

MENTORSHIP FROM AN INTERPRETIVIST PERSPECTIVE: IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION PROCESSES

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Abstract

The article analyses the importance of mentorship to the development of a professional identity based on biographical narratives and the researchers' reflection. Mentorship is interpreted as a multifaceted process, combining professional growth, emotional resilience, the revision of value orientation, and the meaningful consolidation of a professional path. The research is based on interpretivist epistemology and biographical interview, using narrative and thematic analysis, which allows us to reveal how the participants in the research construct their professional identity, and in what ways mentoring experiences become the turning point in professional transformation. The results of the research show that mentoring acts not only as a means of strengthening professional competences, but also as a space for professional transformation, self-awareness, and the creation of professional meaning. KEY WORDS: biographical interview, interpretivism, mentorship, narrative analysis, professional identity, professional transformation.

Anotacija

Straipsnyje analizuojama mentorystės reikšmė profesinės tapatybės formavimuisi, remiantis biografiniais pasakojimais ir tyrėjų refleksija. Mentorystė interpretuojama kaip daugialypis procesas, apimantis profesinį augimą, emocinį atsparumą, vertybinių orientyrų peržiūrą ir prasminį profesinio kelio įtvirtinimą. Tyrimas grindžiamas interpretatyvistine epistemologija ir biografiniu interviu, taikant naratyvinę ir teminę analizę, kurios leidžia atskleisti, kaip dalyviai konstruoja profesinę tapatybę ir kokiais būdais mentorystės patirtys tampa lūžio taškais profesiniame virsme. Rezultatai atskleidžia, kad mentorystė veikia ne tik kaip profesinių kompetencijų stiprinimo priemonė, bet ir kaip asmeninio virsmo, savivokos ir profesinės prasmės kūrimo erdvė.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: biografinis interviu, interpretyvizmas, mentorystė, naratyvinė analizė, profesinė tapatybė, profesinė transformacija.

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Introduction

In the modern knowledge society, mentorship is increasingly acquiring more significance as a mechanism for professional growth, career development, and identity development. Researchers emphasise that having a mentor allows a beginning professional to better realise their strengths, value orientation and professional intentions, thus creating conditions for the more conscious development of their professional identity (Kelchtermans, 2009; Nunan et al., 2023; Orfali et al., 2024). Mentorship goes beyond the traditional model of knowledge transfer, and becomes a space for dialogue, recognition, reflection, and the creation of a meaningful professional path.

International research increasingly emphasises mentorship, not only as a means for strengthening professional competences, but also as an important factor behind emotional resilience, self-awareness and professional well-being. It assists in overcoming professional challenges, reduces the experience of uncertainty, and strengthens the sense of belonging to the professional community. However, despite the increasing attention to mentorship, there is still a lack of research focus on ways mentors and mentees themselves make sense of mentoring experiences, the narrative models they create, and the ways these experiences are incorporated into the trajectories of professional identity.

This gap is especially evident in research focused on mentorship, in which the professional identity is viewed as a constantly developing and socially constructed phenomenon established through narrative. The interpretivist approach allows us to analyse not only *what* the participants narrate, but also *how* they construct their professional ‘self’, what meanings they attach to experiences, and what turning points they identify in their professional path.

Taking the above into consideration, this article aims to show how mentoring experiences, the participants’ biographical narratives, shape professional identity narratives, what transformations they initiate, and how these experiences become reference points in the professional path. The research is based on interpretivist epistemology, which emphasises the subjective construction of experience, and creating meaning through narrative. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to reveal the role of mentoring experiences in the construction of the professional identity from an interpretivist perspective. The following research questions are addressed:

1. How the participants make sense of their mentoring experiences in their professional narratives.
2. What identity transformations the participants associate with the mentoring relationship.

3. How mentoring affects professional decisions and career trajectories.
4. How narrative models reveal the transformational potential of mentoring.

The novelty of the present research lies in the narrative and biographical approaches, allowing for the analysis of mentorship not as a formal process but as a meaningful field of professional transformation, in which personal experience, relationships and the cultural context intertwine.

1. The theoretical background to the mentorship phenomenon: mentorship as a mechanism for the development of professional identity

Mentorship in this study is viewed as a process in which the main role is played by dialogue, recognition and reflection. The development of the professional identity is linked to the self-awareness narrative, in which the mentor becomes an important starting point. Geert Kelchtermans (2009) points out that identity is formed through constant self-interpretation, which is closely linked to relationships and experiences. Research shows that a mentoring relationship facilitates professional confidence, and provides emotional security and a clearer understanding of the professional role (Nunan et al., 2023; Orfali et al., 2024). Therefore, mentoring is viewed not only as a means of knowledge transfer, but also as a space for the development of the identity, in which meaning-making and dialogical self-knowledge occur.

The mentoring process is also associated with the transformative learning theory (Boström et al., 2018; Mezirow, 1994), which holds that critical reflection stimulates the revision of previous assumptions, and establishes a new approach. In this context, mentorship acts as a transformational mechanism assisting the participants in rethinking their professional ‘self’, and adopting new identity assumptions.

Another important dimension of mentorship is revealed through the situated learning theory (Lave, 1991; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023), which emphasises that learning occurs through community participation. Professional identity is formed through involvement in the social context, understanding professional norms, cultural codes and community expectations. In this respect, mentorship becomes a mechanism of engagement with the professional community, assisting in the transition from peripheral participation to full membership.

In summary, mentorship in the present study is viewed as a multifaceted process, in which professional growth, emotional support, narrative reflection and community learning are intertwined. These dimensions form the basis for the construction of the professional identity, and explain why the mentoring experiences in the participants’ narratives acquire a considerable load of meaning.

2. Research methodology

Methodological provisions. The research is based on a qualitative interpretivist approach, which allows for analysing the participants' experiences as constructions of meaning revealed through their narratives. Interpretivist epistemology is based on the assumption that reality is not objective, it is constantly created through language, experiences and social interactions (Ryan, 2018; Schwandt, 2000). Therefore, not the experience itself, but its interpretation and meaning become the subject matter of research.

This epistemological provision naturally leads to a narrative and biographical approach, enabling the analysis of life stories as meaningful narratives. D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly (2000) emphasise that narrative research helps to understand how people structure their life stories and what meanings they attach to them. Narrative becomes not only a source of data, but also a mechanism for identity development.

The narrative approach allows for exploring not only *what* the participants narrate, but also *how* they do it: what voices they adopt, what metaphors they choose, how they position themselves in relation to others, and what turning points they identify in their professional path. This corresponds to interpretivist logic, in which it is important to understand the construction of meanings as well as their content.

Data collection method. The data was collected in July and August 2025 by means of a semi-structured biographical interview. Four interviews were carried out on site, and eight interviews were conducted remotely, taking into consideration the participants' geographical distribution and the mobility of the summer season.

The biographical interview applied in the research allowed participants to narrate freely the trajectories of their professional path. This method is based on the assumption that life stories are constructions of meaning which reveal the individual's identity, reference points of values, and professional transformations (Godson, 2013; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). The participants' stories are interpreted as an act of identity creation, and not only as the transfer of information. Ruthellen Josselson (2004) identifies the hermeneutics of 'faith' and 'suspicion', which help to understand both what the participants state explicitly and what remains implicit.

The interview structure consisted of four parts: introductory questions, analysis of the mentoring experience, professional path trajectories, and reflection questions. The interviews lasted 45 to 90 minutes, and were recorded with the participants' consent.

Participants and selection. There were 12 participants from different professional areas: higher education, healthcare, general education, business and cre-

ative industries. The selection was intended, based on three criteria: professional activity, mentoring experience, and the ability to reflect on one's professional path. Data saturation was reached after ten interviews, when the main themes and narrative trajectories became recurrent.

Data analysis. The data analysis was carried out in two stages. Initially, a thematic analysis was applied according to the model of Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006), which enabled the identification of the main meanings and themes related to the effects of mentoring on professional development and identity development. In the second stage, a narrative analysis was performed, which focused on the structure, voice, metaphors, narrative turning points, and meaning trajectories. This analysis allowed the researchers to gain an understanding of the narrative models participants use as a basis for their professional transformation, and how mentoring becomes a turning point in their professional stories. A question matrix was used in the study, integrating the biographical interview and the narrative analysis into a coherent research logic.

Data coding. The data analysis started with initial open coding to identify units of meaning related to mentoring experiences, professional transformations, and identity construction. The codes were marked inductively, based on the concepts used by the participants and the narrative structures. Then the codes were grouped into clusters of meanings, from which preliminary themes emerged.

During the stage of thematic analysis, the codes were reviewed, compared and refined, aiming to ensure coherence and consistency with the data. The final set of themes was formulated based on the recurrence of codes, their semantic load, and their relevance to the research questions. In the narrative analysis, coding was oriented towards the structure of the narration: identifying the turning points, the moments of transformation, the positioning strategies, metaphors, and the trajectories of professional identity. At this stage, codes were used not only for the identification of themes, but also for the reconstruction of the logic of narrative sequences.

In this way, the coding process allowed for connecting thematic and narrative analysis into a coherent interpretivist whole.

Research ethics. The research was conducted in compliance with the principles of qualitative research ethics: voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. During the interviews, the principle of 'intrinsic ethics' was adopted, which emphasises respect, emotional security, and sensitivity to the participants' experiences.

Limitations of the study. The limitations are related to the qualitative nature of the research and interpretivist epistemology. Biographical narratives are selective and reconstructed retrospectively. Therefore, they may be affected by the current perspective. The active role of the researcher in an interpretivist study may

determine an interpretative bias, which in the present study has been addressed by applying a transparent procedure of analysis and checking the themes. The sample (n=12) allows for the interpretation of individual experiences; however, it does not encompass all possible contexts of mentorship.

3. Results

3.1. Mentorship as a catalyst for professional transformation

The participants' narratives revealed that mentoring often becomes a turning point in the professional path, the moment when an essential change in attitudes, self-awareness and professional direction occurs. These turning points manifested themselves through both the mentor's clear feedback and support, which allowed the participants to articulate their strengths, acknowledge their professional potential, or overcome doubts about the right choice of direction. Such experiences are in line with transformational learning theory, when critical reflection and dialogue with the mentor encourage one to review previous assumptions and establish a new professional approach.

Seeking for a clearer structuring of the mechanisms for professional transformation, a thematic analysis is provided below, summarising the main dimensions of the effects of mentoring which emerged in the participants' narratives.

Table 1. The thematic structure of mentorship as a catalyst for professional transformation

Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Empirical example (generalised)
1. Turning points in professional transformation	The change in attitude and self-awareness	Participants experience essential reorientation of the professional direction or identity following the mentor's significant intervention	'After my conversation with the mentor, I realised that I could take on responsibility which I had avoided before'
	Recognising the strengths	The mentor helps to articulate the professional abilities which become a driver for change	'It was the mentor who first said that I have some leadership potential'
2. The mentor's feedback as an initiator of change	Constructive articulation	Clear specific feedback helps participants to rethink their actions and their professional role	'I first started to believe in myself when I heard which things I could do well'

Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Empirical example (generalised)
	Presenting a challenge	The mentor encourages the participant to make the step which they themselves would not have dared to	‘The mentor suggested leading a project: this changed the direction of my career’
3. Making meaning in the professional path	Integration of experiences	Participants start viewing their professional path as a coherent trajectory, rather than a sequence of random events	‘I realised that all my experiences were related, leading in the same direction’
	Establishing the professional identity	Mentoring allows the participant to articulate what things are important to them in the profession	‘I felt that the teaching job really suits me – that was a turning point’
4. The dynamics of decision-making	The courage to make decisions	Participants make decisions which they used to postpone or were afraid to make	‘I had the courage to change the area of the job, as the mentor said I was ready for that’
	Choosing a new direction	Mentoring helps to recognise new opportunities and evaluate them	‘The mentor’s questions helped me understand that I wanted to continue with my studies’
5. Emotional transformation	From uncertainty towards certainty	Participants transition from doubt to professional stability	‘At first I felt confused, but with the mentor’s support I had clarity’
	From doubt towards confidence	Mentoring strengthens self-efficacy and professional confidence	‘The mentor helped me believe I would make a good specialist’

The themes identified in Table 2 indicate that professional transformation is not a single event, but a consistent process, in which the mentor’s involvement becomes an essential catalyst for change. The research findings show that mentoring acted as a *catalyst for meaning*, which helped the participants to link separate professional experiences into a coherent trajectory. The mentor’s questions, insights and challenges often became an impetus for rethinking one’s role, competences and professional identity. The participants indicated that it was the strengths or new prospects articulated by the mentor that helped them make the decisions which they had postponed before: changing the area of the job, taking up leadership, starting studies, or engaging in new projects.

The narrative analysis showed that the participants often construct mentoring experiences as stories of transformation: from uncertainty towards certainty, from

doubt towards confidence, from peripheral participation to a full professional identity.

These narrative directions are revealed even more clearly when they are connected into a structured model of transformation trajectories, which is provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Narrative trajectories of transformation in the mentoring stories

Initial narrative condition	Direction of transformation	New narrative condition	Mentoring action initiating change	Narrative logic (how the story is constructed)
Uncertainty	→	Clarity	Mentor's feedback in structuring a professional situation	Participant says: 'the picture got put together'; 'a direction appeared'; 'realised what I aspired to'
Doubting oneself	→	Confidence	Articulation of strengths, support, encouragement	The story is constructed as a path to regaining one's self-esteem: 'I dared'; 'was confident that I could make it'
Peripheral participation	→	Full professional identity	Engagement in activities, recognition, mentoring dialogue	The narrative is formed as a story of integration into the community: 'I became part of the team'; 'found my place'
Professional stagnation/getting stuck	→	Reorientation of the trajectory	Mentor's questions, challenges, disclosing new prospects	Participant speaks about 'turning point'; 'new direction'; 'decision which had been avoided for a long time'
Fragmented experiences	→	Consistent professional story	Creating a meaning, reflection, integration of experiences	The narrative acquires a structure: 'everything was related'; 'I saw the complete picture'

The table demonstrates that the participants' professional stories acquire a directed logic of transformation, in which mentorship acts as a link between initial uncertainty and the newly established professional identity. Thus, mentorship becomes not only a means for professional development, but also an essential catalyst for professional transformation, helping the participants to establish a new professional 'self'.

3.2. Identity development through community

The participants' narratives revealed that mentoring helped them to integrate into the professional community, and understand its norms, value orientation

and cultural codes. These experiences are in line with the situated learning theory, which holds that professional identity is formed through participation in the community, and the transition from peripheral to full membership.

Mentors frequently performed a *mediator* role, helping participants understand the unwritten rules of the professional environment, integrate into professional networks, or get access to new activities.

In order to reveal more closely the way mentoring helps to transition from peripheral to full membership, a thematic structure is presented below, which summarises the mechanisms for integration into the community (Table 3).

Table 3. Identity development through community: the structure of thematic analysis

Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Empirical example (generalised)
1. Integrating into a professional community	The first moments of integration	Participants experience symbolic moments of 'introduction' to the professional space: invitations, recommendations, inclusion in activities	'The mentor invited me to join the project: for the first time, I felt part of the team'
	Strengthening the sense of belonging	Participants start feeling visible, needed and recognised in the professional environment	'If not for her, I would have felt on the margins, whereas now I truly feel myself as part of the community'
2. Understanding professional norms and cultural codes	Understanding the unwritten rules	Mentors help to understand the culture of the professional environment, the norms of conduct, and the communication style	'The mentor explained to me the form of communication which was acceptable here: this helped me to avoid mistakes'
	Recognition of value orientation	Through mentoring, participants understand which values are considered important in the profession	'I realised that initiative and collaboration are really valued here'

Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Empirical example (generalised)
3. Establishing professional networks	Access to activities and people	Mentors open the door to professional connections, projects, and community activities	‘The mentor introduced me to the colleagues: that’s when my professional connections started’
	Social visibility	Participants become more visible in the professional space, and are included in making decisions	‘When the mentor introduced me to the team, I felt that I was visible’
4. Development of the stability of identity	Strengthening self-esteem	Participants gain confidence in their position in the community and their professional value	‘I felt that I was quite good at the job: that was an important turning point’
	Transition from periphery to full membership	Participants transition from the position of an observer to that of an active and recognised member of the community	‘At first, I was only observing; now I feel like a full member of the team’

The sub-themes provided in Table 3 demonstrate that community involvement is not spontaneous, it is shaped through mentor participation, which helps to understand the culture of the professional environment and to establish a sense of belonging. The research participants emphasised that without the mentor’s support they would have felt ‘*on the margins*’, ‘*insufficiently visible*’ or ‘*not knowing where to start*’. Mentors’ assistance with integration into the professional community provided an opportunity to experience belonging, which in turn strengthened the participants’ professional self-esteem and the stability of the identity.

The narrative analysis revealed that the participants often spoke about *the first moments of integration*, an invitation to a project, a recommendation, sharing the professional space, or symbolic recognition. These moments were articulated as a ‘gate’ leading into the professional community, and the mentor was seen as the one to open it. Thus, mentorship becomes a mechanism not only for individual growth, but also for *establishing oneself in the community*.

3.3. Mentoring as a source of emotional and professional meaning

The participants emphasised that mentoring provided them not only with professional insights, but also with emotional support, which helped them to cope with uncertainty, occupational fatigue, or doubting their own professional competences. This emotional dimension was particularly evident in narratives about difficult periods: the beginning of a career, a peak in the workload, conflict situations, or the pursuit of a professional direction.

The emotional dimension emerged as a separate theme; therefore, its structure, revealing how emotional support is linked to recreation of the professional meaning, is provided below.

Table 4. Mentoring as a source of emotional and professional meaning: the structure of thematic analysis

Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Empirical example (generalised)
1. Emotional support in difficult professional periods	Coping with uncertainty	The mentor helps to orientate in situations when the participant feels confused, in doubt, or not knowing how to act	‘At the beginning of my career I felt confused, but the mentor’s support gave me some clarity’
	Reducing occupational fatigue	Participants experience emotional exhaustion; however, the mentor’s support helps them recover emotional balance	‘When I was exhausted, conversations with the mentor helped me to recover’
	Coping with conflict situations	The mentor helps to reflect on complicated relationships or conflicts at work	‘After a conflict with the boss, the mentor helped me to understand how to proceed’
2. Creating emotional security	Listening and accepting	Participants emphasise that the mentor provided a safe space to talk about difficulties	‘I felt I was able to talk about that, it was calming’
	Articulation of efforts	The mentor helps the participant to see their own efforts and progress, even if the participant does not notice	‘The mentor reminded me that I had already done a lot: that gave me strength’
	Emotional stability	Participants identify the mentor as a source of tranquillity and stability	‘The mentor’s words helped me to calm down and not to give in’

Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Empirical example (generalised)
3. Recreation of professional meaning	The search for professional direction	Participants discover a new professional direction, or affirm the existing one	‘The mentor helped me to realise that I wanted to stay in this area’
	Strengthening self-efficacy	Participants gain confidence in their own abilities and professional value	‘I felt that I really could make it: that was a turning point’
	Renewal of professional identity	Mentoring helps participants articulate anew what is meaningful in the profession	‘After conversations with the mentor, I discovered why becoming a teacher was important to me’
4. Remaining in the professional field	Prevention of leaving	Participants acknowledge that if not for the mentor’s support, they would have considered leaving the profession	‘If not for the mentor, I really would have left’
	Courage to continue activity	The mentor’s support gives the strength to continue working, even in difficult circumstances	‘He gave me courage not to give up’

These themes show that emotional support is not an additional function of mentorship; it becomes an essential factor in stabilising professional identity and recreating meaning. The mentor’s support was identified as a *source of stability and courage*, which allowed the participants to remain in the professional field, even when they were considering leaving or changing direction. The participants stressed that the mentor’s ability to listen, articulate their efforts and provide emotional security helped them to rediscover professional meaning.

The narrative analysis showed that participants frequently construct mentorship as a meaningful relationship, in which professional growth is inseparable from personal transformation.

Aiming to understand how professional and personal transformation intertwine in participants’ narratives, a table presenting the narrative trajectories is provided below which summarises the dynamics of these processes (Table 5).

Table 5. Narrative trajectories of professional and personal transformation in mentorship stories

Initial narrative condition	Direction of transformation	New narrative condition	Mentoring action initiating change	Narrative logic (how the story is constructed)
Professional uncertainty	→	Professional clarity	The mentor helps to structure the situation, identify the direction, provide points of reference	Participant says: ‘had a complete professional picture’; ‘a direction appeared’; ‘realised where I was going’
Doubt in one’s own competences	→	Self-confidence	The mentor identifies strengths, encourages, and gives confidence in one’s abilities	The story is constructed as a path of recreating self-esteem: ‘I started to believe I could make it’; ‘I saw my value’
Emotional fatigue/exhaustion	→	Emotional stability	The mentor listens, provides a secure space, helps to reflect on feelings	The narrative is constructed as a recovery story: ‘I recovered’; ‘tranquillity came back’; ‘did not feel alone any more’
Confusion of values	→	Reorientation of values	The mentor helps to identify what is really important to the participant in the profession	The participant speaks about ‘returning to the essence’; ‘the discovery of what is important to me’
Search for professional direction	→	Identification of long-term aspirations	The mentor helps to see the long-term trajectory, recognise opportunities	The story is constructed as a discovery of a path: ‘I saw where I wanted to be’; ‘New opportunities came up’
Distinction between the professional and personal ‘self’	→	Integration of emotional and professional identity	The mentor helps to connect professional objectives with personal values and emotions	The narrative is formed as an integration story: ‘professional and personal “self” were joined’; ‘I found a meaningful place’

Table 5 demonstrates that professional growth in participants’ narratives is inseparable from professional values, emotional experiences, and changes in self-esteem, and mentorship becomes a space for the integration of these dimensions.

The mentor's support helped the research participants not only to acquire new competences, but also to reevaluate their values, professional goals, and long-term aspirations. Thus, mentorship becomes a space where professional and emotional dimensions intertwine.

3.4. Narrative models of mentorship

Narrative analysis allowed for the identification of five transformational narrative types, which reveal how the participants construct the development of the professional identity, emotional experiences and reflective actions. These narratives are based on theoretical models, enabling a structural interpretation of biographical narratives, and understanding the role of mentorship in professional transformation.

1. Narrative of growth: a hero's path. This narrative is based on Joseph Campbell's (2025) monomyth structure, in which the hero leaves the ordinary environment, faces challenges, receives support, undergoes transformation, and comes back having changed. In the participants' narratives, mentorship acts as an essential companion, helping to cope with professional challenges and find a new professional 'self'.
2. '...at the beginning of my internship I felt absolutely confused; however, after a few months, assisted by the mentor, I found my voice in the classroom.'
3. This narrative is characteristic of a teaching internship in which professional growth occurs through constant trial, error, and the discovery of oneself.
4. Narrative of rescue: trauma and recovery. In this narrative, the dynamics of shock, emotional fragility and later recovery are revealed. Judith Lewis Herman (2022) points out that trauma narratives start from silence, but recovery occurs through talking and creating meaning. In the participants' stories, mentorship and community support become important factors behind recovery.
5. '...after the conflict with the boss I doubted myself for a long time, but colleagues' support enabled me to return to training with new confidence.'
6. This narrative reveals violations of emotional security and development of professional identity.
7. Narrative of control: the mentorship cycle. In this narrative, mentorship at first is viewed as control and assessment, but later it transforms into reflection, support and professional growth. Kathy E. Kram (1985) points out that mentorship includes not only the transfer of knowledge, but also identity development through a relationship.
8. '...my mentor not only taught me methods, but also helped to understand that the teacher's job means constant growth.'

9. This narrative is especially characteristic of beginning professionals, for whom mentoring becomes a source of security and professional self-assessment.
10. Narrative of emotional relationship: ambivalent narrative. The ambivalent narrative is characterised by contradictory feelings, uncertainty and identity conflict. Dan P. McAdams (2001) states that life stories are often mixed, they encompass pride and doubt.
11. '...I am glad that pupils respect me, but sometimes I feel as if I was pretending, as if I was playing the role of a teacher.'
12. This narrative reveals inner conflicts of professional identity, which are especially evident during the stages of career transition.
13. Additional section: idealised narrative. The idealised narrative conveys a normative and culturally expected image of professional identity, which often silences real challenges. Phillip L. Hammack (2011) points out that normative narratives form what is accepted, but they may also silence an authentic voice.
14. 'I have always wanted to be such a teacher like in films, calm, wise and loved.'
15. This narrative reveals the impact of cultural expectations and institutional pressure on professional self-awareness. This integrated classification of narrative types shows that mentoring experiences act as a narrative framework in which participants make meaning of professional transformation, emotional experiences and change of identity. Although narratives differ in their trajectories, from the hero growth to ambivalent emotional connection or idealised cultural model, they are all linked by the role of mentorship as a reference point for the transformational professional path.

4. Discussion

The research results show that mentorship in the participants' narratives acquires a multifaceted and meaningful status, which goes well beyond the traditional model of knowledge transfer. Mentorship acts as a catalyst for professional transformation, a source of emotional security, and a mechanism for inclusion in the professional community. These dimensions are in line with the interpretivist assumption that professional identity is not static, it is created continuously through relationships, experiences and reflection (Kelchtermans, 2009).

First, the research confirms the statements of the transformative learning theory (Boström et al., 2018; Mezirow, 1994) that critical reflection and dialogue with a significant other may become turning points in the professional path. In the par-

participants' narratives, the mentor's feedback, challenges and articulated strengths acted as an impetus for reviewing previous assumptions and establishing a new professional attitude. This demonstrates that mentorship means not only assistance in solving specific tasks; it becomes a point of reference for meaning, which the participants use for the reconstruction of their professional story.

Second, the research highlights the relevance of the situated learning theory (Lave, 1991; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023) in the context of mentorship. The participants emphasised that mentors performed a mediator role in helping to understand the norms of the professional community, cultural codes and unwritten rules. This confirms that professional identity develops not only through individual experience, but also through community involvement, and mentorship becomes an important passing bridge from peripheral participation to full membership.

Third, the research reveals the emotional dimension of mentorship, which often remains less analysed. The participants pointed out that the mentor's support helped them to cope with occupational fatigue, self-doubt and uncertainty. This corresponds to some international research showing that mentorship strengthens emotional resilience and professional well-being (Nunan et al., 2023; Orfali et al., 2024). In the participants' narratives, emotional support appeared as a necessary condition for stabilising professional identity and gaining a clearer direction.

Fourth, the narrative analysis demonstrated that mentoring experiences in the participants' narratives acquire the form of a story of transformation: from uncertainty to clarity, from doubt to confidence, from the periphery to full professional identity. This reveals that mentorship is understood not as a single event, but as a long-term trajectory of meaning, which integrates professional and personal transformation. Such narrative dynamics confirm that a professional identity is developed through narrative: the way the participants structure their experiences and give them meaning (Clandinin, Connelly, 2000).

Finally, the research contributes to a broader discourse on mentorship, demonstrating that mentorship is not only a means of professional growth, but also a space for identity creation, in which the emotional, social and meaning dimensions intertwine. This allows us to state that mentorship may have a considerable transformational potential, which only manifests itself when the relationship is based on dialogue, recognition and reflection.

Conclusions

The research shows that mentoring experiences in the participants' narratives acquire a multifaceted meaning and become essential points of reference for the development of the professional identity. The interpretivist approach allows us

to understand that mentorship is not viewed as a separate tool for professional development; it acts as a space of meaning, in which professional development, emotional support and community involvement are intertwined.

First, the participants created a sense of the mentoring experience as turning points in professional transformation. The mentor's feedback, challenges and articulation of strengths acted as an impetus for rethinking professional roles, reorientating the career direction, and establishing a new professional attitude. This is in line with the transformative learning theory, holding that critical reflection and dialogue with a significant other may initiate essential identity changes.

Second, in the participants' narratives, mentorship was revealed as a source of emotional security and professional meaning. The participants emphasised that the mentor's support helped them cope with uncertainty, occupational fatigue and doubt in one's competences. The emotional dimension became a necessary condition for the stabilisation of the professional identity and the acquisition of a clearer direction.

Third, mentorship performed a mediator role when integrating into the professional community. The participants experienced mentors' assistance in understanding professional norms, cultural codes and unwritten rules, which created the conditions for a transition from peripheral participation to full membership. This is in line with the assumptions of the situated learning theory stating that professional identity develops through participation in the community.

Fourth, the narrative analysis showed that mentoring experiences are constructed as stories of transformation: from uncertainty to clarity, from self-doubt to confidence, from fragmented experiences to a coherent professional trajectory. These narrative trajectories reveal that professional identity develops through narration, through the way individuals structure their experiences and give them meaning.

Therefore, it can be stated that in the present study, mentorship revealed itself as a multifaceted process of professional transformation, in which professional competences, emotional resilience, community involvement and narrative reflection are combined. These dimensions explain why mentoring experiences in the participants' narratives acquire a strong transformational potential and become key elements in the development of the professional identity.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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