Coaching of Student Internships as the Means of Educational Mobility and Sociability

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Abstract. This study deals with the (meta) dimensions of tertiary education at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication which aims to develop soft skills and master social roles (strengthening sociability) of the journalists. We study the contribution of the innovative internship, which is based on the acquisition of journalistic skills in the lab conditions related to individual and group internships in a real media environment. We introduce methods of coaching and experience which confirm that the practices of sociological pedagogy are correlated to the student's educational mobility.

Introduction

The education in the information society is not complete if the school is focused exclusively on hard skills. Digital technology which has long been a natural environment for the younger generation, provides an extension of human knowledge–give access to the immense online database of information that one does not need to keep in mind. Simply, it is enough to browse the internet. In this situation, the importance of competence is increasing: the ability to interpret and use information and knowledge correctly, creativity, critical thinking, and independence. Educational mobility correlates more with the ability to acquire soft skills than with mechanical learning of new skills. Therefore, the development of personality factors is the key determinant of the educational processes which main aim is anticipatory and secondary socialization (second stage of sociability).

Education itself, as a product of the education system, is unable to prepare a young person for the confrontation to which the individual is exposed to in the interaction with society, where to meet the values, norms, ideals, social status, identity and wellbeing, and their exteriorization. Bauman [1] warns that there is more often important the social position of an individual than one’s personal qualities, and there is a distortion of the process of socialization. Therefore it is ideal, according to Habermas [2], that the socialization is conducted through shaping one’s personality who can balance between the demands of society and a sense of personal identity. The structure of interaction during socialization affects later ability to participate in interactions, anticipate actions of others and bring own asset into the standard roles.

In this point of view, the best European schools implement the principle according to which any college graduate cannot complete the study without being on the internship in the environment that provides him/her with the opportunity of later professional success. The aim is to overcome the risks that confront individuals in the interaction with their environment of professionalization and strengthen soft skills needed for graduate’s sociability. In this study, we concentrate on the current practice of student internships which we examined through the comparative study [3], comparing media studies on the top 50 European Universities; and through the innovative approach of the largest media school in Slovakia, the Faculty of St. Cyril and Methodius. We present experience of the application practice of the media laboratories and coaching student internships, based on which we found out that between the sociological pedagogy which inspired the media labs and coaching internships, and educational mobility, is an apparent correlation.
Sociological Pedagogy as the Premise of Student Internships

Sociological pedagogy is based on Durkheim's concept of an education. It was a rational concept of complete and unconditional adaptation of an individual to the complex structure of contemporary society. Social pedagogy originated under the influence of sociology at the turn of the 19th and 20th century as a response to previously persistent biological and psychological theories which do not recognize the impact of social environment on the formation of the personality of the individual. In Slovakia, there was an academician in this field, Ondrej Balaz, who systematically pursued and explored the social conditionality of upbringing. He defined social pedagogy as the bound discipline between education and sociology which examines the educational aspects of feedback relationships between the individual and the society and at the same time the educational processes in the social institutions.

The European Practice of Student Internships

Within the frame of the project, Implementation of Innovative Models of Evaluation, Monitoring and Quality Assurance in Terms of FMK UCM in Trnava, we conducted surveys of the structure of the Mass Media Communication study program sat selected European universities. We made the selection of the research sample based on the European university ranking and the status of individual education institutions in its home country which specialize in the fields of mass media communication, media or journalism. We focused on the countries with a long tradition in those areas with relatively broad science base which has reached mainstream status in the marketing and media issues.

The primary research sample consisted of 366 universities from the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Austria. During the examination of the education system and its structure, we looked at multiple indicators which are attributable to the particular school system, especially the relationship of the education system to the student experience.

We found out that the universities are closely interlinked with the professional experience. Its connection to the working experience is carried out through the university research centers and through the obligation to absolve the work experience by the students during their studies. For example, the students at the Austrian Wirtschafts Universitäten Wien must choose one of the institutes specialized in a particular area to gain professional experience, or they can opt to act as advisors or consultants. On the other hand, the second year students of the French Groupe ESC Dijon Bourgogne must undertake 12 weeks of work experience in the selected company, and the third year students must take 16 weeks of professional practice. At the European Communication School in Toulouse, the students are required to take the work experience for the minimum of 6 months. Many universities collaborate with the private corporations, mainly during the research topics on specific practical problems.

The internships are the part of the study curriculum of the best European universities, and the students perform professional activities directly related to the curriculum. The students reflect the theoretical knowledge in practice; and simultaneously, they improve their understanding of the studied field. The internship is assessed as an integral part of the study.

The close linkage between academic education and the internship facilitates to respond with flexibility to societal challenges and creates sophisticated, highly specialized study programs, which under certain circumstances become a comparative advantage in attracting prospective students.

Coaching the Student Internships at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication

The concept of the internships at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication is comparative to European trends but it has a different configuration, and it delivers innovative dimension which works with individuals and the group in the laboratory and the real media environment. Student’s working experience, based on coaching, has two interlinked stages: (1) working experience gained in the laboratory and (2) coached internships. We use mainly the following methods of coaching:
Systematic Methods

By the application of this method, the student is perceived as highly competent individuality that cannot be arbitrarily changed externally. The method indicates that all that the students need is in their capabilities, and they are the best experts on themselves. This approach encourages and inspires the students, allowing them to expand the area of their perception, thinking and acting. By creating ideal conditions, the students can activate their resources and within the framework of self-organization to attain the objectives that have been set.

Solution Focused

This method concentrates on solutions. It is applied in the form of communication with the individual, motivation, highlighting strong values, interviews, etc.

Co-active

The method is used to balance the self-confidence and help to obtain the skills necessary for relationships building. Also, it develops the courage needed to take action. This environment in which the students can find a job easily, socialize and be successful in what is crucial for their professional growth.

Grow

Stands for: G - Goal setting—short and long term goals;  
R—Reality—examination of the reality, the actual state of affairs;  
O—Options—possibilities, alternative strategies or course of action;  
W—Will—what is the will to do what, when and where.

This method ensures the desired results by the principle that works from the most distant target to the most concrete step.

Professional Media Experience Obtained in the Laboratory

This professional media experience is primarily designed for the bachelor degree students. The school has created laboratory conditions for media practice where students acquire skills required for their future professional role. It is an event of professionalization; it means the acquisition of expertise in various media stages. The school media system such as print publication magazines, radio, television and online magazine and creative cabinets(PR cabinet, the cabinet of field photography, experimental media art cabinet, the cabinet of events, the cabinet of public opinion research) helps to activate those skills. In these media laboratories, there work teachers and doctoral students who use the coaching internship methods, co-active, solution-focused and grow, so they give the students the room for autonomy and creative approach. They concentrate on motivation, soft skills development and strengthening competencies while coaching the students.

This coaching method increased students’ motivation to study and educational mobility. The students who participate in this laboratory practice achieve better academic performance, they have a clearer picture of their future professional orientation, they have a consistent relationship with the school, and once they are graduates, they find a job faster because during their studies they got in touch with various media organizations.

Coaching Student Internships

Media labs project is connected to another experiment - coaching internships. Its goal is to teach and learn the values, norms and behavioral patterns of professional teams in their natural work environment. Such anticipatory socialization such as the (meta) dimension of tertiary education, simulates authentic job placement and bring the consequences of which is the prospective student able to regulate own professional behavior and actions.

Coaching internships are (a) individual and (b) group.
Individual coaching internship is executed by the agreement between the school and the media organizations. It the beginning, the students familiarize with specialization and objectives of the organization. Based on the motivational letter, the students will be invited to the interview. After the successful interview, the students will start to work at the organization, and it provides them with the personal mentor. The students will receive a particular assignment, instructions and during the internship, they must work on this task. The outcome of their work has to be defended in front of the experts from the organization. After supporting their work, they submit the final assignment to the University. This final assignment is evaluated by the teachers and they propose to accept or not to accept the results of the final assignments. If the students succeed, they get the assessment in the studied subject and they even obtain the benefit—an individual scholarship. Internship in the media organizations is honored.

Faculty of Mass Media Communication realized this pilot project of individual coaching of professional training with a foreign media organization, Media Tenor, Ltd., that is based in the Czech Republic. The organization is dealing with media analysis. Currently, we are preparing an agreement with the network of regional media and the Slovakian mainstream media which will institutionalize these internships as the meta-educational subsystem within the system of tertiary education of the second stage.

The group coaching internship started experimentally by agreement between the Faculty of Mass Media Communication and the organizing committee of the international film festival (the festival was classified as the world class "A" festival) in Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic. The school creates the team of the students which gets press credentials at the festival; and then, the students are acting throughout the world film festival as journalists. They are working for various media.

This internship begins several months before the festival. It the beginning, the school organizes the selection procedure and chooses the students with different professional orientations - cinematographer, photographer, journalists, presenters, technicians and others. The entry condition to the competition is (a) qualified interest that is supported by significant arguments in the cover letter (b) completion of an individual coaching professional training. Then, the selected students will attend a two-month internal training. During this period, the students must demonstrate their professional expertise (publishing activity, own creative outcomes, engagement). They must obtain a customer for their media production in the festival (everyone has to find relevant media for which they will work) and finally - they have to create a self-management activity—personal creative plan. The selected teacher acts as a coach from the preparation period to the end of the group coaching internship. His/her mission is to motivate, give a professional advice and assist in managing activities during the festival, etc.

In two years of the experimental verification of this form of the (meta) education, the students in the position of journalists created together over 150 media products for almost 30 magazines, online media, television and radio broadcasts. They did successful interviews with Richard Gere, Jean Reno, Daniel Dafoe and with many other celebrities in their countries. This event attended about 600 journalists from 70 countries. In the second year of the experiment, the students have achieved significant professional recognition and the festival organizers prepared for them an accompanying event of the festival, solo exhibition of their editorial photos. The festival organizers nominated the students for the journalist's "red carpet."

One of the participating students expressed the benefits from her student placement (representing the benefits is the part of their final work). She said: “Ten days working at the festival gave me so much as one year in the university…”

The student internship is financed by the school and by its partner. The students obtain special scholarships and they receive a grant from the organizational committee for the festival accreditation.

The pilot project of the group internship has brought the positive results; and therefore, it has become the central part of the curriculum of the Mass Media Study Program. Currently, the school is preparing similar projects also for other study programs, and it intends to extend this kind of internship to engage more students.
Conclusion
The experience of the Faculty of Mass Media Communication that was gained by an experimental application of the principle of sociological pedagogy in the tertiary education system has confirmed that there is a correlation between the development of soft skills through social learning in the process of professional and educational mobility as such[8]. After two years of the experiment of coaching internships, we have observed that trainees achieved excellent academic results. They became leaders in the student groups, and they are an example of motivation for their academic fellows. The fact that all of the attended students have a clear vision of their professional future and most of them start to work in media organizations or find the job easily corresponds with the fact that in the latest period only 1.3% of the graduates have not found the job up to 6 months.

References