Guiding Intent Participation at an Art Crating Company

Sarah C. Radke, New York University, scr274@nyu.edu
Jasmine Y. Ma, New York University, j.ma@nyu.edu

Abstract: This paper presents the theoretical concept of *guiding intent participation*. Grounded in a sociocultural perspective of learning and analytically guided by methods of multimodal and interaction analysis, guiding intent participation is a distinct category of guided participation (Kirshner, 2008; Rogoff, 1995). Guiding intent participation takes as relevant both the coordinated efforts of oldtimers and relative newcomers to make contributions to ongoing work and learning, as well as the observational activities by the oldtimers that are precursors to guidance. The analytic implications of the concept in support of rethinking assessment to consider social context are discussed.

Introduction

This paper presents a secondary analysis of data from a larger study of an art crating company called CratEx that designs and build crates for the transport and storage of art objects. We look to guided participation (Rogoff, 1995) as a lens through which to analyze interactions between new employees (newcomers) and managers (oldtimers) during work activity and with a focus on how these interactions relate to newcomer learning. We recognize the work done by Kirshner (2008) in describing categories of guided participation as relevant when investigating newcomer-oldtimer interactions. In an effort to add to these works, the following question drives this case: What other kinds of guided participation are observable in this setting? We introduce the theoretical concept of *guiding intent participation* as a new and distinct category of guided participation.

Guiding intent participation is reminiscent of intent participation (Rogoff, et. al, 2003) in that keen observation with the expectation of participation in the future is still the participation structure of focus. However, it diverges from the original concept in that it focuses on the relative oldtimers and *their* observational activities rather than on those of the learner. Additionally, guiding intent participation is methodologically consequential as an analytical lens in reconsidering assessment during work activity because it illuminates moments of shift from inherent to discursive assessment (Jordan & Putz, 2004).

Theoretical framework

In this paper we take a sociocultural view, allowing us to take seriously the roles that participation in social interactions and culturally organized activities play in learning at CratEx. Furthermore, we draw on Rogoff's (1995) theory of guided participation, a developmental process at the interpersonal level of activity - the second of three planes of analysis between personal and community processes. This interpersonal plane is comprised of everyday activities engaged in and managed collaboratively by individuals within a particular setting. Rather than being an operational definition, guided participation offers a perspective on interpersonal interactions that focuses on, "mutual involvement of individuals and their social partners, communicating and coordinating their involvement as they participate in socioculturally structured collective activity" (p.146).

The term guided refers to direct and indirect structuring of participation possibilities through cultural, social, and interpersonal values. Moreover, by participation Rogoff is referring to both explicit involvements in an activity and observation of said activity. Central to the concept of guided participation is that more experienced members of a community support the participation of relative newcomers, through "a system of interpersonal engagements and arrangements that are involved in participation activities," (Rogoff, 1995, p.146). This may be done, for example, by encouraging involvement in some aspects of activity and restricting it for others. This is of primary concern in this paper because the interactions of focus are frequently asymmetric in terms of experience.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of learning as a process of legitimate peripheral participation is useful in understanding these types of asymmetric interactions. It brings into focus the intimate connection between learning and participation in a community of practice by focusing on the social situations in which activity occurs. Possible forms of participation to which newcomers have access mediate membership. In particular, the authors argue that learning is best supported when newcomers have full access to the practices of experts. This means having opportunities to complete low-risk tasks, but also to observe and participate in more complex activity with the support of more experienced participants. In doing so, newcomers begin to "gradually assemble a general idea of what constitutes the practice of the community," and how their activities fit within it (p.95).

Using guided participation and legitimate peripheral participation as his lens of analysis, Kirshner's (2008) study of youth activist groups distinguished between three categories of guided participation: facilitation,

apprenticeship, and joint work. Briefly stated, guidance through facilitation highlighted adults as having a neutral role that supported youth leadership and input. Here, the youth were given a say in regards to the content of meetings, focus of projects, and adults stepped in only "as needed." Guidance through apprenticeship consisted of adults being seen more as veteran activists who participated in youth-centered mutual endeavors. Lastly, guidance through joint work also had the collaborative characteristic similar to apprenticeship, but activities were not youth-centered. Here, categories of adult or youth did not drive the tasks participants were assigned. Rather, divisions defined by experience (regardless of age) were more salient. Kirshner's categories of guided participation are relevant because they offer examples of how the efforts of oldtimers and relative newcomers might be coordinated to make contributions to the work and learning occurring in a community.

Methods and data

Presented here are findings based on a secondary analysis of data originally collected as part of a study that investigated spatial reasoning practices. In the primary study, both researchers held observational roles and did not take part in any of the building activities. Methods of multimodal and interaction analysis (Goodwin, 2010; Jordan & Henderson, 1995) were used to examine instances of guided participation by CratEx employees during work activity. Data include ethnographic field notes, audio and video recordings, images of material representations used by participants in their work, and informal interviews, collected over an 8-month period.

The original study observed interactions and activities within all the departments of CratEx. This included the Project Managers who designed crates, the Crate Shop who built each crate's exterior, the Packing Department who created the interiors and packed the art, and Transport who were responsible for shipping management. The analysis presented here focused solely on interactions that occurred in the Packing Department. This department was responsible for "building out" the interior of the wooden crates. Packers cut and installed anything that went inside the crate (e.g., foam, braces, shims) and were responsible for ensuring the security of the crate's contents. Previous research found that work in the Packing Department was more often collaboratively, rather than hierarchically or individually, undertaken (Radke & Ma, 2015). For example, teams of packers often worked on large or complicated crates and when questions came up, the help of additional packers was often sought.

Analytically, we focus on interactions where there was some amount of new employee - manager interaction during work activity. Because work at CratEx is often collaborative, this type of interaction was pervasive. In this study we selected for analysis those episodes which highlighted aspects of guided participation, but could not be explained by Kirshner's three categories. The episodes examined in this paper were chosen to best illustrate our findings. They occurred across our time at CratEx and together, include all the Crate Shop managers as well as both new and seasoned employees.

Findings

More experienced packers often took a guiding role; however, the collaborative structure also supported relative newcomers sharing and applying what they had learned in the Packing Department and in previous experiences outside of CratEx. This allowed them to show initiative or take leadership roles with the support of their more experienced colleagues. For example, after receiving some assistance from Nick (a more experienced packer) about how to safely pack a large piece of artwork, Brenda (a relative newcomer) offered a suggestion about how to accurately and efficiently measure for extra padding. Nick accepted her suggestion and emphasized her position as a leader in that moment when he stated to the group, "she is showing us how to do our job!"

Many of these episodes of newcomer initiative occurred after they spent time observing more experienced packers as they worked. It became clear that the more knowledgeable packers were not only mindful they were being observed, but routinely initiated the observations as potential teaching episodes. In an interview, one Packing Department manager framed these opportunities for observation as key to how processes and standards were learned. He shared that, "the way you communicate it [the knowledge to be learned] is just by having someone watch you work." Rogoff and her colleagues (2003) argue that these kinds of newcomer (or learner) observations are not passive occurrences, but an "aspect of participation" (p.178) that they call intent participation. They describe intent participation as, "observ[ing] and listen[ing] with intent concentration and initiative," where, "collaborative participation is expected when they are ready to help in shared endeavors" (p.176). The concept emphasizes a type of observation motivated by expectations of eventual collaboration and participation.

Our focus in this paper, *guiding intent participation*, combines aspects of intent participation described above and guiding participation. In our term, *guiding* refers to participation by the more experienced member in an interaction that is in support of newcomer learning. *Intent* indicates that there is "keen observation" (Rogoff, 1995) of participants with the expectation to participate in the not so distant future. However, here we turn our

attention to observations made by more experienced members rather than by relative newcomers. Finally, *participation* of oldtimers may come in the form of "overseeing" or "checking in on" without interjection, or suggestions, corrections, clarifications, etc., which can occur both as an injection into interactions and during ongoing collaborative work activity.

Common to work activity in the Packing Department were instances of relative oldtimers observing, or listening in on, newcomers as they worked, often injecting themselves into the ongoing activity to clarify, correct, or otherwise offer assistance. Often times this was connected to assessment of learner's actions or reasoning during collaborative work in an effort to support learning, while ensuring work tasks were accomplished correctly. For example, managers would routinely walk the Packing Department to check on progress of all the ongoing projects, listening or looking in from a distance (See Figure 1).

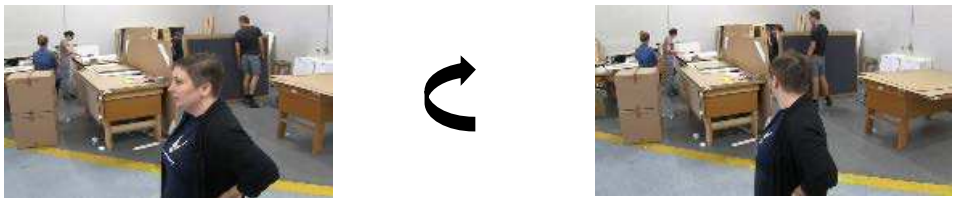

Figure 1. Manager (Nan) Observing multiple ongoing projects

Sometimes self-injections following observations occurred when they saw something of concern (e.g., On a walk around the department floor, an oldtimer stopped at the workbench of a newcomer with the exclamation, "Whoa! What happened here?"). However, they were also part of routine assessment of ongoing work activity. For example, in the following excerpt, Nan (the manager) has been observing Fred (a Packing Department employee) as he frames the interior of a crate with foam. After several non-verbal observations, Nan makes her way over to his workspace.

> Nan: So? (2 seconds) What does it need on the sides?
>
> Fred: Just this piece. ((Holds a short piece of foam inside the crate where he plans to glue it.))
>
> Nan: Yeah. Perfect.

Oldtimers also injected themselves into ongoing activity with a guiding recommendation or to offer assistance (e.g., "Make sure you measure both sides, there might be something funky going on with that foam"). When they were already part of collaborative activity, more experienced packers would stop their own work to check on the work of their less experienced project partner(s). For example, in the following except, newcomer (Nancy) and an oldtimer (Chuck) worked to frame the inside of a crate with foam. As they work, Chuck stops, watches Nancy, and after five seconds of silence makes a suggestion about her work efforts.

> Chuck: ((Pauses in his work to watch Nancy; he looks up [Figure 2a] and down her length of foam.))
>
> Chuck: Go ahead and [Figure 2b] push that down if you can. They're cut – you cut them a little short.
>
> Nancy: Oh. Sorry. ((Pushes down on [Figure 2c] the foam)).

a)  b)  c) 

Figure 2. Chuck, in the midst of his own work, a) stops to observe while Nancy inserts foam into her side of the crate, b) interjects a suggestion, and c) watches as Nancy responds.

Reviewing two decades of research coming out of the Palo Alto Research Center and the Institute for Research on Learning, Jordan and Putz (2004) presented a three-part framework for rethinking assessment as a ubiquitous social practice. They described the framework as a tripod of inherent, discursive, and documentary assessment. Relevant to this analysis are the first two categories in which they describe assessments, "produced on the fly, as natural parts of mundane social activities by individuals and groups" (p.346). Some of the nonverbal observations the managers make of their employees fall into this first category, inherent assessment. For example, the time spent moving around the Packing Department observing ongoing activity and assessing project progress. At other times however, these nonverbal observations, or inherent assessments, result in a verbal communication with one or more employees; these explicit communications Jordan and Putz label as discursive assessments. The shift from inherent to discursive is a transformation of individual, nonverbal assessment, to assessment that is public, verbal, and now exists as an object that can be referred back to, or talked about. In these ways, the discursive assessments are critical for the learning of ongoing activity.

Significance

Guiding intent participation is distinct from Kirshner's three categories of guided participation. On a surface level, aspects of each of Kirshner's categories are relevant within guiding intent participation (e.g., "veteran" packers participating collaboratively with newcomers; newcomers taking charge of their own learning; etc.). However, it is distinct because it is a hybrid of guided and intent participation that describes the actions and participation of the relative old-timers in the interactions. As such, it considers both the interactions that support and coordinate efforts of old-timers and relative newcomers to make contributions to the work and learning occurring in a community as well as the observation activities by the oldtimers that are precursors to guidance. Guiding intent participation, as a category of guided participation, provides insight into how learning occurs in everyday, routine interactions as it highlights ways oldtimers both recognize the need for guidance and interact in order to support the learning of newcomers.

Guiding intent participation could also serve as a methodological frame in support of the call made by Jordan and Putz (2004) for research to "turn its attention to the task of gathering systematic empirical data on assessment practices as they occur naturally in various organizational contexts" (p. 355). Giving systematic, analytical attention to moments of guiding intent participation would help pinpoint and elucidate shifts in assessments from inherent to discursive.

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