Chapter 5
Observing to Understand, Understanding to Develop:
A Point of View of Professional Didactics on the Teaching Activity in Multilingual Context

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ABSTRACT
Observing teaching-learning situations in order to better understand them, such was the OPEN project (Altet, Bru and Blanchard-Laville, 2012). This project has been transformed into the research federative structure of OPÉEN&ReForm (the passage from observation by research to observation for training being at stake). In this chapter, the resort to the video aiming at analyzing the activity is carried out according to an approach of professional didactics (Pastré, 2011; Vinatier, 2013) with the purpose to help the professionals in their development (Vinatier, 2013). The authors introduce the case study of a co-analysis approach of the video traces of a teacher activity, according to her point of view, in a collaborative research (Vinatier et al., 2012) in French Polynesia, what seems to constitute for her a potential situation of professional development (Mayen, 1999), in her authorizing herself to try out new ways to lead her teaching.

INTRODUCTION
Observing teaching-learning situations to understand them better, identify observation criteria which can become resources both in the service of teachers training and of their continuous professional development, that is the outline of the research federative structure OPÉEN&ReForm: Observation of Educational and Teaching Practices, from Research to Training which we participate in. One of the perspectives consists

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in enrolling collectives of professionals in forms of collaborative researches (Vinatier et al., 2012) and tracking their effects. Within the framework of the latter, the professionals by collaborating with the researchers in the sharp understanding of their activity are potentially in position to better understand their acting in order to be able to display it differently. But observing is not obvious and requires the resort to specific methodologies as to collect or analyze dimensions of the activity; relevant methodologies for the extension of the actor’s power of action. The account for the activity theory which our modes of observation are grounded upon, is necessary if we want observation not to be limited to describe, but may also enable to explain, under certain methodological and theoretical conditions.

According to the point of view of professional didactics (Pastré, 2011; Vinatier, 2013) which we share with them, if with some experience, the professionals are often able to display relevant choices, adapted to the very situation, as well consistent with their professional values; on the other hand, they are not still able to explain choices prevailing in their decision-making, upstream or in the course of action. The research purpose is to help them doing it, but it can only be achieved by realizing analyses with and for the professionals themselves, that is in the service of the extension of their choices of action, and if they consider it necessary. From our point of view, it is out of point that the research works to conceive new prescriptions which would aim at being orders to act differently, just because they would be a matter of “best practice”. For teaching practices are very diverse and are a matter of complex and varied contexts, as for example multilingual contexts prove it. The purpose of professional didactics is to accompany the professionals in the development of their power to act (Vinatier, 2009). This prospect, spread within the framework of collaborative researches (Vinatier et al., 2012), proposes a process of co-analysis of the video traces of the professional’s actual activity, realized from his own point of view, by confronting him with the researcher analysis. This point is essential because it supposes a didactic approach by the researcher, whose goal is to convey his theoretical perspective, aiming to its appropriation by the professionals. It is a matter, indeed, of supplying the professionals with necessary resources so that they can fit the analysis process by and to themselves. Two purposes are aimed: at the level of the research, it is a matter of enabling the researcher to decipher the specificities of a professional activity, enrich his theoretical frame and make it didactizable; and at the level of the training, it is a question of enabling the professional to build a reflexive approach of the organization of his activity and of a part of the reasons founding it. This approach means enabling the professional to have access to the implicit conceptualizations which he or she spreads in working situation (Vergnaud, 2007).

That is why it is a matter of observing to understand, to contribute to the power to act development of professionals. But how, and under what conditions? From a case study within the framework of a collaborative research in French Polynesia we try to understand how an analysis of the activity, from a confrontation of a first degree teacher with the video, can constitute for her a potential situation of professional development (Mayen, 1999), in the fact that she allows herself to try out new ways to lead her teaching.

A first part will introduce our epistemological position, in professional didactics, grounded upon a constructivist approach, according to which succeed is not enough to understand, but one also needs to adopt observation practices, as proposed by the research federative structure OPÉEN&ReForm. A second part will explain our frame of collaborative research and our case study methodology, as well as its context. The third part will provide some observation elements connected to the actor’s point of view, and enabling to bring up the hypothesis of an evolution of schemas of action constituted in interaction with the pupils for one of the participating teachers in the study, by sketching her development from her initial positioning. A discussion relative to these first analyses enables us to provide in conclusion a new
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