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A Case Study of the Creation of a Supervising Boundary Practice in a Work-integrated Language Learning Program



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Abstract

When migrating to a new country, there is often a need to learn a new language and find a job. In Sweden, and to meet this need, a type of work-integrated language learning program, called combination courses, with the idea that students learn the language and a vocation simultaneously, has been initiated. In this article, such a combination course, centering around the Swedish language and cleaning skills, and providing apprenticeship workplace placements for the students, is studied. Using boundary crossing as a lens to analyze ethnographic observational data, consisting of 65 hours of observations, this case study analyses the boundary practices created by one workplace supervisor. The results show that the supervisor establishes a boundary crossing practice that comprises around two hours of theoretical studies for the student each day he spends on the practice, and, over time, how this boundary practice becomes increasingly like schoolwork. This boundary practice provides the student with abundant language learning affordances. It emphasizes both oral and written communication, giving the student the opportunity to develop both during the placement. The experiences gained from this work-integrated language learning program provide valuable insights into the supervising practice involved when students are expected to learn both language and vocational skills simultaneously.

Keywords: L2 learning, work-integrated language learning, combination courses, workplace learning, boundary practice, affordances

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Introduction

In today's globalized world, as people move to new countries, they often need to learn new languages and find livelihood opportunities (Angouri et al., 2023). Work-integrated learning (WIL) is a pedagogic strategy aimed at integrating school-based learning experiences and encounters with work-life (Jackson, 2015; Patrick et al., 2008). Building on this, work-integrated language learning (WILL) is defined as "a program or other form of education that primarily targets the development of L2 skills, where classroom and workplace-based learning are intentionally combined, and where connections between settings are actively sought" (Febring & Henry, 2022, p. 19–20). Combination courses (Rexgren, 2022) are examples of WILL programs, since language training is combined with vocational education. In Sweden, those are offered to shorten the way for newly arrived adult migrants to join the workforce and participate in Swedish society (National Education Agency, 2022). The National Education Agency (2019) states that:

When SFI [Swedish for Immigrants] and vocational education are integrated language learning may occur naturally and partly be an effect of the vocational education. Knowledge about the vocation and knowledge about language learning goes hand in hand, and enhance each other. However, this presupposes a method, where the SFI- and the vocational teacher and to a certain extent the supervisor at the practice, consciously work in cooperation evolving as well language as vocation for the student from both course goals as well as the student's qualifications and experiences (p. 11; author's translation).

As evidenced above, the report emphasizes how not only the actions of teachers, but also of supervisors are important. Like Edwards (2006), who states that all contexts can be learning contexts, and that supervisors and managers are important in facilitating learning, Jackson (2015) similarly brings to our attention how it is important to depict supervisors' perspectives in WIL investigations. Likewise, Bouw et al (2021a) stress the importance of depicting the perspective of the representatives of professions. Additionally, in WIL studies (e.g. Bilsland & Nagy, 2015) it is acknowledged that cooperation between teachers and supervisors is important for students to achieve their learning goals. Trede (2012) calls the supervisors "workplace educators" (p. 165), thus enhancing the educational aspect of supervision. Furthermore, a study by Martin et al. (2019) examining supervisors who have previously been WIL students underscores the importance of both oral and written communication. Since supervisors need to cultivate a style of supervision and leadership, having themselves attended a WIL program as students can have been beneficial as it can have provided them with a better understanding of WIL learners' perspectives.

Considering the above and given that research on the actions of the supervisor in combination courses has not been given sufficient attention, this case study focuses on a workplace supervisor and opportunities for language learning activities in the workplace. This case, though not representative of the general findings in the dataset, provides valuable insights into understanding how second language learning (SLL) opportunities can be created during workplace supervision in vocational education. As Flyvbjerg (2006) puts it: "Atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied" (p. 229). This unique supervisor distinguished herself by offering the student numerous language learning opportunities during the practice. For this reason, I decided to follow this supervisor more closely and investigate her practice.

Several researchers have identified the need for more research on language learning in naturalistic settings (Firth, 2009; Lilja, 2014; Wagner, 2004). The importance of communicative skills is also

highlighted by Makhathini (2016). Learning the language is often metaphorically viewed as the key to entering the labor market, a perspective frequently endorsed by politicians (Söderlundh & Kahlin, 2022). However, in some cases, certain individuals act as language brokers, facilitating communication between their peers and colleagues who speak different languages. Consequently, access to the labor market does not automatically result in language learning. Moreover, previous research indicates that many workplaces offer limited opportunities for interaction (Sandwall, 2013; Strömmer, 2016a). So-called blue-collar workplaces often place less emphasis on language proficiency, focusing instead on fulfilling duties (Söderlundh & Kahlin, 2022). These are often labelled “language marginal” (p. 42) workplaces.

Hållsten (2020) argues that while combining language learning with workplace practice seems advantageous, significant efforts are needed in relation to supervision, language and communication in the workplace. Additionally, a study on second language nursing students reveals sparse language use in supervision. Often it focuses on basic directions and consists of contextual cues and body language. While this might facilitate understanding, it does not promote professional language acquisition (Lehtimaja et al., 2021). Moreover, the importance of investigating pedagogical practices such as mentoring and supervision to support second language learning in workplaces is emphasized.

Literature Review

In this section an overview of related research is given. This includes studies about language learning in the workplace, as well as studies of combination courses.

In Sweden, newly arrived migrants who need rudimentary language training are referred to SFI-courses. These are costless for the participants and comprise up to level B1 in CEFR (Lindberg & Sandwall, 2017). Communicative skills are emphasized in the course syllabus (Ahlgren & Rydell, 2020). Since 2001, courses have had a vocational focus (Carlson & Jacobsson, 2007). Following the completion of SFI, there are four basic courses in Swedish as a second language, followed by three upper secondary courses.

In a report on language learning in the workplaces of Nordic countries (Kirilova et al., 2023), findings show that work tasks at a workplace may be a valuable resource for language learning, if they comprise interaction. However, language learning does not occur in workplace contexts unless there are certain contributions, such as interventions from the language teacher, colleagues, and the workplace. Additionally, language learning, for example, is likely to happen only if the student has access to interaction with colleagues, customers, or others in the workplace, as opportunities for language acquisition can be severely restricted during solitary work.

Interestingly, informants in McLaughlin’s (2020) study report the development of language skills in a blue-collar context through colleague interaction. Nonetheless, when moving to a new country and beginning work, opportunities for language learning are often limited (Piller & Lising, 2014; Roberts, 2010). Despite this, migrants need to navigate linguistically and culturally in workplaces in the new country (Roberts, 2010), and language acquisition is important across all professional fields. Also, today, the language demands of workplaces are multifaceted (Sandwall, 2010). An example is international academics in Denmark, for whom English suffices for most academic duties (Kirilova & Lønsmann, 2020). However, proficiency in Danish is necessary for career advancement. Additionally, there is a shortage of research on informal language learning in the workplace (Yates, 2017).

Strömmer (2016a) has shown that there may be possibilities for language learning in the workplace even though direct interaction is not present, such as in lonely cleaning work. This can be, for example, by listening to carefully chosen radio programs and learning polite language usage from reading environmental signs. Moreover, material scaffolding is a prerequisite for the success of second language learners (in the early stage) in managing work in a new country (Strömmer, 2016b). Strömmer (2017) also found that vocational development is important for employees' willingness "to invest in work-related language skills" (p. 155). Moreover, a study by Duff et al. (2000) examined a care aide training program for migrant workers that combined English language studies with workplace practice. The findings revealed that the language lessons did not provide the students with the diversified English language competence needed for communication with the senior citizens they met in the practice.

Sandwall (2013) studied SFI education combined with practice elements and measured the time the participants spent interacting during their workplace practices. According to the findings, students typically engaged in interaction between 7 and 19 minutes daily (inclusive of mediation through artefacts and body language), with participants themselves only talking between a half and two minutes a day. The reasons for this are that even though the purpose of the practice was to gain proficiency in the language, getting the work done was prioritized, and the tasks offered to the participants did not demand explanations. Additionally, they were not engaged in interaction during breaks.

In Sweden, combination courses, where students study the language as well as a vocational education in a WILL program, are offered by an estimated 61–86 % of municipalities (National Education Agency, 2022). The combination courses aim to expedite newly arrived adult migrants' entry into the workforce by enabling them to learn the language while undertaking an upper secondary vocational education (National Education Agency, 2023). There are state subsidies for arranging combination courses and increasing numbers of students attend. However, combination courses vary widely due to a lack of established criteria (Febring, forthcoming). The most common combination courses are in health care, childcare, and hospitality (National Education Agency, 2023).

In a study of a combination course in construction (Bigestans et al., 2018) the language teachers took photos and made video films while visiting the building lessons. These films were used to visualize the close connection between the students' development of vocational knowledge, and appropriate language skills. In another study (Walldén, 2023), which involved collaboration between the researcher and the SFI teacher, the aim was to offer language learning opportunities by making use of elements from a workplace practicum. However, in this lonesome blue-collar work, there were few language-learning opportunities. For students doing practicum in nursing, education, and health care, more language learning opportunities appeared. The assignments consisted of, for example, word discovery at the practice and subsequent presentation in class (Walldén, 2024). However, as the students talked about these words, they referred not only to their practice but also to more general instances in life.

Study and Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the language learning opportunities of a supervising practice in a WILL program and, in this way, to add to the body of knowledge on WILL programs. The research questions are:

- (1) What boundary crossing efforts are undertaken to facilitate the simultaneous development of language skills and vocational knowledge?
- (2) How can a boundary practice that holds affordances for language learning be established by supervisors?

Theoretical Framework

In this section, a boundary crossing perspective (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011a) and affordance theory (Gibson, 1979, 2014) are presented. Together, they provide a theoretical lens through which the supervising practice in combination courses can be explored.

Boundary Crossing

Boundary crossing is defined by Bakker and Akkerman (2014) as “the efforts by individuals or groups at boundaries to establish or restore continuity in action or interaction across practices” (p. 225). As highlighted by Cornelius and Stevenson (2019), Engeström et al. (1995) emphasize the need for “negotiating and combining ingredients from different contexts to achieve hybrid situations” (p. 319). Akkerman and Bakker (2012) studied boundary crossing in a vocational context to chart students’ transitions from school to workplace. When learning takes place in different contexts, such as the workplace and school, physical, social, and cultural boundaries need to be crossed. Often, this can create discontinuities (Bouw et al., 2021b). However, in processes of hybridization, components of the different contexts can be combined (Ritzen et al., 2017) and can result in a new and hybrid practice. The process of hybridization, mixing elements from different domains, is seen by Zitter et al. (2016) as decisive for a favorable outcome of vocational education and training programs. Moreover, Arts and Bronkhurts (2020) have shown that “brokers [also known as boundary crossers], boundary objects, hybrid practices, boundary interactions, degrees of freedom, degrees of clarity, and supervision” (p. 215) can support boundary crossing.

Akkerman and Bakker (2011b) discuss four types of boundary crossing, namely (1) boundary crosser, (2) boundary object, (3) boundary interaction and (4) boundary practice:

- (1) A boundary crosser is a person who is a member of more than one domain, or who moves between domains, and thereby, parts can be transmitted from one domain into another (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011b).
- (2) A boundary object is an artefact that bridges different boundary practices (Bakker & Akkerman, 2019; Star, 1989). Boundary objects also facilitate cooperation between groups without consensus (Star, 2010).
- (3) Boundary interactions are cooperation across the boundary with people from different domains (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011b).
- (4) Boundary practices are practices in between domains that are more enduring types of cooperation which come into existence because of boundary interactions (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011b).

As discussed by Cornelius and Stevenson (2019), boundary crossing that aims at restoring continuity can be enabled by bridge-building boundary crossers and mediating boundary objects. Moreover, Akkerman and Bakker (2011a) establish that boundaries are present both within and between domains. However, boundary crossings may occur at the individual level, the group level, but also on institutional levels (Bakker & Akkerman, 2019). Febring and Henry (2022) discuss that at the individual level, boundary crossings mostly involve boundary crossers and boundary objects, while boundary crossings at the institutional level more often involve boundary interactions and boundary practices.

Akkerman and Bakker (2011a) state that “[a]ll learning involves boundaries” (p. 132) and within the sociocultural framework (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011a; Engeström et al., 1995; Wenger, 1998) boundary crossings are considered to have potential for learning. Boundary crossings are not about

reaching conformity by obliteration of the boundary, but rather about attaining continuity despite sociocultural differences (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011a). It is the sociocultural differences that carry learning potential (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011a). Additionally, Billett (2014) also recognizes that “accounts of boundaries, boundary objects and boundary crossing emphasise learning processes negotiated across two physical and social settings and individuals’ placements within and on boundaries of such settings” (p. 6).

Affordance Theory

To make potentialities for learning visible, an ecological perspective (Gibson, 1979, 2014), with the notion of affordances, is used. The work of Gibson (1979, 2014) clarifies that animals navigate their environment by perception and behavior, and they need to make distinctions between elements in their environments, for example between allies and enemies. By using perception and action, animals discover that there are possibilities in the environment, which they may utilize, and these possibilities are specified as *affordances*.

The ecological perspective was adapted by van Lier (2000) to be used in studies of language learning. The environment surrounding the learner contains potential meaning, which is steadily attainable meanwhile the learner acts and engages with the environment. The learner also makes use of semiotics, which are “the opportunities for meaningful action that the situation affords” (van Lier, 2000, p. 252) to create mutual understanding with communication partners. Being a language learner thereby involves actively taking part in a mutual, interpretive process.

Thereby, an affordance is something in the environment that is discovered by the person who may utilize it to facilitate learning (van Lier, 2000). However, the affordance needs to be discovered to lead to learning opportunities, since an undiscovered affordance does not entail any learning opportunities. The usage of affordances is dependent on the learners’ prerequisites and perspectives (Pedersen, 2022). This means that the same affordance may be used differently by different individuals. This is because affordances exist in relation to the person and his/her experiences, values, knowledge, and ability to perceive (Sandwall, 2013). Moreover, affordances may also restrain learning (Henry, 2016; van Lier, 2000). Furthermore, there are potential learning affordances concerning the workplace’s linguistic, relational, and physical dimensions (Kirilova et al., 2023).

In sum, the theoretical lens of boundary crossing can, together with the affordance framework, provide insight into a supervising practice, where the supervisor crosses boundaries to create affordances for learning. In the current study, the boundary crossing framework was used as a lens through which data was analyzed. Affordance theory was used to explain how these boundary crossings contain potentialities for language learning.

Materials and Methods

The study is part of a larger data production. Students in a combination course were observed during language lessons (25 hours), vocational lessons (51 hours), digitalization lessons (17 hours), workplace practice (140 hours) and meetings between teachers and supervisors (8 hours), making up a total of 241 hours. The fieldwork was executed during fifteen weeks in the autumn of 2022. Data production consisted of fieldnotes, photographs, and document collection. A small municipality in western Sweden provided the combination course. It was a cooperation between the political board responsible for municipal cleaning and the Education Department, marking the municipality’s first combination course. The workplace practice depicted in this case study was observed for 65 hours.

The Combination Course

The studied combination course targeted cleaning services and was given as an apprenticeship. This meant students generally spent Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays at the workplace practice, accompanying a professional cleaner and participating in cleaning tasks at public schools, libraries, and city halls. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, the students had lessons in school. They studied Swedish as a second language, with a focus on reading, writing, listening and speaking. Many of the assignments were linked to vocational education. For example, the students were asked to keep a diary of days spent at the practice, they read texts about cleaning equipment and completed grammar exercises on cleaning terminology. During digitalization lessons, the students were taught basic computer skills, such as saving files and accessing the local intranet. In the vocational courses *Cleaning services* and *Service and interaction*, the students learned the names of cleaning equipment, when to use it, how to handle cleaning chemicals, and how to operate cleaning machines and other equipment. In total, ten students were enrolled in the combination course.

The Participants and the Site

I observed six supervisors and their students during the workplace practice. Generally, they focused on building relationships with students through discussions during breaks (c.f. Bilslund & Nagy, 2015). However, as noted in the introduction, in this study focus is on one of the supervisors, who provided the student with multiple learning opportunities. Her self-chosen pseudonym is Teresa. She had worked as a cleaner for 14 years. Swedish is her second language (L2), and she had been in Sweden for 17 years when the study was carried out. She was in the 50- and 54-year-old age-span at the time. The student, who chose Heidar as a pseudonym, speaks Dari as his first language (L1). He had not gone to school before coming to Sweden. He studied SSL basic course 1. He was in the 25- and 29-year-old age-span and had been in Sweden for 6 years at the time of the study. He enrolled in the program to obtain vocational education, as this was required for a permanent residence permit.

The practice took place at the Valley school, a primary school located in a small town in western Sweden, where there was a need for cleaners due to imminent retirements. While there was plenty of interaction during breaks, I noticed throughout my observations, that as they cleaned, there was not much talk. Some examples from my fieldnotes (23 September 2022) are: *“Then he wet mops the floor silently”*; *“Heidar is silent”*; *“He mops silently”*; *“They silently clean a classroom each”*; *“They clean the same room but both are still silent”*. As I introduced myself to a colleague of theirs and told her about my research (20 October 2022), Teresa clarified: *“She checks on him as he is cleaning, but she won’t see much, because I don’t talk when I clean, so she can’t see anything. I don’t like to do that, but later on [after cleaning] we can talk”*. As was immediately apparent the environment was linguistically impoverished. The workplace tasks were mundane and Heidar easily learnt how to conduct them.

Data Production

The observations were documented by fieldnotes written as running text on a blank piece of paper. In instances where I reflected on something, this was also noted down. In these cases, the sentence started with “I think”, to distinguish between my observations and personal reflections. One example of the fieldnote technique is presented here (31 October 2022):

At seven thirty, we go to the crafts room. Teresa is surprised that the door is unlocked [...] Heidar is going to dust inside a storeroom and then Teresa comes and shows him (by taking the duster) how he is going to dust around and between the metal pipes

and wood pieces that are inside it. “Because we are not supposed to move furniture”, Teresa says. I think that there is much physical demonstration that complements the oral instructions.

Most of the time, it was unproblematic to have the time to write down everything that happened. However, when there was much activity, I wrote as much as possible and supplemented the fieldnotes later, in as close affinity as possible to the action (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Quite often there were times during the days when I could expand on the fieldnotes from memory, for example when the student and the supervisor cleaned a classroom in silence. At the end of the day, the fieldnotes were read through yet another time and were completed if I noticed anything was missing (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

In the article, data extracts from the fieldnotes are presented. To the fieldnotes, I have sometimes added clarifications and context descriptions. I have also translated them from Swedish into English. The translations were validated by a senior researcher who was a native English speaker and fluent in Swedish. The fieldnotes are written in italics.

Ethics

The study has been given approval by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (2019-03449; 2020-00512) and was carried out in accordance with current ethical principles (Swedish Research Council, 2017). Prior to the study, the participants were informed orally and in writing about the purpose of the study, that their participation would be treated confidentially, that they participated voluntarily, and that they could withdraw their consent at any time.

The students in the study, who did not have Swedish as their L1, were provided with a translated version of the research information, and an interpreter was hired twice for each language. On the first occasion with an interpreter, I told the students orally about the study and the students had a chance to ask questions. Then the translated research information was read aloud by the interpreter. Thereafter I asked the students to go home and think about the information they had received, until the next day. Subsequently, the interpreter was called on a phone, allowing the students to ask questions in their L1 before deciding to participate in the study, as suggested by Gujord et al. (2023).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out abductively and followed ethnographic principles (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). The coding of the ethnographic observation data was undertaken in several steps. At first, the data was read through several times and was coded openly to get a hunch of what was in the material (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). The data was treated as material to think with and was coded on the question *what is happening here?* This inductive process generated several codes that were sorted into more general subcategories, like “teacher cooperation” and “integrating school and practice”. In this way, the data was initially narrowed down.

As explained by Hammersley and Atkinson (2019), ethnographers search for patterns that are interesting or things that protrude in the data. Of particular interest were interactions coded as “integrating school and practice”, which I interpreted as an ambition to integrate the school and the work domain. Therefore, ethnographic abduction (Atkinson, 2015) followed, and the coding was done in NVivo 14. To further condense the data, a coding scheme based on boundary crossing theory was used (see Figure 1), regardless of whether the data was collected at school or during practice. Through this, I realized that

the four analytic categories suited my material and could help explain what was happening. Thus, these categories came from existing theories, as methodologically acknowledged by Hammersley and Atkinson (2019). However, data was not forced into these categories; rather, they were used to “make sense of the data” (p. 173). Examples of the coding scheme are provided in Figure 1.

In a final step, constant comparisons revealed that the same data segment was sometimes relevant to multiple categories (c.f. Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). For one workplace practice, the same

Code	Definition	Example
Boundary crosser	<i>A person</i> who is a member of more than one domain, or who moves between domains, and thereby, parts can be transmitted from one domain into another.	[<i>The supervisor</i> lectures the student about pH (21 October 2022)]: “Now, we don’t have the binder”, Teresa says and goes to get it. “Now, let’s talk about pH-value”, she says. She takes a sticky note and draws 0, 7, 14 on it, saying: “If I take pH 4, which group is it?” and then she inserts a 4. She fetches a bottle of dishwashing liquid and asks Heidar which pH-value it has. He reads at the back of the bottle and says: “10”. Teresa says that it is a group, and draws an arrow from 0 and 7, and one next to seven, and one from 7 to 14. “Which group does it belong to?” Teresa asks.
Boundary object	<i>Artefact</i> that bridges different boundary practices and facilitate cooperation between groups without consensus.	[The supervisor and the student use the <i>textbook</i> to discuss cleaning equipment (23 September 2022)]: They look at pictures of cleaning pads in the book and Teresa says: “The white ones we use to polish the floor”, pointing at the white cleaning pads. “Mostly, we use the brown ones, because they are a bit stronger. Otherwise, we use the orange”. “Red”, Heidar says. “Not blue”, Teresa says, “because it is about their strength”. [...] Teresa shows on the next page, how strong they are (there is a picture of the colors with some numbers to indicate the strength).
Boundary interaction	<i>Cooperation</i> across the boundary with people from different domains.	[The vocational teacher (Duska) makes a <i>workplace visit</i> to grade Heidar (21 November 2022)]: “We will discuss what has happened during these weeks, how the process has unfolded and whether the goals have been achieved”, Duska says. “Heidar, you are attending a combination course, you learn Swedish simultaneously with studying a cleaning course, but this course is an upper secondary course”, Duska says. Duska shows the table with the grading criteria from the course plan. “Here are the practical goals and here are the theoretical goals that we work with in school”, Duska says.
Boundary practice	Practices in between domains that are <i>more enduring types of cooperation</i> which come into existence because of boundary interactions.	[The student <i>asks the supervisor</i> about a difficult word from the schoolbook and <i>the supervisor explains</i> it (20 October 2022)]: Heidar has taken the book. “What is wear and tear?” Heidar says and shows Teresa a page. Teresa wants to read the whole sentence, so Heidar gives her the book. Teresa says that it is when something is worn out. Heidar asks me how it is pronounced, and I tell him “worn out”. Heidar uses Google translate to play the word in Swedish: “wear”.

Figure 1 Coding scheme and examples of the analytical categories.

data segment was recurrently coded into boundary crosser, boundary object, and boundary practice, prompting me to examine these segments more closely. When looking at the coexistence of these codes, a recurrent pattern protruded of a supervisor acting as a boundary crosser, bringing in elements from the school domain to the practice, using artefacts, functioning as boundary objects, to bridge between these domains, and thus creating a boundary practice with affordances for learning for the student. It was clear in the analysis that as time went by, this became more and more like school practices, and therefore the results are presented chronologically.

Results

In this section, the results are presented. When the student, Heidar, is at the practice, cleaning is faster than it would have been if Teresa had been the only cleaner. Therefore, there were long breaks during the work. The day usually started at 06.30 in the morning, when toilets, classrooms, hallways, and entrances were cleaned. Around 08.30 there was a half an hour breakfast break, when they went to the staffroom and had a cup of coffee and a sandwich and chatted with their colleagues. Thereafter, Teresa and Heidar usually stayed in the staffroom until eleven. Since they had often cleaned a lot in the morning, work usually allowed for a two-hour long break, during which a repeated pattern became visible. The time was devoted to Heidar's studies. Teresa encouraged Heidar to take advantage of this time to study. She actively helped him with his school assignments. I spent eight days observing at the Valley school and this pattern repeated daily. In this way, the supervisor acted as a boundary crosser, bringing in elements from the school domain, using mediating artefacts from both the school and workplace, that functioned as boundary objects, and creating a hybrid practice rich in affordances for learning for Heidar. Below, I provide examples of this repeated pattern from four of the observation days, as these examples are representative of the entire dataset.

In the first episode accounted for below, Teresa urged Heidar to study with schoolbooks and artefacts. The next day, she went on to include knowledge about workplace objects. About two weeks later, Heidar asked Teresa to help him correct a written text, and finally, Teresa constructed a written test for Heidar. As stated above, these events are accounted for in chronological order, and the dates are also present in the headings. This is done to facilitate the reader's understanding of how these learning activities become increasingly school-oriented as time passes by.

Day 2: Studying with Schoolbooks and Artefacts (20 October 2022)

On this Thursday morning, Heidar and Teresa cleaned toilets, classrooms and the crafts room. In the early morning, the pupils were at the before-school center, located in a side wing of the school building. Therefore, no pupils were present. It was very quiet and quite lonesome in the part of the building where they cleaned. When it was time for breakfast, Teresa went on a walk and Heidar and I went to the staffroom. Teresa urged Heidar to take out his books:

After about two hours of cleaning different classrooms, toilets and the crafts room, Teresa says: "Now, let's take a break. I'm going out with the trash and then I'm going on a walk, as usual. Now, take your books". Heidar and I go upstairs to the staffroom and Heidar takes out his school textbook and a notebook. He reads the first page of the chapter about equipment and machines. I am sitting next to him and I can hear him whisper the words to himself. Heidar takes his mobile phone and uses Google Translate to translate a word, and I ask about which word he translated. The word is regular. "Translate", Heidar says and points at a sentence in the textbook. [...] Heidar asks me what "regular" means, and I tell him that it is what is done every day.

In the extract above, Heidar was studying on his own while Teresa was taking a morning walk, but it was Teresa who urged him to take out the book. When she came back, she brought the cleaning cart and started asking Heidar about the things that were on the cart:

Teresa comes back from her walk. "Let's have some theory", she says as she wheels the cleaning cart in. "I want to have the click scraper because I want to know if you know the name of it", Teresa says. "The click scraper, is it this one?" Heidar says handing over the click scraper.

Here, Teresa was using professional language and asked Heidar to pick out the correct item ("I want to have the click scraper"). Used this way, the artefact provided a tangible illustration of the professional word "click scraper", thereby ensuring that both the supervisor and the student had a mutual understanding of the referenced item. Thus, it bridged different languages.

In the next example, Teresa asked for an artefact, and Heidar asked if it also had another name, thus initiating a dialogue:

"Mop yarn, please", Teresa says. Heidar repeats: "Mop yarn", and then Teresa and Heidar repeat the word "mop yarn" a few times each. "Do you call it something else?" Heidar asks. "Mop yarn, as you use when cleaning the floor", Teresa says. Then Heidar takes the mop yarn from the cleaning cart and says: "I thought only mop".

In this way, Teresa and Heidar also had conversations about what things were called, and Heidar asked for clarifications ("Do you call it something else?"). Teresa explained what the mop yarn was used for as Heidar asked for clarification.

For equipment where there were several types, or that consisted of several parts, Teresa asked about the professional name of each part, as well as the whole item:

"Broom set, please", Teresa says and Heidar points at the broom set on the cleaning cart. "Dustpan, please", Teresa says. They repeat "dustpan" a few times and then Heidar points at the dustpan. "Broom, please", Teresa says and Heidar points at the broom. [...] "Prolonged feather duster, please", Teresa says and Heidar points at it, and then Teresa asks him about the ordinary feather duster. Heidar shows her. "I want a stand, please", Teresa says. Heidar is standing next to the mop. "What is a stand? That is a handle", Teresa says. "The stand is below", Heidar says.

Here, Teresa used the cleaning cart items to interrogate Heidar on their names.

In the next extract, Heidar asked Teresa how to mix detergents, thus he acknowledged her expertise:

Thereafter Teresa asks Heidar about the water bottle, and Heidar shows her, and then he says: "I have a question, how do I use detergents in the water bottle?". "It depends on what detergent it is. We usually use all-purpose cleaning detergents, and the water bottle is one litre so just take a few drops in the bottle", Teresa says. "For the machine, we have 10 litres of water and 5 millilitres of detergent. You can count, what would that be for 1 litre?" Heidar says that it will be five drops. "It will be 0,5", Teresa says.

As Heidar asked his question (“*I have a question, how do I use detergents in the water bottle?*”), Teresa went on by instructing him about dissolving detergents and asked him to calculate the amount of detergent (“*You can count, what would that be for 1 litre?*”), thus bringing in mathematics. Simultaneously, Heidar was involved in browsing through the textbook, which gave access to further cleaning equipment:

As Heidar browses the book Teresa sees the mop yarn and points out that it is one of the things he needs to know the name of. [...] Heidar opens a page in the book and says: “These are cleaning pads”. Teresa says: “There are also different colours, but we only have one”. “You can have small as well, but we have this one”, Teresa says and points to a red cleaning pad. “We don’t have the other one. [...] “But the red one?” Heidar asks, and Teresa says that it is used for all floors with plastic carpets.

Here, the book was used for input to discuss what cleaning equipment was available and how and where it was used.

Day 3: Studying with Workplace Objects (21 October 2022)

The second round of data extracts comes from the next day. As usual, they started cleaning toilets and hallways. As Heidar was cleaning one of the entrances, two children came in and he greeted them. When it was time for breakfast, Teresa, Heidar and I went to the staffroom and had our coffees and teas. Later, Teresa reviewed Heidar’s knowledge of the cleaning maps, which showed where to clean, which day, and how often. In this way, not only school materials functioned as boundary objects but also theoretical artefacts of the workplace:

Around nine-thirty, Teresa says: “Show me on the map where we only clean during the summer and where we clean all year round. Heidar takes the cleaning map folder and looks at the first map. Then he browses through the maps and reads on them. “Do you find the correct map?” Teresa asks. Heidar does and shows it to her. “Which cleaning map shows 52 weeks of cleaning?” Teresa asks next. Heidar says that it is the purple one. “Which day am I supposed to do deep cleaning of the two oldest classes?” Teresa asks, and Heidar looks at the different maps before answering “Tuesday”. Teresa confirms that that is correct.

When Teresa was satisfied with Heidar interpreting the maps, she went on to ask him about diluting detergents, and asked him to make calculations on how to dilute them:

“I want you to count”, Teresa says. She takes out a sticky note and writes “5 litres water; 2 litres water”. Then she asks Heidar: “How much all-purpose detergent do you need to dilute in the water? Look at the dilution”. The bottle of all-purpose detergent is in front of him. Then Teresa takes a new sticky note and writes “5 millilitres 10 litres” and underneath 10 she writes “5”. She then says: “You’ve got 5 millilitres for 10 litres, how much will it be on five litres?” Heidar answers “0,1”, and then Teresa exclaims: “You have to learn how to dilute! How much detergent will you use if you have five litres of water?” Heidar repeats “0,1 millilitres”, and Teresa says: “Not correct!”

Here, Teresa dealt with mathematical calculations (“*I want you to count*”), which is part of the job as they dilute the detergents, but the way she asked Heidar to count, using a sticky note to set up a mathematical expression is something usually done in school.

Day 6: Correcting a Written Text (04 November 2022)

The next iteration of data extracts was generated around two weeks later. This Friday morning, they started to dust the entrance hallways and vacuumed the library and entrances. No pupils were present; they were at the before-school center in the side wing. Consequently, it was very quiet and rather lonely as they cleaned silently side by side.

After cleaning for around two hours, Teresa went off on her usual morning walk, and Heidar and I went up to the staffroom. Initially, we engaged in small talk. Upon Teresa's return, we had our breakfast tea and coffee, and a sandwich. Following the break was study time. After spending some time talking about the cleaning maps and the work environment, and noting that Heidar had a lot of school assignments, Heidar asked Teresa for assistance with a text that he had written at home:

"But I am writing a small, short diary", Heidar says, handing the notebook to Teresa. She reads through the text. "Is it for Madeleine [the SSL-teacher]?" I ask Heidar. "Diary, yes", he says. Teresa takes a pencil as she reads the text, but then a colleague comes, and they start talking about the work environment. [...] [When they are finished] Teresa takes the notebook once again and reads it anew. She suggests some changes by making marks with a pencil.

The notebook brought the school domain to the practice, and acting like a teacher, reading the assignment with a pen in hand, Teresa employed her knowledge of the Swedish language. A few minutes later, Teresa suggested improvements to the text:

Teresa reads the diary text. "At 06:30 I start every day", Heidar has written. "You are going to turn that", Teresa says. "Every day at 06:30 I start", she says. "Then you can write after that and we do the same thing", Teresa continues, writing simultaneously with talking. Heidar watches her. Teresa makes corrections and reads part of a sentence aloud: "Always we start", she reads, looking at me. "Sometimes you have to change, if you have always or starts", she says and appears to want my help. I help to make it "We always start". Teresa goes on reading: "At eight o'clock we work with theoretical things". "Things or tasks?" she says. Heidar repeats "Things or tasks". Then he shrugs his shoulders, saying that it doesn't matter, and then he says "Things".

In the extract above, Teresa was reading the text Heidar had written, suggesting improvements and, at least partly, explaining grammatical issues ("Sometimes you have to change, if you have always or starts"). The same situation might have taken place at school, in the SLL classroom, thus, Teresa was mimicking the role of an SLL teacher.

After a while, Heidar started to rewrite the text, and Teresa was there to support him with more language input. Therefore, while writing, Heidar asked Teresa a lot of questions about how to formulate himself, and she supported him:

It's ten o'clock and Heidar asks for a white paper. Teresa goes off to get a white paper from the copying machine. [...] Heidar asks how to write "the day" and Teresa points at the text: "The day always starts with cleaning", it says. "Starts, always?", Heidar asks. "Mm", Teresa says. "Always with cleaning or?" Heidar says. "Write the theoretical?", he goes on to say. "Both, it's theory (Teresa points at the textbook), practical is when you work", Teresa says. "Write that?" Heidar says, pointing to a word. "Yes", Teresa says.

In this way, Teresa gave Heidar support also for writing texts, giving him the support he might have gotten on an SSL lesson in school. When he misspelt something, Teresa corrected his mistake, concretely showing him how to shape the letters:

Heidar writes “all day”. “All days”, Teresa corrects him, and Heidar changes. Then he is going to write “the next”. He writes “nxt” [the Swedish word is “nästan”, and Heidar leaves out the letter ä]. Teresa shows him by drawing the letter ä on the table: “Write it like that, with two dots”, she says. Heidar takes out the striped paper where he has written “Diary” and starts writing the text once again. “Copying”, he says and starts writing.

In the above extract, Teresa concretely supported Heidar on how to shape letters, and this day, the text that Heidar had written at home and brought to the practice was rewritten twice, thus giving Heidar numerous opportunities to practice his writing skills. Teresa was there to support him in the manner a language teacher might have done during a school lesson.

Day 7: Constructing a Test (07 November 2022)

The subsequent set of data extracts was produced the next Monday. On this day, the early morning cleaning performed by Teresa and Heidar involved cleaning the hallways before the pupils arrived. Routinely, Teresa took a morning walk and Heidar and I entered the staffroom. Heidar and I chatted about the weekend, before having breakfast. As we were finishing our teas and coffees, Teresa urged Heidar to study, even though he did not seem to be as interested. Teresa thus emphasized the notion of the importance of studying:

“Where’s the book?” Teresa says. Heidar does not react at first. “Where’s the book, Heidar?”, Teresa repeats. “Go and get it!”, she urges him. Then Heidar goes to get the textbook, his notebook, and a plastic folder. He browses the notebook.

At the same time as Heidar was getting his schoolbooks, Teresa constructed a small test for him. This activity was normally not found in practice placements, but Teresa chose to bring school elements into the domain of the practice:

Teresa goes to get several white papers. She starts to write and looks at me, laughing. “Small test!” she says. Teresa writes “What is the name of the tools you need to have on the cart?” on the paper. Then she gives the paper to Heidar. “What’s that?” he says. “You are going to answer, write some points”, Teresa says. Heidar says: “Write?” “Yes, write, think a little”, Teresa says. Heidar takes the pen and looks at the paper, sitting like that looking at the paper for a while.

In the extract above, Heidar seemed to be a bit surprised at receiving a test, which is not normally found in a workplace practice. He did not seem to come up with anything to write, and therefore Teresa fetched the cleaning cart to support him:

Teresa says: “Shall I get the cleaning cart?” At first, Heidar is silent, then he says: “Write the name of things, yes”. Teresa says that she is going to get the cleaning cart and goes on to get it. Heidar has started to write “it”. Teresa crosses “it” out and says: “You don’t have to write it, just the name”. Heidar is silent for a while. “At first you are going to write equipment, and then the material that we need to work with” Teresa says. “To work with?” Heidar says. “Start to write them, then you’ll write what we

refill”, Teresa says. “My equipment”, Heidar says. “Shall I write my equipment or just the name?” he continues. “Just write the name”, Teresa says. [...] Heidar asks if he can write “broom set” and Teresa confirms this. [...] He writes it down, followed by “dusting”.

As seen in the extract above, the cleaning cart was used to concretize the cleaning equipment for Heidar. With the test, Teresa was once again replicating practices of the school domain in the practice domain. Through this, Heidar gained an opportunity to practice his writing skills at the practice.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the supervising practice in WILL programs. It provides insight into how, through functioning as a boundary crosser and by using boundary objects as mediating artefacts, a workplace supervisor establishes a boundary practice that provides affordances for learning. This supervisor, herself an L2 speaker, actively pursued time to work with the theoretical parts of the vocation, and she found this time in the breaks. When having a break, the student and the supervisor were in the staffroom. This can be conceptualized as a third space, where there is time and room for instruction and learning and no need for cleaning. A third space is a hybrid place where knowledge of different communities meets, undergoes reorganization and opens new learning opportunities (Gutiérrez et al., 1999). The cleaning artefacts are brought into this third space and used as memory aids or to illustrate and concretely show what the professional language denotes. The supervisor asked questions, held up artefacts, used learning material from school, helped with school assignments, and constructed a test. As a boundary practice, how this is done provides affordances for the student to learn general and professional language in both oral and written form.

As time passed, the boundary practice evolved. Breaks from work became increasingly like lessons in school. The supervisor urged the student to get his learning materials, provided him with grammatical feedback on texts, and construed tests for him. Over time, as the student became accustomed to this practice, he also sought clarification and assistance from the supervisor regarding his school assignments, thereby utilizing the affordances provided by this boundary practice. Throughout the eight days I spent observing at the Valley school, the scenario was similar, thus constituting a boundary practice, which is conceptualized as an *in-between practice* by Akkerman and Bakker (2011a). However, in their conceptualization, a boundary practice emerges from boundary interactions and involves cooperation. In this case, no boundary interactions were present, and this boundary practice was not a result of cooperation. Rather, it was enduring and involved what are traditionally regarded as school practices. This may indicate that boundary practices may come about in several ways. Additionally, in this study, the boundary practice was found on the individual level, even though in previous studies (Febring & Henry, 2022) boundary practices were mostly associated with the institutional level.

The boundary crossing efforts resulted in numerous instances of language practice. As there was not much talk during cleaning sessions, the instances of language practice, generated by this boundary practice, were very important. Since they did not talk when cleaning, the talk that was offered the student in the breaks was extremely important. Otherwise, the student would have had very few possibilities to interact during practice, like the findings in earlier studies (Lehtimaja et al., 2021; Sandwall, 2013; Strömmer, 2016a). In contrast, the supervisor and the student spent some two hours each day engaged in interaction. This took place during the breaks. It meant that the supervisor created possibilities to use the target language (Swedish) in a circumstance where naturally arising opportunities for communication were minimal.

Apart from practicing his oral skills, the student also had the chance to refine his writing abilities, as his supervisor assisted him with his written assignments and constructed a written test for him. It seems that practicing writing skills would be even more unusual during practice periods in WILL programs. However, in this supervisor's boundary practice, it was part of the efforts she made to bridge between school and practice domains.

Conclusion

This study has shed light on how a supervisor in a WILL program has created a boundary practice resulting in numerous instances of language practice. It demonstrates that every context has the potential to serve as a learning environment (Edwards, 2006), and portray a profession representative, as called for by Bouw et al (2021a), who is indeed a "workplace educator" (Trede, 2012, p. 165). The instances of language practice, generated by the boundary practice created by this supervisor, are very important, as there was not much talk during cleaning sessions. Contrary to previous research (Lehtimaja et al., 2021; Sandwall, 2013; Strömmer, 2016a), the supervisor and student interacted for around two hours a day.

It seems to be the case that in WILL programs, especially those targeting blue-collar work, often described as language marginal (Strömmer, 2016a; Söderlundh & Kahlin, 2022), something special is required by the persons involved in the education, as highlighted by the National Education Agency (2019). In this case, the supervisor created a boundary practice, comprising numerous instances of theoretical studies, every day the student was at the practice.

This boundary practice does not arise by itself. A precondition for establishing it is to set aside time each day for school-related work. The active engagement and commitment of the supervisor is also needed. Hence, supervisors, along with teachers, play a pivotal role in shaping the outcome of learning within WILL programs. The fact that this supervisor had herself migrated to Sweden and learned Swedish as a second language, and therefore was particularly attentive to the student's language needs, might have influenced her ideas about how to engage in the supervising practice (c.f. Martin et al., 2019). The constructed boundary practice exemplifies how work-integrated language learning can become part of a pedagogical strategy of integrating workplace experiences and school-based learning.

Limitations

This study has limitations since only one supervisor and one student are depicted. Moreover, including interviews might have shed light on the intent behind the shaping of this boundary practice. Furthermore, the specific context of this study may restrict the applicability of the findings.

Implications

By giving attention to this rather unusual example, people involved in arranging WILL programs can be inspired and translate the findings to their areas of expertise, as similar boundary practices can be built by supervisors in different workplace areas. Consequently, the insights from this study may be relevant in other contexts where L2 learners undertake a work placement. They may also be relevant in forms of education where vocational skills and language learning competencies are targeted, and where connections between classroom-based and workplace-based learning can arise. Finally, the insights may also be relevant for other researchers investigating WILL education in different contexts. Future research might focus on WILL programs targeting other professions, where the nature of the work does not allow for dedicated periods of language learning.

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