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MULTIPROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION IN PROJECT WORK

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to describe the experiences and best practices of students and lecturers by multi-professional collaboration in the project work of Bachelor Degree Programmes in Nursing and Social Services. The studies in the project are based on the Learning by Developing (LbD) model as a part of students' competence development.

Laurea University of Applied Sciences operates in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. Laurea has created the Learning by Developing (LbD) model - an innovative operating model based on key components of authenticity, partnership, experiential learning, creativity and research. Students' learning is connected to authentic development projects that are rooted in the world of work. Learning by Developing model creates network between education, working life and regional development.

In the autumn of 2013, 21 students of Bachelor Degree Programmes in Nursing and in Social Services took part in project called Smart Hospital Living Lab as a part of their studies. The aim of the project work was to develop wellbeing by promoting care environment. In addition to gaining the study units another aim was to strengthen the students' multi-professional skills and work habits.

The evaluation material was collected after the study units. Integration of the project work as a part of study units requires good cooperation and planning. According to the students' feedback, multi-professional collaboration was useful and gave the students more knowledge and experience of working life.

This paper will discuss the students' experiences concerning multi-professional project work and best practices for lecturers while combining working life projects into study units. The results of this study will help lecturers to design multi-professional collaboration between different degree programmes.

Keywords: project work, learning experiences, Learning by Developing (LbD) action model, multi-professional collaboration.

1 BACKGROUND OF THE MULTI-PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION

The cooperation between different professional groups has played a key role for a long time in promoting customer-oriented focus and evidence-based methods in health care. Getting to know the work of various professional groups at early stage of the studies promotes students' learning, increases students' capacity to work in a multi-professional work environment and increases the respect for other profession. Multi-professional work has been best-achieved through multi-professional learning and training. [1]

Multi-professional collaboration is a process that includes sharing resources, responsibility and knowledge. Starting collaboration requires recognition of a need for a customer-oriented approach and a willingness to co-operate. [2] Multi-professional cooperation also includes instructing another professional group and learning new clinical skills [3]. Multi-professional co-operation should reach a level of interaction where sharing information and integrating different perspectives becomes possible. The challenge is to find a working method that fits each situation. Success requires that the participants are willing to be active and committed. [4]

The challenges of multi-professional collaboration concern a shared understanding for the flexible roles of each worker, defining questions of responsibility, creating practices for a common knowledge and developing the interaction and team-work skills necessary for multi-professional co-operation [5]. Workers' equality strengthen multi-professional collaboration and learning in multi-professional teams. Equality in multi-professional groups can be promoted by crossing the professional boundaries. [6] Building trust between different professions facilitates discussions and allows the border crossing [2]. Necessary conditions for multi-professional cooperation are open communication and interaction, as well as highlighting one's own views and expertise [7].

2 LEARNING THROUGH RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Laurea's pedagogical learning by developing (LbD) model is based on learning through research and development. Both students and teachers can develop their competences by participating in different types of development projects that address the phenomena and problems of real-life workplaces. Studying within the LbD model is more self-directed than in traditional lectures. More individual goals can be set for competence development in project work. [8], [9], [10]

Competence will grow through data research, understanding the context, and taking on and confronting different kinds of situations in the world of work. One of the main objectives is to identify the core phenomena behind each problem and the key concepts through which these phenomena can be analysed. Phenomena and problems are examined with a research-orientated approach. In the LbD model, learning is not restricted by the limitations of the curriculum, textbook or exercise book. [8], [9], [10]

Smart Hospital Living Lab project was a joint development project between Laurea University of Applied Sciences and Vantaa City Hospital Services and it was carried out during the years 2012-2014. The project was financed by Uusimaa Regional Council. The aim of the project was to create a functional and open environment for testing and developing new products, services and innovations based on health care and well-being technology. The project offered students and health care professionals a new learning environment as a part of hospitals' everyday activities with patients and their relatives. The target was to provide an environment where partnering companies, technology providers and service users could together produce new innovations, competences and services. [11]

The development targets for the project were chosen together with the staff of Vantaa City Hospital Services. The focus was on a well-being patient and fluent everyday care. The six development themes were: 1) Functional space for delivering medication, 2) Monitoring and assessing patients' vital functions, 3) Reducing hospital days, 4) Care environment promoting well-being, 5) Development of self-care capabilities and 6) Safe and secure hospital. [11]

The focus of this study is "Care environment promoting well-being". The target was to develop a care environment, where acoustics, lighting, functional activity, colours and furniture promote both the patients' and the staff's well-being. The aim was to create an environment that supports patient's rehabilitation and discharge.

Good and rehabilitative care environment consists of many different factors. Care environment should take into account the patients' physical, mental, social and functional needs as well as to guarantee adequate privacy. Various studies have shown that the care environment should be especially comfortable and empowering. Good care environment is safe and it empowers patient's feel of safety. Good care environment also includes skilled health personnel who are present and listen to patients. Studies have shown that music, good atmosphere and contact with nature have a good stimulating impact. The environment affects the stronger, the more fragile person is. [12], [13], [14], [15], [16], [17]

More evidence-based research and planning should be utilized, while designing and constructing effective care environment. Also the knowledge and skills of the nursing staff, as well as the experience of the patients should be used. [18] Patients have certain expectations towards care environments that affect their experience of the quality of the care and rehabilitation in the hospital [19]. A pleasant care environment increases patients' faith in their own recovery process and affect the patients' mood positively [18].

3 SMART HOSPITAL LIVING LAB PROJECT AS LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

In the spring of 2013 project partners agreed on the methods on how to start developing the care environment in the Katriina Hospital. The partners decided that the students of Laurea UAS could gather information on the current situation in one of the hospital's wards by interviewing the staff and observing the activities of the ward. In Laurea UAS the theme was seen as suitable and useful for both social and health care students' skills.

Working in the project gave the students a good opportunity to work in a multi-professional environment and to gain new experience and knowledge from working life. In order to combine the study units and project work in multi-professional teams, the lecturers of the study units were required to make good common plans inside Laurea UAS and with all the partners beforehand. The aim for the co-operation was both to develop the students' competences as well as to respond to the needs and objectives of the hospitals through the students' learning tasks.

In the autumn of 2013, 21 students of Bachelor Degree Programmes in Nursing and in Social Services took part in the project called Smart Hospital Living Lab as a part of their studies. Students worked in multi-professional teams and they were awarded with 2 credit points for their learning tasks in this development project. The lecturers' role was to organize the project activities from the start to finish. The senior lecturer members of the multi-professional development team participated by providing their expertise to steer the progress of the work and, at the same time, the progress of learning.

The senior lecturers of Bachelor Degree Programmes in Nursing and in Social Services co-operated together with the staff of the Katriina Hospital by developing the learning task and organizing the practice. The idea was that students would clarify the role of physical, mental, social and functional aspects for the care environment while also considering safety and security. In addition, the physical conditions of the ward were observed.

The students formed four multi-professional working teams, each of which included two students from the social services degree programme and three to four students from the nursing degree programme. The working teams specialized in one of the aspects of the care environment. They had to search for five to ten studies on the area and produce some questions and themes for the interview of the staff and observation of the ward. The staff of the ward also took part by commenting the questions and themes in a meeting, where the student groups also got familiar with the ward and its functions.

Fig.1: Care environment promoting well-being – aspects for the development assignment.

The teams interviewed the ward staff on behalf of the aspect they had in a group interview and observed the ward for at least three hours. They made conclusions from the results and presented these in a seminar held together with all the groups and the staff. The teams made a report with some of their development ideas attached. The teams put their results together in form of posters and these were presented to the entire staff and the ideas were discussed jointly. The ward was responsible for carrying on the ideas in practice.

4   STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF MULTI-PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION

The aim of the multi-professional cooperation was to develop students' professional skills and competence. The goal was also to get new information about learning in a project environment in order to improve the Learning by developing (LbD) settings in the courses. Students gave feedback in the final seminar by filling in a questionnaire. The feedback questionnaire was answered by all students N = 21, and the response rate was 100.

In this study we will focus on the following questions:

1. What kind of professional skills were improved by participating in this project?
2. How valid was the project work for this study unit?
3. What were the challenges of this kind of project work?

The students evaluated multi-professional project work positively. Students' professional competence increased, and the majority of the respondents felt that project work is a useful way to get more information and authentic experiences from working life. The students felt that the project work developed their cooperation skills with different professional groups and provided capabilities for their own profession.

The students also felt that they were able to benefit from the knowledge of various professional groups while working in the project. By exploring different perspectives in different fields of expertise students' developed their problem-solving and communication skills. Particularly diverse thinking and exploring the cases together in a group increased some of the students' courage to act with different people, contributing to the development of skills.

The project work was seen very conducive and the students felt that their work improved the functioning of the department. During the project they received a concrete knowledge of the practice in a hospital. The fact that the students were able to actually influence the development work at the hospital was also a positive learning experience. Learning in this project increased their empowerment to be more active in the society.

The LbD model helped to develop students' abilities to respond to future challenges. The chance to act as developers in this genuine development project supported students' development as actors who can change, develop and influence real workplace practices. By working in a project environment, students improved their interaction and reasoning skills.

This project provided a way for students to achieve concrete development skills, which increased their motivation to study. This had a positive effect on their academic success.

Skills developed during the project work

- working life skills
- interaction skills
- problem-solving skills
- network competence
- professional skills
- development skills
- professional identity
- multi-professional skills
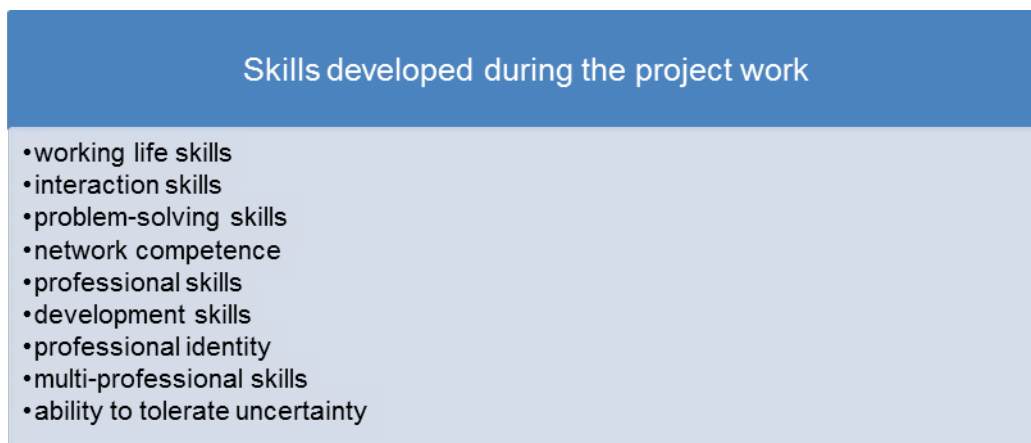- ability to tolerate uncertainty

Fig. 2: The professional capacities developed during the project.

Most of the students felt that the project work was valid as a part of their studies and that it developed their professional capacities further. Working in a genuine development environment increased the students' motivation to work, which in turn contributed to the broad development of their professional skills. However, part of the students felt that the project was not suitable enough for their study unit and its content, and therefore the multi-professional working did not seem meaningful. Some students thought that multi-professional project working did not teach them anything new. The development environment felt unfamiliar to some of the students and as a result its contribution to their professional skills was evaluated low.

Working on the development assignment required individual working skills and ability to apply things learned before now in practice. For some the project posed challenges to develop their research skills. Some of the students hoped that considering the broadness of the development task and the work load the awarded number of credit points for the study unit could have been bigger.
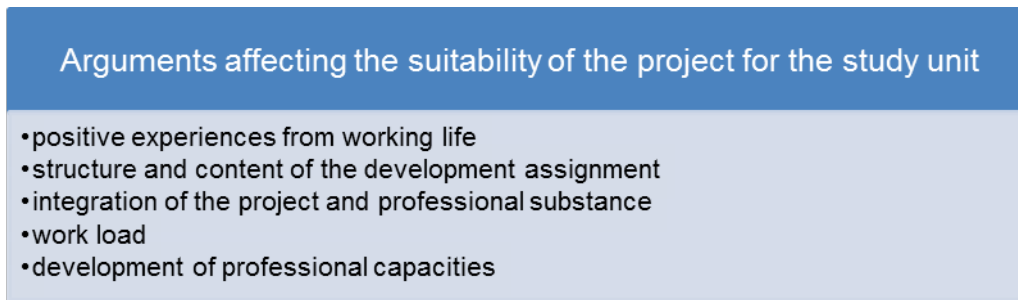
Fig. 3: Arguments affecting the suitability of the project for the study unit.

The students felt that matching timetables with the other students from another degree programme and integrating the contents of the study unit into the project environment were the biggest challenges during the project work. In addition, overlapping studies between the students from different programmes took some time away from the development assignment. The students wished for more common planned time for the project work as well as for some more contact with the lecturers. Some more attention should be paid to on how to give the instructions and how to divide the tasks. There was also a need for more leadership in the teams.
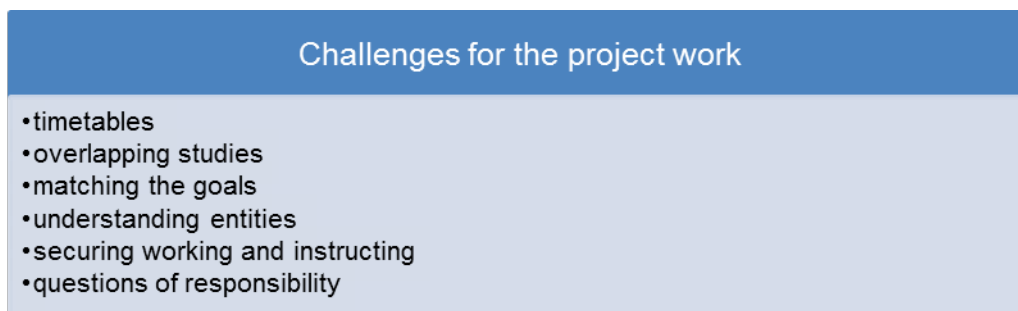

Fig. 4: Challenges for the project work.

A majority of the students felt that multi-professional project working was a positive and useful experience. Some of the students hoped that there would be more co-operation between the social services and nursing students in the future. Also co-operation with other professional groups was supported.

5 MULTI-PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROCESS IN PROJECT WORK

As a conclusion it might be said that multi-professional project work as a part of competence development was well-suited for the social services and nursing studies. The students learned through co-operation a various set of skills needed in working life. The students' multi-professional project work highlighted the importance of finding common time and using different expertise from different sectors in finding the best outcome for the patient. Utilizing different expertise developed the interaction and problem-solving skills and gave capacities needed in working life.

Integrating two study units from the social services and the nursing programme in the Smart Hospital Living Lab project provided new information to support co-operation between different programmes. The learning goals of the study units and the aims of the project work were the bases for the planning. From the lecturer's point of view the challenges were the timetabling and the scarce of the credit points. There should have been enough time for the students' learning process and for working on the assignments. Because of some overlapping studies, matching the students' timetables for the project did not succeed in the way wanted. Also the hospital as a new working environment for the social services students and project work as a new learning environment for the nursing students brought some challenges.

Integrating a project work into study units requires time from the lecturers to instruct the students together, to agree on common working methods and to have dialogues to support the teams. The project as a whole and the learning from the project might stay minimal if the students do not

understand their role as a part of the development work. Good interaction between the students and other actors in the project, as well as agreeing on responsibilities, is a pre-requirement for multi-professional project work and also reinforces it.

The ability to tolerate uncertainties is an integral part of project work. Understanding this might cause difficulties to some students. The aim of project work is developing co-operation, where the goals are being formed during the process as a result of collaborating. From project co-operation's and competence development's point of view broader studies and working in the same teams for a longer time would be advantageous. These would give a chance for the participants to comprehend the process better, to develop the results further and to promote the development work more fluently.

Multi-professional learning process in project work

- understanding one's actions as a part of the whole project
- highlighting one's own expertise
- sharing resposibility and expertise
- respecting other's expertise and using it
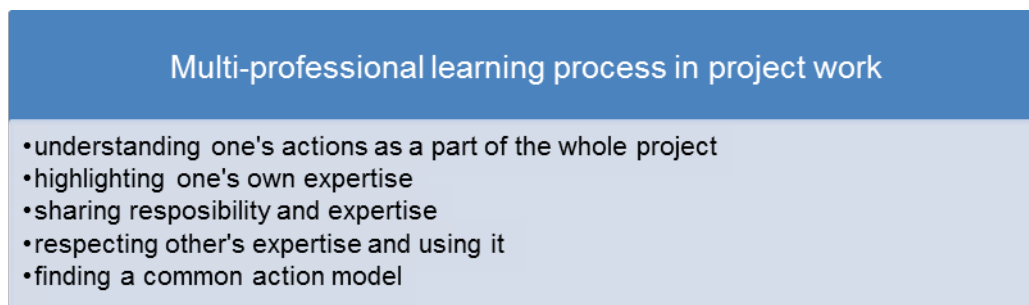- finding a common action model

Fig. 5: Multi-professional learning process in project work.

Authentic learning environment and real-life situations challenge every actor and lecturer to create development assignments and content for the studies. It is important that the students could integrate themselves into the working life situations as a natural part of the working community and the patients' lives. Good planning and searching, curious attitude are helpful if the development work is done in an area outside one's own comfort zone. Multi-professional collaboration makes it possible for the students to cross professional boundaries in a safe way within the project environment and to create a new way of thinking. Integrating the project and the study units produced new expertise, skills and innovations for all participants. Project integration developed the students' competences far beyond the goals set for the study units.

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