Overview of the talk

I. Context of the study
   - The Swiss VET system
   - The case of a migrant apprentice

II. The linguistic demands of learning through practice
   - Referring to the material environment
   - Responding to humour
   - Requesting guidance

III. Theoretical implications
   - From linguistic demands to literacy practices
   - From linguistic demands to interactional competences
   - Linguistic demands and workplace learning

IV. Implications for practice
   - Training mentors and workplace supervisors
   - Training learners in transition
Context of the study

The Swiss VET context

- A “dual” vocational training system
  - A long-standing tradition of apprenticeship programs
  - Integrating school and practice-based learning in the workplace
  - Developing “smooth” transitions from school to work

- Current issues and challenges
  - The difficult access to apprenticeship in a “market-driven” VET system
    - 70% of Swiss firms do not hire apprentices
    - Young people with migrant background are significantly more enrolled in “bridge courses” preparing to apprenticeship
  - The contested quality of a practice-based training system
    - 30% of apprentices drop out of the training system
    - In some trades, 60% fail at their intermediary or final exams
A case study

- The apprentice observed: ROD
  - 1st year automation specialist
  - Migration from Cape Verde
- The training company
  - Construction of electric boards for the building industry
- The training environment
  - The work supervisor: FER
  - Other co-workers: JUL, FRA, DAV
  - Direct immersion into work
- The tasks observed
  - Assembling electric boards: wiring electric devices, inserting frames into plastic casings, engraving plastic tags, installing electric sockets, etc.

The linguistic demands of learning through practice
1. ROD: ((ROD plugs in the testing cable))
2. FER: you have to switch on these devices\ ((points to the devices included in the electric board))
3. ROD: ((ROD switches on the circuit breakers included in the electric board))
4. also the EFI/
5. FER: this isn’t an EFI/
6. ROD: it’s a: mmm: a relay/
7. FER: ((looks at ROD without speaking))
8. ROD: it’s a Multi-9/
9. FER: ((continues to look at ROD in silence))
10. ROD: it’s- ((picks up his notebook and reads))
11. it’s a contactor\
12. FER: OK\ ((hands on the testing device to ROD))
13. ROD: a contactor\ . OK\ ((takes the testing device))
14. FER: how shall we do the testing\
15. ROD: I put one on the neutral and the other on a phase\
16. FER: correct\ . so\ . you start at the beginning right/\n17. ROD: mmm/
18. FER: you should start at the beginning not at the end\

1. ROD: ((enters commands on the computer))
2. one two three/ .. OK\ ((enters commands on the computer))
3. ROD: ((goes back to the workshop))
4. ROD: the computer has a problem\ ..
5. I went trough all the procedure but it doesn’t work\
6. JUL: ((JUL leaves his workspace and joins ROD in the computer room))
7. ((JUL and ROD stand in front of the computer))
8. ROD: it says this\
9. JUL: ((handles the mouse and inserts commands))
10. did you go here/ ((inserts commands))
11. ROD: yeah/\n12. JUL: ((inserts commands))
13. ROD: no no less less less/\n14. JUL: wait a minute/\n15. ROD: no it’s just one/ .. it’s just one/\n16. JUL: just one/ [Justin]
17. ROD: yeah\
18. JUL: Bridou/\n19. ROD: you have to delete that\
20. JUL: Justin Bridou or:\
21. ROD: just a layer\ . you have to set it with one layer\ ((points to the screen))
22. JUL: not Bridou/\n23. ROD: what is Bridou/\n24. JUL: a sausage\ ((continues to enter commands))
25. two three four five that’s it/\n26. ROD: yeah/\n27. JUL: OK two three four five OK\ .. now .. that’ all right/\n28. did you set it vertically/ ((the printer starts to engrave the stickers))
Theoretical implications
From linguistic demands to literacy practices

- **Literacy is socially constructed and situated**
  - Literacy is a socially constructed phenomenon that is situationally defined and redefined within and across differing social groups including reading groups, families, classrooms, schools, communities, and professional groups (e.g., educators, lawyers, administrators, and plumbers).

- **Literacy is visible in the actions members take**
  - What counts as literacy in any group is visible in the actions members take, what they orient to, what they hold each other accountable for, what they accept or reject as preferred responses of others, and how they engage with, interpret, and construct text (e.g., Bloome, 1983, 1991; Bloome & Green, 1984)

- **Literacy as a dynamic process**
  - Literacy, therefore is not located in the heads of individuals or a process that is the same for all people in all situations. Rather, it is a dynamic process in which what literate actions mean are continually being constructed and reconstructed by individuals as they become members of a new social group (e.g., classes, families, professions).

From linguistic demands to interactional competences

- **Pragmatic dimensions** of linguistic demands
  - The production of speech acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969)
    - Directives – Assertions – Expressives
  - The implicit and negotiated nature of speech acts

- **Socio-cultural dimensions** of linguistic demands
  - Workplace norms and values (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003; Holmes & Woodhams, 2013)
  - Membership and Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991)

- **Interactional dimensions** of linguistic demands
  - Interactional competence as a capacity to engage in joint actions effectively and to make relevant contributions to situated social encounters (Mondada, 2006; Pekarek, 2006; Young & Miller, 2004)
Learning the linguistic demands of the workplace

- The duality of learning at and through work (Billett, 2001)

Workplace Affordances \[ \rightarrow \] Individual Engagement

- The Expansive – Restrictive continuum (Fuller & Unwin, 2003)

Expansive Environments \[ \rightarrow \] Restrictive Environments

IV

Implications for practice
Training mentors and workplace supervisors

- **Training contexts**
  - University programs for Adult Educators
  - Government training programs for mentors and workplace supervisors working in initial vocational education

- **Objectives of the module “Interaction & Learning”**
  - Designing expansive work environments
  - Understanding the role and place of verbal interactions
  - Reflecting about language use at work

- **Pedagogical activities**
  1. Conceptual input (sociolinguistics; workplace learning)
  2. Reflexive analysis of naturally occurring video data
  3. Diagnosing expansive or restrictive forms of interactions
  4. Practicing through simulations and feed-back

Training learners in transition

- **Training context**
  - Skilled professionals migrating to New Zealand
  - The intercultural challenges of the New Zealand workplaces
  - An extension from the Language in the Workplace Project (LWP) at Victoria University of Wellington (Holmes et al., 2011)

- **Objectives of the Skilled Migrant course**
  - Providing socio-pragmatic skills to migrant workers
  - Developing analytical, reflective and critical skills
  - Empowering rather than simply fitting into the local work culture

- **Pedagogical activities**
  - Analysing naturally occurring empirical material (scenarios)
  - Developing awareness and reflexivity about socio-pragmatic aspects of communication
  - Experiencing workplace interactions through placement and internships
Main References