcription conventions**

- pause
- / rising tone
- \ falling tone
- \((action, movement or gesture))\) non-verbal behaviour

**Notes**

1. This research programme was been sponsored by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF) under references PP001-106603 and PP00P1-124650. It benefited from the contributions of Prof. Ingrid de Saint-Georges, Dr Barbara Duc and Dr Stefano Losa.

2. All the excerpts presented in this chapter are translated from French to English.

**References**


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