ESTABLISHING A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY VIA MENTORING IN DESIGN PROGRAMMES

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ABSTRACT
The use of a mentor mentee relation in the course of a not well known design programme in Bachelor of Applied Science will strengthen the establishment of the student's professional identity, with the overall purpose of the student positioning themselves as a professional. The relation to the mentor is made through regular meetings where the mentee gradually positions himself professionally. This research addresses the student perspective and the students' transition to become a part of the profession and to position themselves as professionals. The focus in this research is to facilitate the student's job entry in the industry as opposed to professional mentoring within the industry where professionals mentor professionals for career development [1] In conclusion this article is seeking to present an example of how a student becomes aware of a professional identity by being a legitimate peripheral participant [2] in the run of the education. A modified version of Grounded theory represents the methodical approach [3], [4] as the collected empirical data has formed the overall basis for this project. The descriptive and evaluation codings give an indication of which elements are relevant in regards to the establishment of a professional identity for the student. The mentor mentee meetings is facilitated through a series of activities throughout the educational programme [5]. The Activities arising from categories of practice, social relation and professional environment, which encapsulate the creation of the professional identity [6]. The findings indicates that the three different mentee activities during the mentee mentor relation, helps the students positioning themselves as professional thereby creating their professional identity. The findings also shows that the students who engaged actively in a mentor mentee relation find it easier to navigate in the professional environment within the industry.

Keywords: Professional identity, positioning yourself as professional, legitimate peripheral participation, design education, mentoring.

1 A STUDENT'S INCREASED PROFESSIONAL SELF-UNDERSTANDING ON THE WAY INTO THE PROFESSION

The research looks at how a mentoring programme can help students at design programmes establish their professional identity, thereby positioning themselves in the industry in which they enter after finishing a not well-established and traditional educational design programme. The activities within the mentoring network relates to the legitimate peripheral participation of the students involved, which describes transformation into a well known profession [2] - hence presenting the student with a means of learning how to make the transition into the professional identity as well as eventually qualifying the student to become a legitimate central member of the profession in an industry, where the profession is not well defined.

David Clutterbuck [5], [7], Kirsten M. Poulsen and Christian Wittrock [1] have presented research within the field of professional mentoring where professionals in the industry seek sharing of knowledge and wisdom with other professionals for career development purposes. Furthermore, Dominguez and Hager [8] literature studies support this approach in mentoring. This paper presents research in how students can use a mentor relation to develop their understanding of how to start and form a professional identity and thereby enter the industry with confidence in own professional qualities. Hence the research on mentoring is focused on establishing the professional identity rather than developing a professional career.

1.1 The not well-established design educational programme

The educational programme subject to this project is a bachelor's degree in Digital Concept Development started in February 2010 [9]. This is placed within the Department of Design and Production at the University College of Northern Denmark, a university of applied science. The students combine knowledge of users, business and digital technical aspects, which give them the skills and proficiencies to design digital concept solutions. The institute has a strong cooperation with companies, which amongst others manifest itself in the students being presented with assignments from actual companies throughout the educational programme, providing them with a more realistic approach to the work areas in their future profession. The students attending the study programme in Digital Concept development all have a background in Multimedia Design or Design & Technology, which means that they all have knowledge, skills and proficiencies within either graphical design or digital media and technology. This also implies that they will adapt the bachelor in various ways as they have different starting points. The diversity in the origin of the students, contributing to the challenge of defining the profession and become well known in the industry. The design educational programme therefore distinguishes from traditional educational programmes, like physicians, architects and teacher by not having the long and well known tradition in the profession. As a consequence the students have to form their professional identity according to their individual professional characteristics.

1.2 Professional identity

Professional identity is derived from three main perspectives, the individual, the practices and the social aspect [6]. (1) The practice perspective; is focused on knowledge, skills and functions immanent in the profession [2], [6]. (2) Acting professional in a professional environment; The skills and competences that enable the students to act professional as well as operate in a professional environment, belong to the individual aspect of the professional identity and consequently they see themselves as part of the profession [6]. (3) The social aspect; is about how others within the profession recognise the student as part of the profession and an interaction with practice takes place [2], [6]. Based on these three categories, Madsen [6] divert six essential subjects that fragmentise the professional identity. The focus in this research is on the one subject *Positioning yourself and being positioned by others as a professional* [6]. The subject of *positioning yourself and being positioned by others as a professional* consist of elements of the three aspects that encapsulates the professional identity. The transition of positioning oneself and to being positioned by others require a minimum set of knowledge and skills in order for the student to be part of the community of practice [2]. When students have different educational backgrounds, positioning themselves in the profession is essential, hence the practice perspective among students is not identical, e.g. practice skills, function and knowledge [10]. But the learning goals from the educational curriculum covers the minimum set of skills and knowledge in order to entering the professional community. Moreover, it is also required to act professional and have the proper social skills for others to position you as being part of the profession [2]. Under these circumstances where the student acts as a professional in a professional environment the positioning is reinforced [2], [6]and hereby they are in the process of transition from being a student to becoming a professional [2].

1.3 Legitimate peripheral participation

The notion of legitimate peripheral participation [2] is a core analytical approach in understanding the perspective of the student's transition from being a student to becoming a professional. The student enters in a relation or in a membership within the profession different to the real world experience given in the design educational programme. In this peripheric relation the student gets various insights into aspects of the profession from which the student ideally gets a broader understanding of the study work internally in the education. Being a legitimate peripheral member of the profession provides the student with a means of learning how to make the transition into the professional identity as well as this learning process qualifies the student to eventually become a legitimate central member of the profession [2]; this is a long term process and it requires long term relations with a presence of both community of practice, identity and insights. As the model *figure 1.0* below indicates it requires several entries in the centre of participation in order for the student to establish the professional identity. The more entries the students have in the peripheral of participation - and thereby interaction with the industry and professionals from the industry - the more it will help them form their own professional identity [2]. Here the mentoring is intended to increase the interaction between students and the industry.
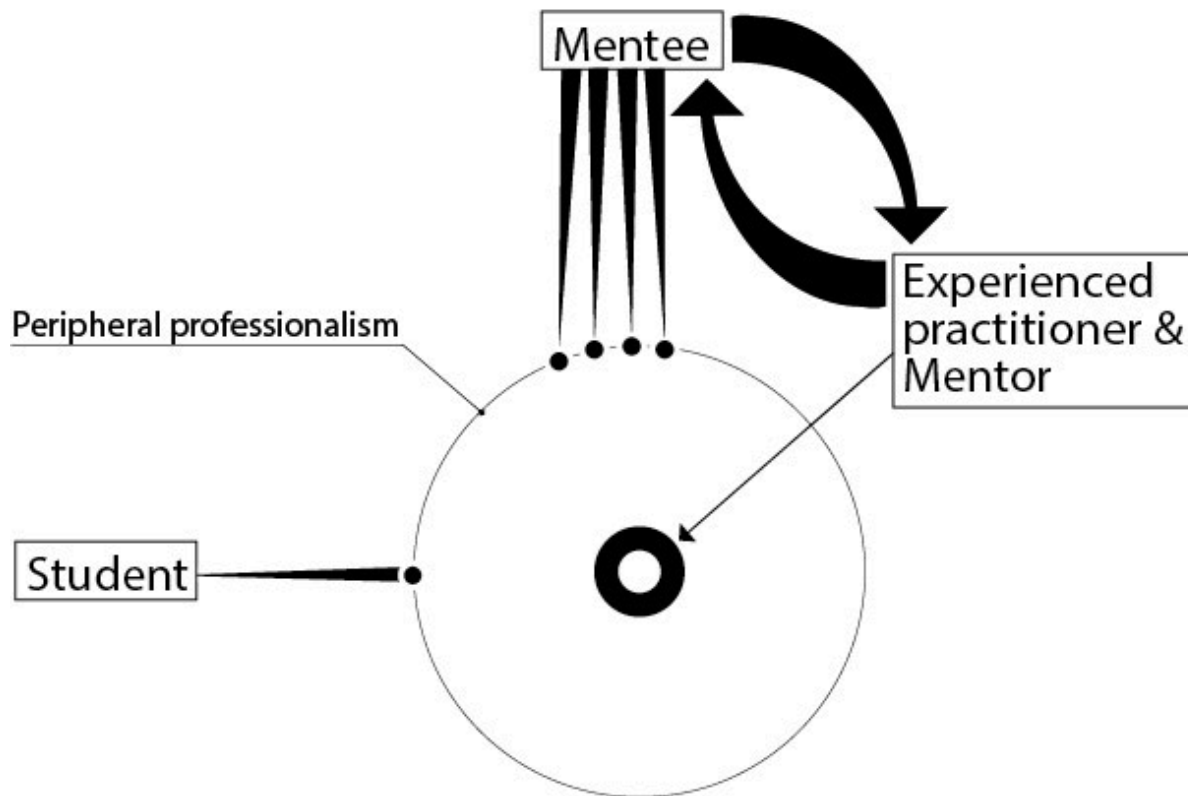
Legitimate Peripheral Participation

Figure 1. Own illustrated model of legitimate peripheral participation based on Lave & Wenger [2]

1.4 The aspect of mentoring

Mentoring in *The Mentor Network for UCN Design* are based on Clutterbuck's [7] definition of mentoring and contain elements of transition of knowledge and thinking [11], thus increasing the interaction in the peripheral participation between mentor and mentees. The mentors are all from the industry that the students are educating themselves towards. Therefore, the mentees can gain knowledge of the industry through the appointed mentor. Furthermore, the mentees are able to combine their knowledge from the educational programme with the insights from the mentors' company and profession. The mentor is a more experienced person who encourages and befriends a student (mentee) with the purpose of helping the mentees forming their professional identity at the entrance into the work market [12]. Furthermore, the aspect of mentoring can be seen in relation to the five phases, to set the frames for the process of interaction between mentor and mentee [5].

2   THE METHODICAL APPROACH

In order to examine the aspect of the transition of becoming a professional and positioning yourself in the industry through mentoring activities, the hermeneutic approach have been used. This approach is based on the hermeneutical circle, where there is great focus on individual perceptions and perceptions of the world, through the interpretation of texts. The concept of text also includes conversation and actions and appropriate interview-based research and development. It highlights the dialogue and interpretation of interviews [13]. Our qualitative research is based on a modified version of Grounded Theory [3], [4]. The interviews have been made in the timespan of October 2012 to December 2015. The number of mentees interviewed is 116 and the number of mentors 35. In order to look at a progression, the mentees have been interviewed 2-3 times during the period they have been mentees. The mentors have been interviewed 1-2 times during the timespan of the project. Some of the mentors have been part of the project from the beginning and they have therefore in the interviews been able to draw upon knowledge of having different mentees. Our interviews have been decomposed into

different questions to the mentees and the mentors, all questions in some way addressing the matter of what meaning the mentoring has on establishing a professional identity for the students and the positioning of themselves as professionals. The condensation of meaning of the interviews has been used as data for the further analysis and development of the project [4], as we have used descriptive coding and evaluation coding to code the outcome of the interviews and thereby found exceptions, contradictions, and convergence [14]. In the descriptive coding the areas *social relation, practice and environment* have been used to code the interviews; all relating to the derived three main perspectives of the professional identity. The descriptive coding has been used as a supplement to the evaluation coding, where the data has been looked at in terms of merit and significance for the development of the project [14].

2.1 Activities in the mentoring

All the mentoring activities are deconstructed to their core elements to identify the activities directly related to enhancing the ability of the student positioning himself as a professional. This is based on preconceptions of the best performing activities in the process of positioning yourself in the industry as a professional. This is a dynamic process, where activities are tested for performance, analysed and modified into new activity constellations. Furthermore, activities that can be found in the mandatory internships at Digital Concept Development programme, are not a part of the mentoring. This being the high amount of time consumption and the day to day work with the core professions skills and competences. The mentoring activities are additional activities towards gaining a professional identity. The mentoring activities are supplementary activities to an internship as both addresses an interaction with practice. The mentoring programme is not training the mentees in their core skills or become a part of the company team. The mentoring activities identified as performance given in relation to positioning yourself as a professional within the industry are sorted according to three categories that encapsulates the professional identity [6].

(1) The practice perspective; A resume of the student's approach to skills and knowledge in design is presented for the mentor, through a mentor-mentee dialogue meeting. Moreover, the mentee presents their student projects in order to facilitate a professional discussion on skills, knowledge and functions.

(2) Acting professional in a professional environment; The mentor invites the mentees into their normal work habitat, giving a tour around the company, for the mentee to get an insight of the environment of the profession and acting as a professional. Mentees are hosting, inviting and setting the agenda for several mentor-mentee meetings. (3) The social aspect, how other recognise you as professional and an interaction occur; Mentees are encouraged to interact with other at the mentor's workplace / environment, like mentor's colleagues.

The frame for the mentor mentee interaction is set via the five phase process [5], which includes rapport-building, direction-setting, progress-making, winding down, and moving on/professional friendship. Thus, initiating a process that starts with a match of mentor mentee, facilitates their first interaction, guidance in regards to a continuously interaction with a focus on positioning themselves as professional, and finally looks at ending their mentor mentee relation and establishing their onwards interaction as professionals within the industry.

3 FINDINGS IN THE MENTEES' TRANSITION TO ESTABLISHING A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

The overall outcome of a student's relation to a mentor depends on the efforts made by both the mentee and the mentor during the relation; both the student's as well as the mentor's engagement is proportional to the outcome, hence the quality of the legitimate peripheral participation as well as the number of impacts into the practitioners centre/profession obviously are crucial to the outcome of the process. Despite the obviousness it has also become clear, that the extent to which the mentee is capable of entering a meta reflective level on the outcome of the mentor relation in correlation with the mentee's educational process might be even more crucial in terms of establishing the professional identity. The research shows that mentoring within an industry or within well-established educational professions have already been looked upon, however, mentoring within newly established professions has not been addressed. As there is no predefined professional identity, the students form their identity based on the their individual characteristics combined with the learned skills of the profession. The combination of these are, however, not sufficient in regards to the recognition of others from the

profession. Thus, the findings show that the student within the addressed educations can benefit from having a mentor in regards to the development of their own professional identity. Turning to the three categories in focus there is a strong indication of a positive difference that the mentoring provides a student during his education. In terms of the practice perspective focusing on skills, knowledge and functions, a large group of mentees have experienced from few dialogues with the mentor that the theoretical framework within the programme is directly applicable in the industry, thus giving a self-perpetuating effect in terms of higher engagement in the curriculum as well as a stronger understanding of own qualities. Also the mentee sees his actual skills very close to the actual profession and thus not making him feel alienated towards it. On the contrary it adds positively to the positioning of the student and his professional identity. As for the notion of acting professionally in a professional environment, a group of mentees has had the opportunity to take their work to the company just to get a glimpse of a workday. Some mentees were invited to participate in meetings, particular assignments, conferences or other events related to the profession. Others were given weekly assignments by their mentor, yet others have had ongoing conversations about working as a professional. All of these activities provide the mentees with a belonging and a connection to the profession in terms of being clarified about which steps to take in the process of establishing their professional identity. This both in regard of internship, but also in regards of entering the job market. These initial steps towards the profession are highly connected to the student's profile and hence his own professional positioning and not to the mentor's profile or professional identity. Finally, the social relations that the mentees engage in, all add to the mentee's professional identity. Be it in the actual relation to the mentor, in the meeting with the mentor's colleagues when visiting the company, participating in actual assignments at the company or be it a relation to fellow mentees in connection to mentee network meetings, Some mentees described this as a process of growing professional self esteem as well as getting a clearer understanding of how to contribute in a professional dialogue. Therefore, over time, the student becomes increasingly aware of his particular role in the industry and this helps him in navigating and networking towards becoming a full member of the profession.

3.1 Discussion of the findings in the mentoring activities and the impact

There is a clear connection in the different mentoring activities and the outcome of positioning yourself as a professional and shows the activities reinforce the positioning of being professional. Furthermore, there is a relationship in the more active the mentees are in the mentor/mentees relationships the stronger professional identity they achieve. The reason for these findings can be argued by the Legitimate peripheral participation in combination with the three categories that encapsulate the professional identity, where a continually interaction with professionals and their environment strengthen the students positioning of themselves as professionals. Therefore, the mentees must gradually find their own way into the industry's community of practice to position themselves as professionals. The mentor can provide impacts, insights and learning in order to amplify the student's own position in the industry.

The mentoring activities have been tested on design student at a PBA programme, and the empirical data covering the one programme alone. It is preferable to implement mentoring activities in other educational programme and gather empirical data to discover if similar effects occur. The research has not benchmarked the different activities up against each other and therefore does not give a clear picture of the most performance giving activities according to positioning yourself as a professional and could lead into further research, where the result could be used to optimise the performance of the activities. Krejsler [10] is addressing the students competence background as an essential aspect of the professional identity and this research focusing on the students with a diverse educational background. The importance and effect of mentoring towards positioning yourself as professional, for students with a homogeneous educational background is not covered in the research, but relevant in order to discover the effect of mentoring in other types of educational programmes.

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