Negotiating exemplarity and example
- accommodating the student's needs for real world authenticity by 'long term practice arena'-integration

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Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to how to develop a practice-based course that works and how this contributes to a better understanding of the link between learning and professional identity. We present a new teaching context, which we have tested for four years cooperating with Danish Music Event NorthSide. Secondly, we discuss the complexity in situated learning (Lave, Wenger) to make the argument for four key dimensions of a 'situational authenticity', which will contribute - we argue - to an understanding of what is perceived as relevant outside-world experience for today's student. We aim to present a new teaching context and push the limits for student participation in course development and cooperation with the industry.

Key Words *scenario-based teaching, iterative authenticity, transfer, situated learning, communities of practice, creative partnerships.*

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Introduction

This paper is based on 4 years of experience with teaching higher education associated to 'practice arenas' in the Danish event industry. Teaching at Business School, University and Business Academy we have worked with integration of business cases in teaching in several ways. Doing this, we have come to realize that the 'experience of reality' ought to be expanded into a long term cooperation. Why? The objective here is not just to give the student 'the experience of reality' but 'the experience of doing the work', some might call it 'authentic learning' (Donovan 1999, Mims 2003, Herrington 2006, etc.).

The subject field here is a seven day course where the student participates twice in the same 'practice arena' during a period of two years. The – authentic learning – is tied to situation-based challenges that the students experience participating in, in this case, volunteer management at the three day Danish Music Event *NorthSide*, which produces situations that call for the students' immediate action. The idea is, participate twice and get more responsibility the second time. In this paper we will argue that this type of 'returning experience' of real-world cooperation has value for the students and that this type of learning can be implemented in different types of courses with different content.

We present the structure of an elective course called *Practice-based Volunteer Management (PVM)* and its content in brief. The aim is to describe what is gained by involvement in 'long-term course-partnerships'. This calls for a nuanced concept of authenticity in learning which leads us to argue for authenticity perceived through four dimensions. Such a complex understanding of authenticity in learning - we argue - helps us to understand the dimensions of what is gained.

Research

The content of the course *PVM* is developed after finishing a research project on volunteer event participation. In 2017 we began a cooperation with *the World Sailing Championships 2018* in Aarhus. During the championships and the test-event in 2017 we performed two evaluations of volunteer participation. The aim of this research was to understand how volunteers understand their own contribution to an event and to understand how such a participation is experienced as positive, meaningful and successful. The purpose was to improve management by a deeper understanding in order to create loyalty and stronger bonds between the event organisation and the volunteer corps. In this research process one of our key findings was that a lot of volunteer participation is highly motivated by shared values and communities of interest between volunteers, the event organisation and other volunteers. Values and motivation becomes key.

By building *PVM* on the knowledge from this research, it is our belief that a large part of volunteer management is about creating a meaningful frame for performing the work. It is about creating meaningful relations and about being clear in communicating the values. Our course aims at giving the student the experience of these value-driven relations and thereby giving them both valuable knowledge and practical experience. As explained in the following, the long-term practice arena creates such relations between organization and participating students.

We will describe the structure of the course and designate the character of relevance and experienced authenticity in learning stemming from situated learning (Lave 1991) in the community of practice (Wenger 1998) at the music event NorthSide:

Course Structure and Learning Process

The learning process in *PVM* is structured in four phases as discussed below. The student, however, is committed to participate in a second event the following year. This commitment is central because firstly, at the event the second year the student becomes a mentor for the next-year students (this mentoring role in the learning process is part of our central hypothesis as explained below). Secondly, the two year commitment increases the likelihood of transfer potentially helping the student create

linkage between learning situations and different practices and maximizing such linkage increases the potential for 'transfer' (Dolin 2015).

In short the phases of the learning process are:

The 'Application phase',

We ask the students to apply for the course by explaining their relevant competences and showing us their personality in a video application. We have a maximum of participants, so the student can get the feeling of applying for a job. This has to do with motivation which is a central theme in the teaching of the course.

The 'Knowledge phase'

In this second phase the student is introduced to different forms of relevant practical and theoretical knowledge. This gives perspective to the challenges they will meet as Volunteer managers at the event. We dedicate four days to this part where we introduce motivational theory, management and leadership theory, sociological theory, business theory, hostmanship, cultural analysis, methodology and conflict management. *NorthSide* introduces a more practical field of knowledge, e.g. security measures, communication skills, knowledge of venue, action procedures. We use a lot of scenario-exercises and second-year students offer different challenging scenarios taken from their own experiences. After three days in the classroom, we take them to the festival venue which is ready to open. This place bound proximity allows them to feel the energy of being close to the event opening, meet their co-workers and get a first impression of the organizational culture. Relations begin.

The 'Practice phase'

The student participates in the event as team leaders for 25 new volunteers. The first year they train together with second-year students and they get full responsibility the second year. They work approximately 16 hours each day concentrated on keeping the volunteers happy, loyal and getting the job done in time. As they go along they will meet many different practical challenges. From this they get the feel of making a little difference of a larger organizational whole.

Here our methodological tool is that we demand a videolog at the end of each day. We ask them to report their different tasks and evaluate themselves. These videologs are used both by the organization as an evaluation tool and they are also integrated in the examination as field observation. This means that at the examination they can reflect on their primary reflections in the videolog. This develops a self-reflection upon their own behavior and using the theory of the course they reflect on their own learning. This is:

The 'Analytical/Evaluation phase',

We demand a synopsis demonstrating theoretical-based reflection. They are to formulate a research question which is subject for discussion in both synopsis and oral examination.

Preliminary conclusion

Through the structural phases of the course - the learning process - the student will gain both theoretical and practical knowledge by having experienced practical event-work in a real-world arena. The practical phase has a particular potential precisely because it allows the student to measure his real-world results. We ask them again later on in the process to evaluate these actions and their earlier day-by-day videolog-recordings. Then, they analyze using theory. This becomes not just an analysis of the tasks and situations they experienced but also of their own handling of them.

Sociologist Richard Sennett has described the pride and the rousing engagement tied to the craftsman's processes of creation. He points out that the craftsman wants to do the work well, for the sake of the work itself (2008, 19). Our students experience the practice arena and our partner, the organization, as a potential future employer and thus they want to perform well. They have the opportunity to experience pride coming up with solutions to real-world problems. The quality of this work, becomes visible, and "the quality of work is impersonal […] The laborer with a sense of craft

becomes engaged in the work in and for itself" (Sennett, 2008, 27). Our course-structure supports "the aspiration for quality" (Sennett, 2008, 24), evaluation of 'own effort' and last, meta-reflection on overall-performance. Bottom-line here is, that we create a practice arena where the student is 'subject to action'. From this follows his preliminary evaluation required in videologs and later reflection is unfolded in theory-based examination. "The first involves doing [...] the second [...] reflecting on its attributes, the third implying its importance" (Sennett, 2008, 278). It is a movement from locating a problem to finding the solution to a problem. Even with limited reflection at the end, the student can measure himself on his achievements in the practice arena. The satisfaction of having contributed, the experiences and the reflection must be the yardsticks of the student's experience (of success) and maybe his sense of professional identity.

Course-content

The main purpose of the course-content is to progress from abstract theoretical positions towards a kind of embodied reflex that prepares the student, qua team leader, for active participation in the practice arena where they are forced to act. That is, to help them *"devise courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones"* (Simon in Nørgaard et al. 2015). We aim at transforming the course theory into practically applicable learning categories through our didactic choices e.g. scenario-exercises and we strive toward helping the students engage in *reflective practice* (Schön 1983, 1987, Smith 2013, Troelsen & Tofteskov 2015, Sølberg 2015) as a foundation for developing practical expertise.

Concluding remarks on course structure and content

We have explained how our course structure facilitates the learning process. We have presented (yet, only shortly) how the content is aimed at producing complex practical situations where theory becomes learning categories.

We have mentioned how we use the student's own experiences and the experiences of previous students to create a transfer between the theoretical understanding and what we call *the situational authenticity* of the practice arena. This self-perceived 'authentic' connection to reality cannot be reduced to a knowledge form. The practical experience derives knowledge, but it will remain linked to the situation in which it arose. We seek to maintain that link and thus the specific context of the scenario-exercises is exactly an attempt to underpin it. The videologs function as 'knowledge sharing' but is 'situated knowledge' in a social context as is the experience of the practice arena itself. Again this link is maintained in examination.

Authenticity in learning

'Authentic learning' (Donovan 1999, Herrington 2006, etc) differs. It may refer to the sincerity of the teacher, the realism of the assignments or the proximity to reality of the learning environment. In short 'Authenticity', we argue, is conceived of as relational. It describes the attached value that the student attribute to the *relation*. In the following we relate situational authenticity to the duality of the example to better understand student learning.

If we look at the challenging situations the student will meet at *NorthSide*. When they are discussed, the situation is either interesting because of its particular challenge that might lead to different solutions, or it is interesting because the exemplarity of the subject can be deduced from the situation. This difference is central. The experienced situation in the practice arena as example of the particular or an example of a trend, i.e. exemplarity. If we teach close to practice and maintain a reflective approach keeping our eyes on "the relevance of what comes to you in the situation" (Hansen 2016, 9) it requires that we train the student gaze to "interact between the local example and [larger] context".

Brian B. Hansen (2016) has explained *the duality of the example* in methodology, which we adopt into our didactic structure. The example in this dual perspective is both particular but also an expression of something larger. The example thus becomes a cognitive tool that functions as "a scientific prism" i.e. the specific case potentially condenses something larger. We accumulate relevant examples delivered by second-year students which we use as scenario-exercises. But, as we

discovered, retaining the second-year student and asking them to contribute gives them the opportunity to discover, how they contribute to the accumulated knowledge. This links to professional identity development (explained below).

The student and his example is used on the basis of 'the exemplary principle' deducing the specific from the general. Learning then, is formed "bottom up - from the experiences, dilemmas, [...] of the lived life, and towards a better theoretical description and mastery of this life situation" (op.cit. 15).'The exemplary learning' must find the places in the practice arena where our critical gaze can create connections between the local and the general (op.cit. 16). [Teachers must qualify] the sensitivity towards the [example] and the [...] theoretical reflexive use of examples" (op.cit. 17).

Both teachers and students seek out the practice arena and "pick out" something - from a pool of opportunities - in order to identify this as a particularly privileged place for our attention" (op.cit. 18), making the example a cognitive tool (epistemological). Maintaining a critical perspective we hopefully teach the student to understand the nuances of the example (ontological), while the teachers, may test the relevance of theoretical perspectives and may be forced to adjust the grip. This is "the insight of the example" (op.cit. 19).

Experiencing relevance: dimensions of authenticity
If the student perceives the didactic activities as something that makes sense and is meaningful and relevant, then relevance is measured on the perception of how close to real-world experience (how authentic) the activities are?

Potentially the scenario-exercises, taken from previous students' experiences, are experienced as *objective authenticity* (Wang 1999) because the exercises were retrieved from the real event (the object). The dilemmas that the scenario-exercises forces the student into, require equally authentic solutions, with which - it is our intention - the student feels more prepared for performing the tasks in practice. The responses and actions that both exercises and the practice arena require from the student we understand as a different mode of authenticity, a *performative authenticity,* tied to a particular action. The aim is *transfer*. Connecting self-experienced examples at the event and theory, the student can hopefully use and perceive the theory as reflective courses of action and potentially feel better prepared to solve similar future situations. If such a transfer is experienced as successful, then we believe that the student experiences it as a development of their professional identity. This can be called *existential authenticity*. An authenticity form tied to the value of the experience and the potential transformative nature it may have for the student.

The situated learning of the practice arena and negotiation with the particular and exemplary power of the example, can be described through such objective, performative and existential authenticity.

The iterative dimension of the long-term practice arena
The last point we want to make, is about the authenticity that attaches to the student's *accumulated experience* which is only made possible by participating in wo events at one-year intervals. The following year, we ask the second-year student to take the first-year students as mentee. Thus the student experiences becoming 'the experienced' as well as becoming the event organization's culture-bearing role model for 'the new students'. We point to this *iterative experience in long-term collaboration*, as a fourth dimension of authentic learning, elaborated below.

We conceptualize teaching as a practice arena through Lave and Wenger´s (2004) community of practice and situated learning. Here learning is situated because it takes place in certain forms of social participation and certain forms of engagement. We thus emphasize the individual's relations to the outside world. Lave's (1991) concept of *legitimate peripheral participation* is relevant here. Saltofte and Krill (2017) have explained Lave's concept as a position that shows "how learning is situated between newcomers and knowledgeable people in a social community" (2017, 59), situated

between mentor and mentee, between first-year students and second-year students in our practice arena.

If we focus on the student's knowledge sharing to track the possibility of professional identity-development, the mentioned videolog presentation delivered to the event-organisation is the first. The videolog is characterized by problem solving while displaying the student's own knowledge and identity to the potential future employer. Later in examination this (now field study) is shared knowledge with us teachers. When they return to the practice arena the following year, knowledge is shared again. Now in a mentor-mentee relationship. Hopefully a new development to their professional identity.

Pointing to these changes in social participation in the relation to the outside-world, Lave and Wenger helps us understand what is gained by a two-year student-commitment. This is important because learning is tied to the development of identity. The student takes part in many different relations through these two phases of practice. Relations where he can define himself as student, team leader, mentor. According to Lave and Wenger there is *a stream of reflexive moments* in such *participation paths*. Identity, accordingly refers to the development of professional identity in practice and to the reproduction of communities of practice.

The new student has a need for learning and the experienced student participates in this process. If we understand this relationship between them as a form of peer-to-peer-training (Pedersen and Sprogøe 2015) then the argument can be made that it contributes to the development of professional and personal skills of both. This requires that the experienced student must now convey 'what works'. Therefore he must have an eye for quality but also the ability to pass it on through communicative competences. This kind of work has a reflexive character and therefore second-year participation is learning.

Furthermore, this two-part role - the student as experienced and as being a cultural role model - gives the second-year student the opportunity to understand himself as a professional resource and this, we argue, carries the potential for identity-development.This dimension, which is only made possible by a learning process that insists on the long term practice arena, we point to as *the iterative authenticity*, the fourth dimension of authentic learning.

Our intention with this paper has been that our course could serve as an example that can explain how we produce and evaluate 'relevance' for the students and how iterative dimensions in long term commitment can potentially enhance professional identity and maximize learning. We hope that the course might have an exemplary quality that could serve as inspiration.

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