

From school to work: interaction and participation in vocational educational and training situations

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In a context characterized by job insecurity and instability, change from school to work is not only an important socioprofessional transition but also a fundamental issue both for individuals and for society. In this view, vocational education and training (VET) systems are considered as a way to gain access to the labour market. Do the conditions offered by VET systems facilitate this transition? How do they prepare young people to enter the professional world? How do they support learning and professional socialization?

To address these issues, we propose to focus on the Swiss “dual” system of VET, in different technical fields. We concentrate on the apprentices’ experiences in settings proper to this context (vocational schools, training centres, workplaces), and more specifically on their participation in contrasted communities of practice.

In this contribution, we propose to analyze a set of audio-video data documenting the activities of two apprentices in ordinary training situations during their first and their third or fourth year’s apprenticeship. These recordings show how they interact with experts both in enterprises and training centres. Through an analysis of verbal and non-verbal interactions in which the apprentices engage, we examine how they participate in different communities, that is the roles and places proposed to them and the roles and places they identify with in different activities. In our view, this allows us to observe in situ how professional socialization occurs.

This analysis enables us, first, to underline the collective and dynamic dimensions of participation. Then, the study of two contrasted trajectories of participation allows us to sustain our reflection on learning and professional socialization processes in VET situations. Finally, we try to stress how an analysis of local participation phenomena contributes to have a better understanding of transitions from school to work.