

# *Scaffolding practices: A study of design practitioner engagement in design education*



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*The paper presents a study of tutor-student design reviews that form part of formal Industrial Design education. It is motivated by interests in how design expertise is acquired through experiences of designing and how novice designers are assisted to develop their own positions as designers. It explores the ways a professional designer tutor directs, guides and encourages students' engagement with a design task, and presents them with opportunities to develop their own design values, preferences, and design sensibilities. It uses the empirical data to draw attention to how the potential of design proposals as rhetorical instruments to serve both designers' own thinking and the presentation of their designs to others is a prominent theme in the professional designer tutor's engagement.*  
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Professional designers have to contend with the complex and unpredictable problems of practice. Although design professions are not unique in this respect, designers' practices, the strategies they learn, and the ways in which they acquire competence are fundamentally influenced by the nature of design tasks. In essence, 'any design process can unfold in an infinite number of directions ... first judgements in conjunction with a systematic assessment of the design situation codetermine the stance of the designer in relationship to that which is being designed' (Nelson & Stolterman, 2012: p. 245). The central role of judgement not only positions the designer as the one who shapes the design through the way s/he frames the task, but also implies a necessary awareness that choices have been made and that they have consequences. These relations between designers, designs, and design justification, in turn, have consequences for how design skills are acquired. In the context designer formation, Donald Schön's 'Educating the Reflective Practitioner' (1987) presents extensive explication of the case for why experiences of designing, through the 'studio', or through project work, are deemed critical to formal design education. The characteristics of experiences that offer the potential for becoming more skilled at designing, and how one might assess their presence and precise contributions, continue to engage pedagogical researchers. Among the matters of interest is what goes on in the interaction between novice designers and those who teach or coach them; a concern

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to understand better what are the competences novices are acquiring through practicing their craft and being critiqued in the process. The goal of the research reported here is to contribute to better understanding of what may be contributed to designer formation by one particular type of educational experience, namely, the formative review of individual students' design work by a design practitioner engaged as tutor.

On the one hand, novice designers must develop a command of technical matters and the norms of practice in their discipline. They submit to inculcation to achieve this end. On the other hand they need to develop their own sensibilities; to develop their own values and preoccupations and the confidence and ability to manifest these in what they design. Professionals have to take responsibility for what they propose; becoming a design professional therefore implies finding one's own 'place' or 'voice' and being aware of what that is and the consequences. The study presented here examines the face-to-face interactions between a professional designer and some of the student designers he is tutoring to expose what his critique offers them. It comprises a close examination of a small number of 1:1 design reviews to explore how the students are presented simultaneously with opportunities to practice designing, to find their own voice as designers and to learn what is expected from them as members of a profession. The broader motivation for the study is an interest in how working on design projects serves to develop novice designers' competence as practitioners and their understanding of what becoming a designer entails. The paper first describes the material analysed and the setting in which the design reviews take place. The ensuing analysis is in two parts. The first is an interpretation of the conversations between tutor and student; it draws attention to the repertoire of roles the tutor plays during the meetings. In these roles he retains control over the interactions that take place, conforming to established social practices in the pedagogical setting. The interpretation of the tutor's performance is presented through the lens of prior work that has characterised role profiles for tutors operating in a design studio context. The second part presents particular observations that arose *as a result of* examining the material with the broader motivation outlined above. In particular, attention is paid to how the novice designers are encouraged to use their emerging design ideas as resources for the development of their eventual design proposals and justify them to others. To do this the notion that designs serve as *rhetorical instruments* (Buchanan, 1989/1985) is introduced to draw out some very particular ways, in which the novice designers are invited to see how Nelson and Stolterman's notion that 'process and outcome are entwined and equally important to the designer' (2012: p. 243) can play out in their practice. It is important to emphasise that in both parts of the work attention is being drawn to the tutor's interactions with the students and their work as *opportunities* for the student designers to learn about designing and as *invitations* to explore their own stances. It is beyond the scope of the study, which is limited by

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