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Constituent aspects of workplace guidance in secondary VET

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to present an integrated model of workplace guidance to enhance awareness of what constitutes good guidance, to improve workplace guidance practices in vocational education and training.

Design/methodology/approach – To identify constituent aspects of workplace guidance, a systematic search of Web of Science was conducted, focussing on mentoring literature, research on institutional socialization tactics and research on didactical interventions and their effects.

Findings – The model interprets workplace learning as a relational and integrated process of participation, acquisition, guidance and social interaction. Psychosocial support, structure-providing interventions and didactical interventions are discussed as essential components of guidance. How these components are enacted is influenced by the characteristics of training firms and their employees' readiness to provide guidance. This makes guidance an intrapersonal process. Workplace guidance is also an interpersonal process in which the agencies of employees mediate the relationship between guidance and interaction, and the agencies of trainees mediate the relationship between, on the one hand, participation and acquisition and, on the other hand, social interaction.

Originality/value – Integrated models of what constitutes good workplace guidance are rare. To fill this gap, this paper highlights constituent aspects of workplace guidance and brings them together in an integrated model. The model can help mentors/employees choose effective interventions to improve workplace learning.

Keywords Workplace learning, Agency, Didactical interventions, Workplace guidance, Workplace interaction

Paper type General review

1. Introduction

The social perspective on workplace learning (WPL) stresses that for learning to handle workplace tasks adequately, competences must be developed through an interpersonal, interactional process in which participation and acquisition must be guided to make learning meaningful (Billett, 2004; Billett *et al.*, 2008; Poortman, 2007). From this perspective, *guidance* is a basic process in WPL.



However, during practical placements in secondary vocational education and training (VET) mentor-trainee interactions targeted at learning mostly seem to be too unfrequented, and guidance is often assessed as ineffective (Blokhuis, 2006; Filliettaz, 2011; Poortman, 2007). An explanation might be that employees of labour organizations accredited to train and guide trainees, so-called training firms, lack information about where to focus on to guide them properly. Integrated models about what constitutes good workplace guidance are rare. Billett's (2002) bases for a workplace pedagogy are an exception. Analogous models regarding VET contexts, however, seem to be totally lacking (Cedefop, 2009).

To fill this gap, this article proposes a model of what constitutes good workplace guidance in VET. To contextualize guidance, first the basic processes of WPL are briefly described. Then constituent aspects of guidance are explored. Subsequently, in a Result section, the model is presented in which the basic processes and the constituent aspects of guidance are related. The article ends with a discussion containing some practical implications and suggestions for further research.

2. Methodology

To characterize WPL, concepts of Sfard (1998), Illeris (2007, 2011) and Billett (2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2003, 2004) were used. The resemblance between their approaches is that learning inevitably is socially situated and guided by social interaction.

To identify relevant literature about guidance related to WPL in secondary VET, a computerized search of Web of Science and Google Scholar was conducted, using terms like "guided learning", "situated learning theory", "social learning theory", "formal mentoring" and "socialization". To specify the search, these terms also were combined with "educational", "work placements", "apprenticeships" and/or "newcomers/novices". We especially searched for reviews and empirical studies focusing on guiding learning.

To characterize guidance, first literature on mentoring, especially formal mentoring, was explored. This literature highlighted the importance of psychosocial and instrumental support, but appears to be less useful for characterizing interventions supportive to the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Literature on mentoring, indeed, came forward, as Ragins and Kram (2007) note, as predominantly descriptive, non-intervention research mainly focussing on relatively long-lasting relationships targeted at career development and growth. Therefore, we used cues in WPL and mentoring literature to identify didactical tactics to support learning. Subsequently, these clues were used to track, preferably recent integrative, empirical studies about these tactics.

3. Basic processes of WPL in VET

Social cognitive theory states that human functioning results from interaction between internal personal factors, behavioural patterns and environmental influences. In this interactive process, people use their ability to plan and execute effective interventions for given purposes to effectively cope with their social environments (Bandura, 2001). In line with this, situated learning theory, more specifically, emphasizes that learning is an integral aspect of activities, and is connected to the social context in which these activities take place (Lave, 2009). Consistent with this view, theorists like Illeris (2007, 2011) and Billett (2001c, 2002, 2004; Billett *et al.*, 2008) characterize WPL as a content and

incentive-driven process of acquisition that occurs through engagement in goal-directed activities in which reciprocal social contributions shape learning.

During practical placements, trainees mainly gain vocational competences through *participation* in the daily practice of training firms, in which their *acquisition* of knowledge and skills is shaped through interactions with these practices and their colleagues (Billett, 2004; Billett *et al.*, 2008; Blokhuis, 2006; Illeris, 2011; Nelen *et al.*, 2010; Wenger, 1998). The socio-structural practices of training firms may then profoundly affect their personal development by imposing constraints, and providing enabling resources and opportunities for learning (Bandura, 2001). To make learning meaningful, however, task-enabling interactions must be combined with teaching trainees how to plan, start and carry out tasks, as well as helping them to solve problems adequately (Poortman, 2007; Van Merriënboer and Kirschner, 2013).

Seen as such, *participation*, *acquisition* and *guidance* are basic processes in WPL. As these are personal as well as socially interceded processes (Billett, 2002, 2004; Billett *et al.*, 2008; Illeris, 2011; Sfard, 1998; Wenger, 1998), *social interaction* is a basic process too.

3.1 Participation

Participation or active engagement in task-related and social activities starts when trainees enter training firms, and is guided by their efforts to acquire the behaviours and knowledge to function as “employees” (Chao, 2007; Griffin *et al.*, 2000; Sfard, 1998). Their participation, however, may initially be peripheral in the sense that intensity, risks and production pressures are lessened or special assistance is provided (Rogoff, 1995; Wenger, 1998). Over time, peripheral participation may develop into semi-independent functioning and, eventually, full participation (Wenger, 1998). Dawson (2013) notes that full participation is not clearly defined. Her research has shown that it “equates with proficiency rather than expertise” (p. 280). Regarding trainees, this best is seen as “a state of being confident of the basic skills” (Dawson, 2013, p. 247) and the perception that one was useful.

3.2 Acquisition

Acquisition refers to predominantly inner processes of constructing and transforming knowledge, skills, attitudes, norms and values, underpinning competence development (Illeris, 2007; Lave, 2009; Sfard, 1998). Illeris (2007) argues that acquisition, next to “content”, also is driven by incentives like one’s volition and motivation, which are reflected in the mental energy invested in learning. The content and incentive dimension of acquisition likely are activated simultaneously by impulses from the interaction between individuals and their surroundings. The strength and nature of the energy they mobilize for learning may influence the quality in which content is processed and this, in turn, influences the development of relatively stable modes of feeling and reacting.

If the trainee already has acquired prior knowledge, acquisition generally comprises assimilation and accommodation (Illeris, 2007; Sfard, 1998). Assimilation refers to connecting new things to existing knowledge, therewith changing earlier-established mental patterns. Accommodation is at stake when new knowledge is difficult to relate to any existing mental scheme. Then existing schemes must be broken down or transformed through reflection and critical thinking, so that trainees can link the new knowledge to what they already know. The stored outcomes of assimilation and

accommodation subsequently can be retrieved by new impulses, adapted through learning and restored again (Illeris, 2007, 2009; Sford, 1998).

3.3 Guidance

Workplace guidance refers to any form of developmental assistance to help trainees improve themselves (Higgins and Kram, 2001). It is directed to helping trainees to socialize (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007; Griffin *et al.*, 2000; Gruman *et al.*, 2006) and to gain vocational competences (Billett, 2004).

Helping trainees to socialize is associated with fulfilling their “need to belong” and is typically seen as the primary function of providing guidance (Allen and Eby, 2007). If guidance results in a sense of belongingness of trainees, then situational satisfaction, attachment to the workplace, positive learning effects and positive evaluations of mentor-trainee relationships can be expected (Eby *et al.*, 2008; Rawaswami and Dreher, 2007; Van Merriënboer and Kirschner, 2013).

Helping trainees to gain vocational competences encompasses providing opportunities to participate in work processes, providing access to knowledge that otherwise remain inaccessible, helping them to execute job tasks correctly and helping them to acquire relevant knowledge (Billett, 2002; Illeris, 2007; Van Merriënboer and Kirschner, 2013). In initial learning phases, guidance will most likely focus on role modelling as well as supporting participation and acquisition, to positively influence motivation and help trainees absorb attitudes, values and behaviours useful for learning (Ambrosetti and Dekkers, 2010; Rawaswami and Dreher, 2007). When trainees function more independently, guidance may shift to facilitating learning or mere collaboration, whether or not combined with assessments of performance (Ambrosetti and Dekkers, 2010). Guidance, thus, should be proportional, and fading out support as learners gain more experience is inherent to it (Van Merriënboer and Kirschner, 2013).

3.4 Social interaction

When trainees and employees work together, the mere proximity of these colleagues provides opportunities for social interactions. These social interactions may attribute to the learning of trainees by addressing and changing their ability to participate and to socialize, and to help them develop competences by involving them in actions, discussions, multidisciplinary problem-solving and reflections (Fuller and Unwin, 2004; Wenger, 1998).

How trainees and employees interact, however, is influenced by their personal agency. This can be characterized as the mechanism through which they purposefully “exert influence, make choices, and take stances in ways that affect their work and/or their professional identities” (Eteläpelto *et al.*, 2013, p. 62). How they exert their personal agency is intertwined with their respective commitments, ideals, motivations, interests and goals. In exerting agency, they use their prior experiences, knowledge and competences as their individual resources, while the practice of agency also is constrained and resourced by the circumstances they are in (Eteläpelto *et al.*, 2013). Agency, therefore, is seen as “an important negotiating force” (Billett, 2004, p. 117), shaping and influencing the interaction between trainees and employees. Their interaction, conversely, is believed to influence subsequent choices and future investments in guidance and learning (Billett, 2002; Billett *et al.*, 2008; Smith, 2008).

In sum, this section presented WPL as an integrated process of participation, acquisition, guidance and social interaction. Participation, acquisition and guidance are found to be intrapersonal and interpersonal processes targeted at socialization and competence development. When trainees and employees interact, participation, acquisition and guidance merge. Therefore, social interaction, that is the practiced relationship between mentors/employees and trainees guided by their respective personal agency, has a central position in WPL.

4. Constituent aspects of workplace guidance

This section elaborates on what employees can do to give guidance the planned, organized and targeted form needed to realize meaningful learning outcomes (Stupans and Owen, 2009). Psychosocial support, structure-providing interventions and didactical interventions are presented as indispensable components of guidance. Psychosocial support as well as structure-providing interventions aim at helping trainees develop their sense of belongingness. Of these, psychosocial support is a well-known person-oriented mentoring strategy (Hansford *et al.*, 2002; Ragins and Kram, 2007; Wanberg *et al.*, 2006), while structure-providing interventions refer to organizational tactics to help trainees socialize (Griffin *et al.*, 2000; Gruman *et al.*, 2006; Saks *et al.*, 2007). How to help trainees acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes, however, is neither a central topic in research on mentoring nor in research on socialization. Therefore, didactical interventions targeted at helping trainees with their personal learning are added as a separate category.

4.1 Providing psychosocial support

In VET, psychosocial support usually starts with assigning trainees to mentors who ideally are willing to share their workplace and knowledge, who are open for the needs of trainees and who are interested in helping them execute tasks (Allen, 2003; Finkelstein and Poteet, 2007). Given a good match between mentors and trainees (Kroeze, 2014), assigned mentors contribute to trustful relationships in which trainees perceive personal contacts as marked by affective concern (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007; Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Hezlett, 2005; Rawaswami and Dreher, 2007). However, as much guidance is provided by helpful colleagues (Eraut, 2007; Filliettaz, 2011; Higgins *et al.*, 2007; Kroeze, 2014; Wanberg *et al.*, 2006), not only mentors but also other employees should invest in such relations with trainees.

Building relations meant to help trainees develop should begin with efforts to get a good picture of the readiness of trainees, because their learning is influenced by their previous education, their willingness and enthusiasm to gain new knowledge and skills and the competences they bring to the training firm (Billett *et al.*, 2008; Poortman, 2007; Schön, 1987).

In addition, mentors/employees can help trainees by serving as models of effective values, attitudes and work behaviours. They also should engage in personal contacts, offering trainees acceptance and confirmation, counselling and collegiality. In their personal contacts, they may discuss goals and expectations, or help trainees explore personal concerns that undermine self-worth or interfere with productive behaviours (Hansford *et al.*, 2002; Ragins and Kram, 2007; Wanberg *et al.*, 2006). Subsequently, they should attend to factors that enhance or hinder learning, create a sphere of mutual support, make room for making mistakes and shield trainees from miss-learning,

non-learning or damaging experiences (Eraut, 2007; Illeris, 2007), therewith creating learning situations safe enough for trainees to let go of already established knowledge and to make room for learning new things.

In trustful relationships, trainees may experience sufficient organizational commitment, and feel confident about themselves and the support they can expect from their colleagues (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007; Hezlett, 2005; Rawaswami and Dreher, 2007). This may positively influence feelings of acceptance and competence, enhance self-efficacy in pursuing goals and result in satisfaction with their mentors/colleagues and their work (Allen and Eby, 2007; D'Abate and Eddy, 2008; Higgins and Kram, 2001; Rawaswami and Dreher, 2007; Wanberg *et al.*, 2006).

4.2 Structure-providing interventions

Mentors/employees can help trainees socialize and seek out interpersonal contact by formalizing and structuring their introduction and initial participation (Chao, 2007; Griffin *et al.*, 2000; Gruman *et al.*, 2006; Saks *et al.*, 2007). Structure-providing interventions may reduce feelings of anxiety; stimulate trainees to engage in proactive behaviours such as information-seeking, feedback-seeking, building relationships and socialize; and help them fit into the organization (Griffin *et al.*, 2000; Gruman *et al.*, 2006; Saks *et al.*, 2007). They preferably encompass: careful matching of trainees, training firms and mentors, providing introductions, organizing WPL as a joint activity and organizing assessments.

4.2.1 Careful matching of trainees, training firms and mentors. Learning benefits from good matches between trainees, training firms and mentors: the experience of getting along personally and professionally with each other (Kroeze, 2014). To realize such matches, the perceived attractiveness of a training firm, mentor-trainee similarity and active participation in match-making seem to be decisive factors.

To realize good person–organization fits, it is decisive that trainees find training firms attractive (Darnold, 2008). This may be the case when trainees see opportunities to fulfill their learning needs, and when the cultural values of the training firm, like their willingness to create opportunities to self-direct learning, are perceived as similar to their own. Therefore, it is functional to inform them about what they can learn from the work to be done, and the norms and values of the training firm. To help trainees construct an adequate impression of the attractiveness of a training firm, guidance is needed to help them interpret this information.

To realize good mentor-trainee fits, perceiving a workplace mentor as similar or having similar values, expectations, developmental needs and problem-solving approaches is important. These aspects contribute to the role-modelling trainees may receive and the degree of satisfaction with their mentors (Blake-Beard *et al.*, 2007; D'Abate and Eddy, 2008; Wanberg *et al.*, 2006).

Active participation of training firms and prospective trainees in match-making, for instance through meet-and-greet sessions or familiarization interviews, may foster commitment to their future relationship. It may result in greater access to each other and more willingness to spend time together or to solve conflicts (Blake-Beard *et al.*, 2007; Finkelstein and Poteet, 2007).

Good matches result in more mutual contacts, more small talks and higher levels of interpersonal comfort (D'Abate and Eddy, 2008; Kroeze, 2014; Wanberg *et al.*, 2006). It also was found that the better the mentor-trainee match is, the better the level of positive

outcomes of the relationship is, such as levels of well-being, self-esteem and knowledge acquisition. Mismatches, however, may result in uncomfortable interactions, minimal engagement and disappointment (Eby, 2007; Kroeze, 2014).

4.2.2 Providing introductions. Showing trainees how they might fit into the organization and organizing structured introductions at the outset of practical periods seem useful because there is evidence that they can help reduce the initial uncertainty of trainees and stimulate socialization (Saks *et al.*, 2007). Klein and Weaver (2000), for instance, found that a three-hour introduction providing possibilities to gain information about the goals and values, traditions and organization of the training firm helped newcomers to form relationships and to be accepted more quickly. A possible explanation is that the provided introduction stimulated the newcomers to engage in proactive behaviours (Griffin *et al.*, 2000; Gruman *et al.*, 2006).

4.2.3 Organizing WPL as a joint activity. Explicitly putting trainees and experienced employees together in joint activities may provide trainees opportunities to observe and participate in activities significant for both their learning and the training firm, or provide them appropriate levels of developmental assistance (Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Billett, 2002; Saks *et al.*, 2007). Such inviting conditions trigger trainees to feel safe enough to show proactive behaviours which, subsequently, may arouse the desire of colleagues to help them (Eraut, 2007; Higgins *et al.*, 2007). This may lead to relationships in which trainees are encouraged to deal with challenging tasks, and in which feedback and support-giving become common (Fuller and Unwin, 2004; Gruman *et al.*, 2006; Higgins *et al.*, 2007; Rawaswami and Dreher, 2007).

4.2.4 Organizing assessments. During practical periods, trainees must meet relevant standards to reach vocational qualifications. Therefore, formative assessments are needed to periodically compare the actual levels of performance of trainees with these standards (Fastré, 2011; Sadler, 1989). Formative assessments highlight the readiness to progress to tasks with more responsibilities, and can thus be used to direct trainees to subsequent activities (Billett, 2002; Sadler, 1989). Self-assessments can be part of it, although it remains necessary to guide trainees in coupling their actual performance to these standards because they most likely lack the knowledge and experience for performing a complex skill such as self-assessment without help (Fastré, 2011; Kostons, 2010).

Summative assessments also are used to measure competence development. However, as the role of trainees in these assessments is rather passive and evaluations do not affect learning directly because the learning phase at stake has come to an end (Sadler, 1989), summative assessments are reckoned not to be part of workplace guidance.

4.3 Didactical interventions

Although psychosocial support and structure-providing interventions can be seen as didactical interventions, this article reserves the label “didactical interventions” for the more or less unilateral actions to purposefully assist trainees to reach educational goals. The presented didactical interventions are: setting and realizing challenging, yet feasible, goals; selecting and sequencing tasks; and providing task-enabling support. These interventions reflect that “goals and feedback on goal pursuit are the core of effective coaching practices that, in turn, are the keys of effective performance management” (Latham and Arshoff, 2013 p. 338).

4.3.1 Setting challenging, yet feasible, goals. Generally, goals function as sources of motivation, direct attention towards goal-relevant activities and cue individuals to use available knowledge and strategies in attaining them (Locke and Latham, 2013). Therefore, helping trainees to set challenging, yet feasible, goals is an essential didactical intervention. As trainees have to deal with their own wishes, as well as with goals provided by schools and training firms, setting goals starts with helping them specify and prioritize their goals (Billett, 2002; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Illeris, 2011). In setting goals, it is important to first set learning goals, which draw the attention to discovering or mastering appropriate strategies, processes and procedures to perform the task at hand. Subsequently, challenging performance goals must be added to encourage trainees to use available knowledge and skills to attain the expected task outcomes (Seijts *et al.*, 2013).

4.3.2 Selecting and sequencing tasks. To motivate trainees, and to let them quickly acquire a complete impression of real-life tasks, they are best confronted with whole tasks or simplified versions of whole tasks. These tasks reflect goals to be achieved or instructions to be performed (Gill and Hicks, 2006). They ideally relate to what trainees want to learn, invite them to use different skills and leave some room to decide on methods and/or activities to solve related problems (Barrack and Mount, 2013; Bartram and Roe, 2008; Eraut, 2007; Rawaswami and Dreher, 2007; Van Merriënboer and Kirschner, 2013). How trainees will respond to these tasks, however, depends on the interaction of the task characteristics and their personal agendas to achieve higher-order goals, like realizing personal growth or developing vocational competence (Barrack and Mount, 2013).

Tasks can best be sequenced from simple, yet whole, tasks to increasingly more complex whole tasks (Van Merriënboer and Kirschner, 2013). If trainees meet the required standards of performance on a certain task, then they may proceed to tasks with less guidance or to more difficult tasks. If they do not yet meet these standards, mentors should provide either a comparable task with the same level of task-enabling support or one with a “higher level of *specific* support and/or guidance” (Van Merriënboer and Kirschner, 2013, p. 25, *Italics in original*).

The workplace curriculum needs to encompass simple tasks to reinforce what trainees already know and to smoothen their performance (Billett, 2002). Normally, these tasks are highly structured, familiar and of a routine nature, and thus experienced by the trainee as being not too complex. Simple tasks generally prevent cognitive overload, because little ability is sufficient to meet the task requirements (Gill and Hicks, 2006).

The workplace curriculum also must encompass tasks somewhat above the ability of trainees to complete them alone through independent problem-solving, but within their ability to complete them under guidance (Illeris, 2007). Such new, non-routine tasks often are less or ill-structured, and demand more of the cognitive system to perform them as required (Gill and Hicks, 2006). Performing them may cause some stress, because trainees will experience that their actual knowledge, skills and attitudes are yet inadequate to solve related problems properly (Gill and Hicks, 2006; MacGowan *et al.*, 2007).

4.3.3 Providing task-enabling support. In initial learning phases, mentors/employees may serve as “modeling examples”, providing task-enabling support by showing and telling (Schön, 1987). They then demonstrate tasks and their underlying strategies,

procedures and rules. They also may provide illustrative examples to make it easier for trainees to relate abstract information to familiar examples, as well as explicate how they think and reason to give them a deeper understanding of how to solve problems (Van Merriënboer and Kirschner, 2013).

On task-level, it is important to provide trainees observable performance-based standards and to draw their attention to relevant standards for the tasks at hand (Fastré, 2011). During task performance, and just in time, precisely when trainees need it, “procedural how-to information” and corrective feedback are needed to facilitate learning the routine aspects of tasks (Van Merriënboer and Kirschner, 2013). Corrective feedback at task-level is best presented immediately after performing an incorrect step or applying an incorrect rule. It must inform trainees why there was an error, preferably combined with a hint, but without saying what the correct action is (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Van Merriënboer and Kirschner, 2013).

Before trainees start working on more challenging tasks, teaching them to appropriately apply problem-solving strategies is relevant to help them systematically solve problems. Additional “supportive information” like knowledge about the task domain that can be reviewed while working on these tasks may further facilitate task performance (Eraut, 2007; Van Merriënboer and Kirschner, 2013). After task completion, cognitive feedback on the way trainees reason, make decisions or solve problems is functional. It can be embedded in reflective dialogues in which action, experience and reflection more or less flow together (Schön, 1987).

Regularly monitoring involvement and progress is required to provide feed-up about the goals to be achieved, feedback about how trainees are doing and feed-forward about where to go next. To be effective, these types of feedback need to be clear, purposeful and attuned to the prior knowledge of trainees, as well as prompt active information processing (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). Effective feedback can help trainees interpret and react to discrepancies between their goals and their actual performance, and to construct their knowledge so that future performance can be improved (Ashford and De Stobbeleir, 2013; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Van Merriënboer and Kirschner, 2013).

5. Results

To construct an integrated model of workplace guidance, this article explored basic processes of WPL. Participation, acquisition, guidance and social interaction came forward as basic processes of WPL. Workplace guidance was defined as developmental support to help trainees socialize and gain vocational competences. Psychosocial support, structure-providing interventions and didactical interventions were identified as indispensable components of workplace guidance. Socialization and vocational competences were defined as important outcome categories. Socialization may result in outcomes like sense of belongingness, motivation to function as an employee and attachment to the workplace. Vocational competences more specifically refer to the obtained knowledge, skills, attitudes and values underpinning performance. In Figure 1, these aspects are linked together.

In VET, WPL is related to school-based vocational training, and is influenced by the characteristics of training firms. Consistent with the social perspective on WPL, social interaction has a central position. How and how intense mentors and trainees invest in interaction, and, thus, in merging participation, acquisition and guidance, is influenced by their initial preferences and choices, while their interaction, in turn, influences

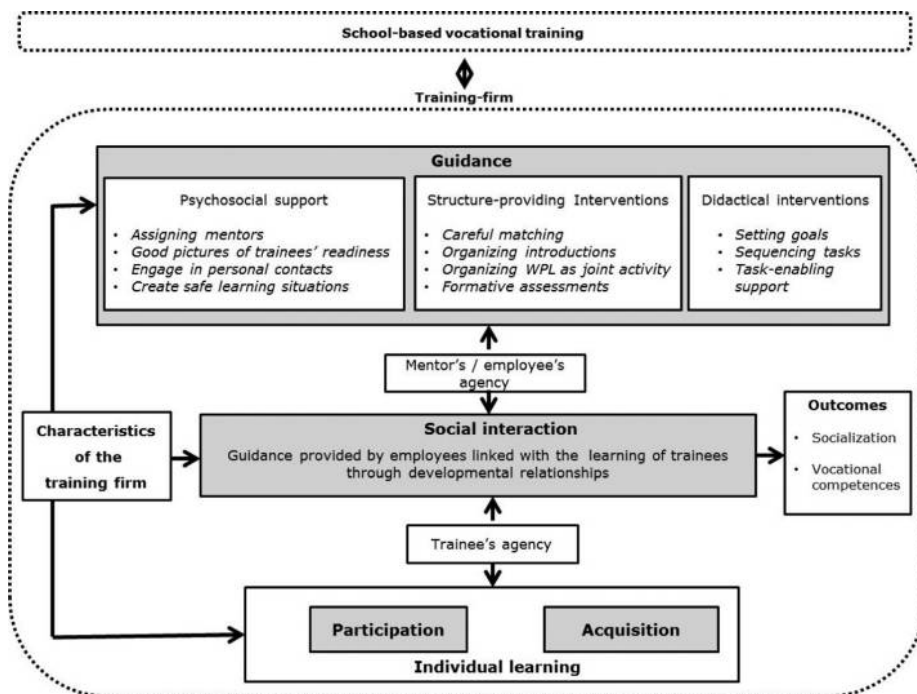


Figure 1.
Basic processes in
WPL and constituent
aspects of workplace
guidance in VET

subsequent choices and actions. The actual mentor-trainee interaction mirrors the quality of their relationship. Guidance and learning are taking place within and as a consequence of this relationship.

6. Discussion

Although workplace guidance is widely acknowledged as being a basic process in WPL, surprisingly, integrated models about guidance in practical placements in secondary VET are rare. To fill this gap, this article has proposed an integrated model of workplace guidance in VET. The main functions of the model are to enhance awareness about what constitutes good guidance, as well as pointing out agency and social interaction as important, probably even decisive, conditions for making guidance successful.

Regarding VET, we had situations in mind in which substantial parts of the school-based vocational training take place during practical placements in training firms. This starting point has influenced the operationalization of workplace guidance. Labels as “create safe learning situations”, “formative assessments” or “good pictures of the readiness of trainees” usually are related to formal education. Although this may limit using the model outside VET contexts, the underlying mechanisms, however, are believed to be applicable in other real-time working situations too.

The model mirrors central aspects of Billett's (2002) workplace pedagogy. In both concepts, guidance and learning merge in social interactions. Both models also emphasize the influence of personal agency on how employees provide guidance, on how trainees invest in participation and acquisition and on how both parties invest in

social interaction. A difference is that the guidance interventions are operationalized differently to provide schools and training firms practical information about how to guide properly and what can be expected when these interventions are used.

The model suggests that, to improve WPL, the quality of employee-trainee interaction must be a central point of attention in research. The quality of social interaction, however, depends on how personal agency is exerted. Therefore, research also must take agency, and how to influence agency, into account. To influence agency, [Eteläpelto et al. \(2013\)](#) suggest to give attention to intentions and commitments, the ability to act and the socio-structural influences participants have to cope with. Without paying extensive attention to agency, transferring information about interventions to influence interaction and learning may result in little use of such interventions, as the study of [Blokhuis \(2006\)](#) has shown.

Being aware of the role of personal agency, and having some understanding about how to influence trainees' agency by using guidance interventions, probably might help training firms to cope with motivational issues and to better direct learning. Insights in the role of agency might make schools more aware that they should prepare students properly for practical placements. They, for instance, may put effort in enhancing their ability to cope with training firms unknown by them or transferring learning-to-learn strategies to enhance the ability to cope with new tasks, as was suggested by [Poortman \(2007\)](#). In further research, the focus, thus, may shift from "what to do to guide properly" to "how to influence agency and/or interaction" to improve WPL.

Implicitly, the model supports the idea that guidance not only is provided by appointed mentors, but also by other colleagues. Therefore, we do agree with [Kroeze's \(2014\)](#) suggestion to also make colleagues responsible for providing guidance. However, simply making them responsible is believed to be not enough and embedding didactical interventions into participatory practices of training firms might be difficult, because mentors/employees "naturally" seem to be inclined to guide socialization, rather than to guide personal learning ([Kroeze, 2014](#); [Poortman, 2007](#)). In addition, time for training to increase the ability of trainees to competently conduct new tasks is often lacking ([Billett, 2000](#); [Blokhuis, 2006](#); [Riedl and Schelten, 2013](#)). To transform training firms into inviting learning environments, [Eraut \(2007\)](#), therefore, suggests to build cultures in which employees support each other in task performance and learning, and in which it is more common to share knowledge.

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