



Information specialist influences when collaborating in projects

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Abstract:

This article discusses ways how the information specialist is an equal partner in projects and has an impact on professional development. Collaboration in authentic working life contexts is in the core of a pedagogical model Learning by Developing (LbD) used in Laurea University of Applied Sciences (UAS) Finland. In a project on electronic documentation on nursing care (eNNI) Laurea UAS tested a model in which an information specialist from Laurea Library and lecturers worked side-by-side planning the project and teaching in class. Students and professional nurses participated together on information retrieval workshops, which resulted in peer-to-peer learning. Retrieved information was relevant for developing practices in local hospital wards. All partners benefitted from the process. This collaborative model was disseminated to nineteen universities of applied sciences. The article introduces also another project with collaboration. In an EU-project Researchers' Night tourism students, working life experts and information specialists interacted. In both projects theoretical and practical knowledge interact during the learning process. These projects led to new roles for the information specialist and continuing cooperation within and outside Laurea UAS.

Knowledge - analyzing, utilizing, and applying it - is an essential part of everyday practices in modern working life. This means that the practices of the library and information field should be intertwined comprehensively in organizations. When the library is actively involved in an organization's practices, it can influence and enhance the use of knowledge. Consequently, library professionals have the possibility to

discover the real needs and use of knowledge in the working life environment. This knowledge is transferrable to working practices and can be disseminated through guiding and teaching. It has been widely acknowledged that collaboration between representatives from different fields during studies or at the workplace is efficient when new knowledge and practices are created. The pedagogical model in Laurea University of Applied Sciences (UAS) promotes collaboration.

Learning by Developing (LbD)

Laurea UAS has created a pedagogical model, which has been given the name Learning by Developing (LbD). It is based on development projects. Studying through these authentic working life projects requires collaboration between lecturers, students and working life experts, who often represent the surrounding region. The core of LbD is authenticity, partnership, experiential nature, research-oriented approach, and creativity. During the learning process theoretical and practical knowledge interact. The model has a holistic view of students and their ability to do things and create processes together with working life. (Raij 2007; Ahonen & Ora-Hyytiäinen 2009).

The LbD-model affects the information specialists' work in Laurea. The role of the information specialists in the LbD-model can vary from supporting the students' learning process during every day practices to active collaborative participation in the organization's processes. Supporting students' information retrieval is very important. In order to do this we must be aware of ongoing projects and study plans. This requires active interaction with teaching staff. (Puttonen & Huovila 2011).

The LbD model provides a way for information specialists to act as partners in projects and thus share their professional know-how also with actors outside Laurea UAS. The projects vary in length and scope. Despite the variation, the projects offer an environment to learn from lecturers, students and working life representatives. However, learning is reciprocal. The other partners gain new knowledge and perspectives for information use and sources. In the partnership, interaction between theoretical and practical knowledge results in creating new knowledge. This is important in the LbD-learning process. New knowledge is created in R&D-projects when problem solving is combined with independent information search and processing, often in group assignments.

From the information specialist's perspective the LbD-model offers many possibilities to influence and learn. Providing and guiding in the use of theoretical knowledge can have an impact on how practices in working life are developed. Interacting with the working life representatives in turn, is a way to learn what and how knowledge is viewed and used. Working side by side with lecturers deepens the understanding of theoretical knowledge. (Huovila & Ora-Hyytiäinen 2009).

There are a lot of studies on professional development and learning. For example, professor Päivi Tynjälä discusses a model of integrated pedagogy, which applies to learning and working environments. The presented ideas on the integrative model have been introduced as a complementary element of LbD. In the model the interacting components are conceptual/theoretical knowledge (knowing about), practical/experiential knowledge (knowing how) and self-regulative knowledge (knowledge of oneself as a performer or learner). When learning takes place in authentic environments, the practices of social communities also transmit information. According

to Tynjälä, many researchers emphasize that in high level expertise the different knowledge components are tightly interwoven. The forms of knowledge are also interwoven in the LbD-process. (Tynjälä & Kallio 2010).

The following cases will illustrate how the above described theory is implemented in practice. The project cases are looked at from the information specialist's point of view. Even though the main emphasis in this article is on the case describing the participation in a project on electronic nursing (eNNI), also a project in tourism is described. The aim is to illustrate that working together in projects can be a force for change. The nursing project provides a national example, and the second example was carried out in Laurea UAS. In both examples information specialists step outside their comfort zone and admit that gaps in professional expertise can be filled when collaborating and working side by side with those outside the library and information field.

Examples of projects

Project on developing electronic nursing documentation (eNNI)

As was described above, understanding and applying theoretical as well practical knowledge is essential when professional know-how is developing. However, studies have shown that nurses and students feel their skills are not adequate in searching relevant information.

The majority of nursing students in a study by Halabin and Hamdan-Mansourin (2010) realized the value of research in improving quality of care and expressed a need to learn about research. Results also indicated a preference for active learning assignments and collaboration with course assignments. The same kind of positive attitude toward using research information among professional nurses came up in the results of a Finnish study (Suvilaakso 2008). However, both studies showed that even though skills were perceived to be useful in both groups, individual skills were considered inadequate in finding research information. The same results came up in a study of the eNNI-project (Rajalahti 2011). In the eNNI-project, evidence-based nursing is critical. In evidence-based nursing, it is very important to use and understand research information when developing nursing in health care.

The first example of the information specialist's project participation was a project focused on developing electronic nursing documentation, which began in spring 2010. The participants were from Laurea UAS and Hospital District of Helsinki and Uusimaa (HUS), Lohja Hospital Area. Ten units with 40 nurses and 19 nursing students in 10 wards were involved in workgroups in wards. The students wrote their thesis on this authentic working-life project. In the beginning of the project the operational project plan was prepared by hospital area's special development planner, three Laurea lecturers and an information specialist. The aim was to include evidence-based knowledge in developing nursing practices. The plan included, among others, two shared information retrieval workshops with the lecturer and information specialist.

After the students had been chosen for the project they were given an initial preparatory task. The assignment was to search for information on the new nursing documentation, care of patients in the wards they were assigned to, and to think of concepts, terms, synonyms, and key words.

First hands-on-workshop

The first hands-on-workshop was for students. The aim of the workshop was orientation to nursing documentation and specialty of his/her ward. The lecturers gave a pre-task to the students. In the assignment they had to find concepts and search terms related to their topic including a wide range of synonyms. The students had basic skills in using databases; therefore they also carried out searches independently. Simultaneously the information specialist prepared for the workshop by going over concepts and theme-related words given by the lecturers.

The information retrieval workshop in the computer class began with the students' reports of their pre-task. It continued with a demonstration of relevant databases. The information specialist and lecturer were both present in the class and showed how to use the databases from different viewpoints. The students tried out different search words, word combinations, and truncations. At the end of the workshop, students' example searches were displayed and discussed together, which made peer-to-peer learning possible. The lecturers and information specialist guided the searches and gave individual guidance together during the whole workshop. They also helped in recognizing relevant information sources.

The next phase for the students was individual work and presenting the research information they found to the wards.

It is important for students to interact with professionals from their future field. When they participate in these social communities it enhances intellectual growth and increases professional skills. Also interacting and sharing between students and nurses paved the way for a relaxed and trustworthy atmosphere for the next project phase.

Students continued their independent work by searching for research information during the rest of the project process. At the same time they gathered information for the theoretical framework of their theses. The information specialist was available for consultation during library hours. Examples of search topics were: how electronic documentation is used in other hospitals, what does e-documentation mean, what is the difference between manual and e-documentation, diseases of patients in different wards, and guidelines of nursing.

Second hands-on-workshop

Participants in the second workshop were students and nurses. The information specialist prepared for this workshop by doing a survey of the nurses' use of professional literature, including the databases they used. The results formed the basis of the second information retrieval workshop. The information specialist and lecturers planned the workshop together. Also the project coordinator from the hospital was involved in planning the workshop. She knew the hospital as a learning environment and could provide information about the databases the hospital staff had access to. Many of the available databases are the same in the hospital and in Laurea UAS.

There were two similar information retrieval workshops to maximize the participation of nurses who work in shifts. The workshops were in Laurea's computer class situated a short distance from the hospitals.

In the second workshop the nurses, students, information specialist and lecturer worked together. The nurses and students chose the topic according to the ward they are working in or assigned to. The core idea was to find research information exactly for the needs of a specific ward. When working together in this way, many viewpoints became evident: the lecturer is an expert of substance, the nurses have the knowledge in practice, students can share how to learn efficiently and the information specialist masters databases and searches. This kind of collaboration included the elements of the LbD model.

The assignment in this workshop for the students and nurses was to find evidence-based knowledge and share it together in the hospital wards. This knowledge was intended to be utilized when the professionals develop their own practices in the hospital. Feedback from the collaborative workshops was collected from students, nurses, lecturers, hospital area's special development planner, and information specialist.

The feedback was then analyzed together by information specialist, lecturers and development planner in order to improve future mutual projects. According to the feedback, the overall attitude to the collaborative model of working together was positive. In particular, the interactive dialog among all involved was felt to be rewarding and it led to professional development. The feedback also revealed lack of time for preparation, which was realized among students and nurses as uncertainty in the beginning of workshops.

EU-project with tourism students

In 2011 Laurea UAS was a partner in an EU project 'Researchers' Night'. It is a Europe-wide event, which brings together the public at large and researchers once a year for a fun evening when science is experienced in an entertaining way. When the planning for the upcoming Researchers' Night event at Laurea began, the information specialist was invited to the project team. It was decided that the library should be open and provide a relaxing atmosphere with dimmed lights, coffee or tea and a "relax for a moment space". It was the total opposite of the busy atmosphere elsewhere in the premises. Naturally, there were also activities related to information search and use.

It was also decided that the information specialist would work with tourism students in the project. It was obligatory to set up an EU corner in the project in order to disseminate information about the EU and Europe. This was a good opportunity to enhance the students' use and searching skills of information provided by the EU. The information specialist decided, along with a lecturer in tourism, to offer the EU-corner as a project for students. The theme was "Tourism is research, too", which fit well the Researchers' Night idea. This was a great opportunity for students to earn obligatory study points by joining in the project. In addition to informing about EU, the students could make known what kind of research is done in the tourism degree studies at Laurea UAS.

After students had enrolled in the project, a meeting was held between the responsible lecturer and information specialist to clarify workload and documentation expected from the students. Thereafter guiding, planning and implementation with the students were the information specialist's responsibility. The planning included a hands-on-session on searching EU-information, for example discovering what the European Commissions' portal includes. Even though the information specialist had the responsibility, the students were given free rein to create the EU information corner and activities there. During the event the information specialist was at the stand with the students serving as their assistants.

When the project was finished, instead of a traditional report, it was decided that the students post a blog to Laurea Library's blog space. The result was a wide audience for knowing about the EU corner and Researchers' Night. Concurrently, the students' blog post served the dissemination requirements of the whole project, and attracted new readers to the library's blog.

There were two working life contacts during the project. The students had to get material from the European Information Centre for the stand. This was a new information provider for them. The information specialist and students went together on an excursion to the information centre in Helsinki in order to learn about the centre, find and choose relevant material for display and to be handed out. The experience increased knowledge about EU-information and its distribution.

The second working life contact, the information specialist in the Finnish Tourist Board, was a personal contact by Laurea's information specialist. The Finnish Tourist Board offers open access research information from the tourism field on their website in addition to a wide range of current information about travelling and tourism. It is an important information provider when studying tourism and suited well to the stand's theme. The students contacted the information specialist and agreed to promote their website as an information source for all. They also received the organization's journals on travel to be handed out during Researchers' Night, a nice addition to get the attention of the visitors.

Experiences and conclusions

Traditionally, in working-life development projects the lecturers guide students and the working-life offers a learning environment. In the eNNI-project the lecturers and the information specialist were involved in development work when they guided students and nurses in recognizing new, relevant scientific information and helped them identify and acknowledge evidence-based knowledge. The idea of collaborating in this way was disseminated to other universities of applied sciences. Libraries were encouraged to participate in working life projects.

Shared lessons gave added value for all involved. From the information specialist's point of view, the students understood that the use of knowledge is not an isolated island but tightly bound with studies and future working life. The information specialist was also acknowledged as an expert, not as someone dealing only with books. In addition, the true working life information needs and use emerged, and hence can be shared in information literacy classes with others. The students used information sources extensively in their assignments. Students and nurses experienced equality when

searching for information during the workshop. The nurses updated their skills in the use of databases and found research information for developing the wards. The lecturers found new ideas and updated expertise for their teaching during planning and lessons.

The Researchers Night -project positively affected the image of Laurea Library among students. Telling other students about working together spread through everyday student interaction and the blog post received positive feedback. Other advantages for the information specialist included updating skills on EU-information databases and websites, which is useful in other information retrieval and teaching contexts, and strengthening co-operation with the tourism lecturers. Also she could act as an intermediary between working life and lecturers by providing a new contact, which proved useful for the tourism degree in later co-operation. Since the information specialist was responsible of the project, the lecturers got help in the workload of the project study module. Students earned study points. The acquired know-how can result in peer-to-peer learning on group assignments. Contacting the Finnish Tourist Board was a win-win situation. On the one hand the students now have a personal contact for the future; on the other hand, the Finnish Tourist Board got more information on the possibility of working with Laurea tourism students, for example, by offering thesis themes. Finally, the Finnish Tourist Board was able to disseminate information about its actions and organization, as well as attract new visitors to their website.

In both of these project examples, the information specialist stepped outside their comfort zone, took on a new role and changed the traditional view of working in the library. The role as an equal partner in projects resulted in a new understanding of the professional expertise in the library and information field. As the activities expanded outside the library environment to wider networks, a new kind of partnership arose. This has led to continuous co-operation both in and outside Laurea UAS as the new role of the information specialist was acknowledged. The library is more visible outside of our own profession.

In Laurea UAS the information specialist is asked to plan, implement and evaluate study modules together with the lecturers, as well as teach together in class. A new project with students creating an international space in the library premises is currently ongoing. Outside Laurea UAS co-operation with the Finnish Tourist Board has continued, and teaching information retrieval has begun also in the working life environment in the hospital premises. The model of working together in the eNNI project has been presented in Denmark.

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