Title:

DEVELOPMENT OF EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICE IN ACADEMIC SERVICE PARTNERSHIPS:
EXPERIENCES OF WORKING LIFE REPRESENTATIVES FROM SOCIAL AND HEALTH CARE
SECTORS

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ABSTRACT

Learning about how to develop and lead the implementation of evidence based practice (EBP) in services is an important part of the education of developers and managers for the social and health care sectors. In order to develop this teaching and to support the development of EBP in services, a Teaching Development Effort (TDE) was conducted by establishing academic service partnerships (ASPs) and connecting Master's students' assignments with them. The TDE was conducted as a part of a larger project whose main aims were to strengthen, develop and renew transfers of knowledge and competence between higher education institutions and workplaces, and to strive for a more multidisciplinary quality in workplace innovations.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the experiences of working life representatives regarding the development of EBP in ASPs within the social and health care sectors. The data were collected by email interviews. Eight working life representatives participated in the study. The informants were asked to describe the usefulness of the plan that had been prepared by the students regarding the implementation of EBP, and to describe the significance of this ASP for the development of working life. A qualitative content analysis method was used when analyzing the data.

Virtually all the informants stated that the plan prepared by the students, for the implementation of EBP, was entirely ready to be taken into use in the form they had finished it. The significance of the ASP was described in terms of the ASP assisting in improving the quality of the service. Furthermore, the workplace-based student assignment topics, external views to support the development of EBP, and the theoretical approach used by the students were valuable. The ASP provided opportunities for the practitioners to learn new things, inspiration to look to the future, and assistance in the implementation of time management practices.

ASPs have potential to support EBP in services and the use of them is recommended.

Keywords: Education, Interdisciplionary; Organizational Development; Professional Practice, Evidence Based; Qualitative Studies; Service Learning

HIGHLIGHTS

- implementation of EBP in social and health care services is a challenging task
- academic service partnerships (ASPs) have potential to support EBP in services
- in addition to the students' learning, ASPs support the learning of the service staff
- theoretically-informed plans for EBP are recommended
- stable ASPs on long-term commitments are recommended

INTRODUCTION

The importance of evidence based practice (EBP) in social and health care services has been acknowledged. However, implementation of EBP has often proved to be a challenging task (Bellamy et al., 2013; Severinsson, 2012). Positive attitudes of professionals toward EBP have been reported in the context of nursing (Duffy et al., 2015; Melnyk et al., 2012) and social work (Aarons et al., 2009; Parrish and Rubin, 2012). However, deficiencies associated with consistent implementation of EBP have been reported, both in nursing (Duffy et al., 2015; Karma et al., 2015; Melnyk et al., 2012) and in social work (Parrish and Rubin, 2012). Many kinds of barriers for EBP in nursing have been reported, the main barriers often being related to a lack of resources, for example, time and competencies, and a non-supportive organizational culture (Fairbrother et al., 2016; Gerrish et

al. 2008; Khammarnia et al., 2015; Melnyk et al., 2012). The same kinds of barriers have also been reported within social work (Franklin and Hopson, 2007).

In the promotion of EBP in organizations, leaders (Sandström et al., 2011, Stetler et al., 2014) and other professionals who have duties related to the development of the practices, e.g. advanced practice nurses in the health care sector (Melnyk et al., 2014), have many duties related to EBP. In a Master's Degree program 'Development and Management of Social Services and Health Care' (90 ects) at one Finnish university of applied sciences, the students have studied topics related to the duties of the managers and developers on a 2 ects course 'Development and Management of Evidence Based Practice' (later 'D & M of EBP'). In 2014, the faculty joined a national project on 'Creating a strong R & D (research & development) profile for Master's Degree programmes'. The main aims of the project were to strengthen, develop and renew transfers of knowledge and competence between higher education institutions and workplaces, as well as to strive for a more multidisciplinary quality in workplace innovations, thus bringing teaching and workplaces closer together. To meet these aims, a Teaching Development Effort (later TDE) on the 'D & M of EBP' course was established. The TDE included academic service partnerships (later ASP) with commissions for the students. The aim of this article is to report on the study findings related to the experiences of the representatives of working life regarding the ASP they participated in. The expressions 'representative of working life' and 'working life representative' refer to the members of the social services or health care staff working in service organisations. The commission for the students involved preparing a plan for the implementation of EBP for the workplace.

Implementation was defined as "a specific set of activities designed to put an activity or programme of a known dimension into practice" (Fixsen et al., 2005, p. 5). In their review, Fixsen et al. (2005) categorized implementation as occurring on three degrees: a paper implementation, a process implementation and a performance implementation. A paper implementation refers to preparing a recorded plan on how the change will be accomplished in the rationale adoption of new policies and procedures. The TDE reported here included an assignment whereby small groups of students were instructed to focus on the paper implementation, i.e. the students were supposed to prepare a plan for the implementation of EBP in a working unit or organization which was a partner of the faculty and had given a commission to the students. As the explicit use of a theoretical approach is recommended when planning the implementation of EBP (Cullen and Adams, 2012; ICEBeRG, 2006), the students were supposed to use a theoretical approach in their work.

<u>BACKGROUND</u>

The concept of an Academic Service Partnership (ASP) was defined as "an officially structured partnership for a university and a practice setting with a shared vision that builds on strength, demonstrated collaboration, and supports change for the sake of improvements" (DeGeest et al., 2013, p. 447). In a systematic review by DeGeest et al. (2013), it was found that approximately one third of the ASPs was highly structured and two thirds was moderately structured. Resource availability was considered as a key facilitator, and open and frequent communication was deemed essential to ensure that effective cooperation took place.

From the point of view of nursing workplaces, the evidence on the outcomes of ASPs including EBP-related activities is associated with baccalaureate nursing education. Working life representatives have been satisfied with the students' EBP projects at clinical sites (Stone and Rowles, 2007). The projects have offered opportunities to educate nursing staff and patients and to improve the overall level of nursing practice (Stone and Rowles, 2007) and EBP (Beal, 2012). In ASPs, the nursing staff has benefitted from faculty knowledge and experience to improve EBP (Beal, 2012; Dobalian et al., 2014) and the faculty has had access to subjects for their research (Beal, 2012). It has been found that inter-organizational teamwork is a critical factor in enabling the partnerships, and that basing stable relationships on long-term commitments is important (Dobalian et al., 2014).

There is scant literature on the experiences of social workers of ASPs. However, Drabble et al. (2013) did describe a framework for a partnership between a university and local child welfare agencies and reported that the agencies received enhanced research capacity during the partnership.

<u>ACADEMIC SERVICE PARTNERSHIPS AS PART OF THE TEACHING DEVELOPMENT EFFORT</u>

The aims of the TDE, which included the ASPs, were as follows:
- Students' learning aim: to prepare a realistic plan for the use of a service for the implementation of EBP
- Services: to develop EBP for a particular workplace

- Faculty: to develop the quality of teaching about EBP on the Master's Degree program called Development and Management in Health Care and Social Services

The students' work in ASPs was based on the idea that in order for the successful implementation of EBP to occur, there has to be a plan describing the purposeful implementation processes in sufficient detail (Fixsen et al., 2005). Moreover, the plan should be theoretically-informed. In order to support both the students' learning and the efforts of the services in the development of EBP, partnerships with services were established. More specifically, these partnerships with services were created in order to obtain real working life commissions for the students to use when preparing an implementation plan for a particular EBP action. Because the scope of the course was very limited, only 2 ects, the commission had to be restricted to preparing the plan; the students were not supposed to participate in further stages of the implementation.

The course 'D & M of EBP' started in January, 2015 in a new format. After an online self-directed learning phase, the students participated in a contact learning day, during which they were placed in small groups and given their commissions from workplaces. The topics of the different commissions were to prepare implementation plans for the following practices: 1) rehabilitative work experience within adult social care services; 2) method of motivational interviewing for mental health services; 3) the WHO/Unicef Baby Friendly Initiative in a maternity hospital; 4) a model to prevent falls in older people at a long-term care ward; 5) changes in practices in the writing of a discharge summary in nursing documentation at an operative and conservative care clinic; and 6) journal clubs at an operative care clinic. The commissions were part of the quality improvement of the services.

A total of 20 students were divided into six small groups. Each group then received one of the commissions. As it was not possible to take the earlier education and working experience of these students into account when making contracts with services about the commissions, some of the students received a commission in a context that was familiar to them, whereas for others, the context was unknown.

In the contract between the faculty and the service organizations, each service organization agreed to have at least one staff member as a contact person to the student group. The contacts agreed to meet their student group at least three times during the process. Their responsibilities in these meetings at different phases of the process

were as follows: 1) to help the students in their assessment of the starting point; 2) to evaluate the plan in the middle phase of the process and provide suggestions and instructions for the continuation; 3) to provide feedback regarding the final evaluation of the plan. The teacher was always willing to offer guidance and support to the students and the contact persons whenever needed, either face to face or by email, as well as by participating in the middle phase meetings between the students and the contact persons. After the third meeting, the students finished and sent off the implementation plan for introduction into working life. The plans were subsequently evaluated by the teacher as course assignments. As the plans proved that the students had met their learning aims, they were awarded study credits.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the experiences of working life representatives regarding the development of evidence based practice in academic service partnerships within the social and health care sector. The questions presented to the informants were: 1) Please describe the usefulness of the plan for the implementation of EBP prepared by the students; 2) Please describe the significance of this academic service partnership for the development of working life. The aim was to map the experiences of the working place representatives about the ASP they had participated in, which could then be used in further development of ASPs. Because the students were supposed to only prepare the plan for the implementation of EBP and not participate in further stages of the implementation, the contact persons were then supposed to lead the implementation of the chosen EBP in the units. Consequently, the first research interest was to gain knowledge about the usefulness of the plans, i.e. how well would the plan support the representatives of working life in the implementation of EBP in their unit. Because the national project aimed to strengthen, develop and renew transfers of knowledge and competence between higher education institutes and workplaces, the second research interest was to gain an understanding on the significance of this partnership for the representatives of working life, i.e. if the ASPs had produced benefits related to the aims of the national project in a way that the representatives of working life felt was worth the effort.

Sampling and data collection

All 10 working life representatives who had been named as a contact person for the students were invited by email to participate in the study. Eight of them gave their informed consent. Six of the participants were managers and two were working on a specialist vacancy.

A qualitative research approach was used, as studies based on this approach can elucidate varied dimensions of a complicated phenomenon. The findings are typically based on the real-life experiences of people with first-hand knowledge of a phenomenon (Polit and Beck, 2012). The data were collected by email interviews during a two-week period in May 2015. In terms of using email, the data collection method conformed to the internet interviewing method (Polit and Beck, 2012). No website use was needed in recruitment because the persons eligible for the study were contacted directly via email. The informants were sent the questions once they had expressed an interest to participate in the study. The email interviewing method was flexible and allowed the informants to choose the time point they would write their descriptions within the two-week period agreed. The interviewing method also included the possibility for the researcher to ask the informants further questions or to provide clarifications when needed.

Ethical issues and approval

This study was carried out in accordance with The Code of Ethics of the World Medical Association for experiments involving humans (World Medical Association, 2014). Permission to conduct the study was obtained from all relevant organizations. It was stressed in all the information for the participants that participation was voluntary. The participants gave their informed consent via email. Because the author was in contact with the informants, they could not remain anonymous. However, the confidentiality was assured. In data collection, the researcher used the faculty's email program which was protected according to the information security guidelines of the organization. All material obtained was saved to a secured USB memory stick. After that each email message was destroyed. The data were saved with ID numbers without any personal details.

Since the researcher was familiar with the informants and involved with the ASPs, there was a possibility of a potential conflict of interest. For example, the data could be analysed from a perspective other than that of a researcher or that the researcher may feel forced to 'be loyal' to the informants. In order to avoid any such presuppositions about the phenomenon under study, the researcher stived to confront the data in pure form by

self-reflecting the subjective research process, with a close awareness of her own personal biases and

perspectives, which could have had the potential to affect the analysis (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009).

<u>Data analysis</u>

The data was analyzed using a qualitative content analysis method. An inductive approach for the analysis was

used, meaning that the categories emerged from the data and no theoretical framework was used in the analysis.

The unit of analysis could be a word, a phrase, a sentence or a unit of meaning which could contain more than

one sentence. The material was reduced by coding meaningful expressions that were significant for the research

purpose. The reduced expressions were then grouped together on the basis of the similarity of the content and

abstracted into subcategories and categories. The categories were named based on their contents. Only the

manifest content was analyzed (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). After categorizing the data, the author returned to

studying the original material in order to specify the contents of the categories (Elo et al., 2014). An example of

the coding procedure is presented in Table 1. In reporting the results, the main categories are written with Bold

and Italics, and the subcategories are written with Italics. Quotations from the original data (I = Informant) are

presented with Italics.

Table 1

An example of the coding procedure: how the subcategory 'A strong link to the context' was produced.

Examples of the substantive material	Reduced expressions	Subcategory
"… the assessment of the starting point in our own unit was useful." (I1)	the assessment of the starting point in our own unit was useful	A strong link to the context
"… the plan was tied to the context…" (I2)	tied to the context	
"... the way of writing expresses what these things mean in our practice." (I2)	expresses what these things mean in our practice	
"… this was made together with practitioners, for a known work unit…" (I4)	made together with practitioners, for a known work unit	
"… the students collected information about this workplace…" (I5)	collected information about this workplace	
"The work has been workplace-based and we can use the plan in its entirety." (I8)	workplace-based	

Trustworthiness of the study

Trustworthiness in the preparation phase of the study (Elo et al., 2014) was strengthened by the method and the descriptive questions being suitable for the purposes of this study. The questions were not pre-tested which weakens trustworthiness. The participants were the best possible informants for this study. As the number of them was restricted, there is a possibility that the data would not represent the whole phenomenon in interest. The selection of the unit of analysis was appropriate for the purposes of this study, because it was flexible and there was no danger of the analysis unit being too narrow or too broad.

As for the organization phase (Elo et al., 2014), an explanation of how the categories were created is provided. Only the manifest content was analyzed which ensures that the results represent the information provided by the informants. The amount of the concepts produced is moderate and it can be determined that the analysis was finished. An external researcher, who is an expert in qualitative methods and familiar with the phenomenon in interest, was familiarized with a part of the original data and reviewed the analysis made by the author. She also reviewed the system of concepts produced in the analysis to ensure that no overlap would exist and that the categorization was logical. For the face validity, she confirmed that the results are credible.

In order to ensure trustworthiness in the reporting phase (Elo et al., 2014), a full description of the methods has been provided. Effort has been made to report the results in a systematical and logical way. Quotations have been used systematically in order to provide readers with some examples of the original data. Readers can evaluate the transferability of the results based on the description of the context, analysis and the results.

<div align="center">RESULTS</div>

Usefulness of the Plan for EBP

At first, the working life representatives were asked to describe the usefulness of the plan for the implementation of EBP that had been prepared by the students. Almost all the informants stated that ***the plan was entirely ready to be taken into use*** in the form that the students had left it. The first subcategory revealed *the importance of getting a written formal plan* for the implementation of EBP. This was considered to be an essential attribute, since it would include the documented instructions for all the members of staff; through these instructions

everything would be remembered during the implementation. In one organization, a written formal plan would be needed as an appendix to an application for funding for the implementation of the EBP action chosen, and the plan made by the students was appropriate for that purpose.

"The plan was thorough and I was really impressed with the way the students had planned all details, including the time schedule and the responsible persons." (I7)

"*Now we have a written plan which can be introduced to practice as such."* (I8)

The second subcategory, *a strong link to the context,* revealed that the plan was seen as having relevance to the purpose for which it was intended (see Table 1 for the illustrations). The students had made an assessment of the context regarding relevant issues for the plan. This was seen as an important step to support the context. Although the basis for the plan was scientific, the way of writing was concrete, including clarifications about what the theoretical concepts presented mean in practice; this made the plan tangible. The third subcategory showed that *the plan was seen as being realistic* in the sense that the scope was concise enough, which would enable a thorough implementation and measurement of the outcomes. The fourth subcategory was that *the plan was clear,* which meant that it was properly structured and would be easy to read and use. The fifth subcategory revealed that *the plan articulated the developmental needs* of the working unit related to the implementation of the chosen EBP action. This was seen as being very useful. The sixth subcategory was the fact that *the plan included attached useful material* for the working unit, which was very much appreciated.

"The plan shows us what we should develop in our organization in future." (I5)

One informant stated that ***the plan made by the students needed some amending*** before being adopted. These amendements regarded the evaluation strategy of the outcomes of the implementation of the chosen EBP action. In their presents form, the measurement means planned by the students were not as thorough as they should be. However, the amendments for the plan would be made in the working unit.

"*The measurement of the outcomes can't be as simple as the students had planned it*." (I1).

Significance of the ASP for the development of working life

In the second interview question, the informants were asked to describe the significance of the ASP for the development of working life. The partnership was found to be a way to **improve the quality of the service**; this first main category contained three subcategories. First, *the patients and the clients would benefit* from the implementation of the EBP action in the form of better health and welfare. Second, the implementation of EBP was expected to produce *cost-benefits,* and third, to bring about *a good organization reputation.*

"We had already known for a long time that this intervention is effective and that we should enhance the quality of our service by starting to implement it. The problem earlier (before the ASP) *was that we did not know how to make the change in practice."* (I3)

"Our organization will get a good reputation when we inform about this EBP action taken into use." (I1)

The workplace-based student assignment topics brought added value in three distinct ways. Firstly, the assignments produced *concrete benefits for the workplaces*. This was because the topics of the assignments were based on the needs of the workplaces. Secondly, contact persons and other members of staff in the units had a *high motivation in helping and guiding* the students, because the aim for the students' assignment (the plan) outcome was the same as their own. Thirdly, *the value of the expertise of the practitioners was visible* from the way that the students needed their expertise when applying the theoretical approach into this very special practice context.

"Our motivation was high." (I6)

"... we understood that the expertise of the practitioners is also important." (I2)

Receiving external views to support the development of EBP in the workplace was valued; this value came from both the students' and the teacher's input. The *students' views* were appreciated, because they had just recently studied the topic in theory and brought new knowledge to the workplaces. Furthermore, the students were seen as being competent and trustworthy in terms of preparing the plan. The discussions between the students and the working life representatives had been inspiring and the informants admired the amount of learning that the students had acquired regarding the implementation of EBP during a relatively short period of theoretical studies. It had been noticed that some students came from very different educational and workplace

backgrounds compared to the context of the commission their small group received; still their work was well-managed. The *teacher's views* were valued, because she participated in the guidance of the students and provided useful feedback on the plan and showed the way how to proceed in preparing it. Furthermore, the teacher also left room for the working life representatives to have the final say on what was appropriate regarding the context that they knew best. The aim of the faculty to develop the quality of teaching through the TDE was appreciated by the working life representatives, because it showed that the faculty did not see itself as just a 'giving', but also as a 'receiving' party in common efforts relating to the development of EBP.

"We have now received high quality academic know-how to support our efforts which we value highly." (I6)
"*It was so good to get external fresh insights and support for our efforts to develop our practices*." (I8)

The partnership provided **opportunities for the practitioners to learn new things**. This included two subcategories. The first subcategory, *learning about theoretical approaches supporting the implementation of EBP,* was often met with the remark that, in the workplace, no knowledge had been available to suggest that such theoretical approaches even existed. Regarding the second subcategory, *development of critical thinking,* it was easy to see that this had taken place through discussions between the students, the working life representatives and the teacher, because many different possible solutions were considered and the evidence supporting different point of views had been examined.

"This cooperation was very fruitful and gave new insights, because there were so many good discussions including critical reflections on how to do things." (I4)

The informants gave **value for the theoretical approach** used by the students in preparing the plan. It was found to create new perspectives and provide concrete directions for planning: i.e. the aspects that have to be taken into account from the first step of identifying the need for a change to the evaluation of the outcomes.

"The theoretical approach used by the students gave good advice about how to proceed systematically in the implementation." (I4)

The partnership **inspired** virtually all **the informants to look to the future**, which resulted in three visions for the continuation of the development of EBP in the workplace being presented. The first vision was that there is *a need for a strong will and adherence to EBP by all sides* in the workplace in order for the implementation of EBP to be successful; this is something that should be worked hard for in the future. The second vision was that *EBP will be a new way to develop the work* by challenging practitioners to find new ways of thinking. The third vision was that the *continuation and development of the partnerships with the faculty will become increasingly important*; a strong will to continue and develop the cooperation around EBP was expressed. Some of the informants mentioned that they were satisfied with the faculty's arrangements as there had been a clear contract from the start, including descriptions of the aims as well as the roles and duties of the students, working life representatives and the faculty. One informant suggested that shorter meetings could be held more frequently in the future.

"In future, all sides must have a strong will (to implement EBP) *to make it a success."* (I5)
"*Your offer about the partnership was very welcome and I believe that the needs for this kind of collaboration will increase in future."* (I3)

The partnership had enabled **successful time management**. This was described in two subcategories. The first subcategory, *members of the working unit saved their own working time,* was seen in the fact that the students did most of the work and the working life representatives were only supposed to support them during their work. This practical help from the students was highly valued as it helped to overcome the difficulties caused by a constant lack of time. Furthermore, the informants admired the high commitment of the students to the work. *Scheduled meetings between the contact persons and the students* were seen as important because the contact persons then knew in time when the meetings would be and how long they were supposed to last. This helped the workers in their time management.

"We would never have been able to put those planning things on paper here at our workplace, without the students' work." (I7)

DISCUSSION

The first interview question presented to the informants asked them to describe the usefulness of the plan for the implementation of EBP prepared by the students. Most of the informants regarded the plan as entirely useful, and only the work of one student group needed any later amending. When describing the usefulness of the plan, it was stated that it was useful to get a written formal plan (Fixsen et al., 2005). The informants described the plan in terms of having a strong link to the context, being realistic and clear, and articulating the developmental needs of the unit, which all reflect the elements of a plan for the implementation of EBP described by Barker (2010) and the benefits of a use of a theoretical framework (ICEBeRG, 2006). In one unit, the written plan enabled the application for financial funding, reported also by Beal (2012).

In the second interview question, the informants were asked to describe the significance of the ASP for the development of working life. One significant outcome of the ASP was described in terms of it assisting in improving the quality of the service. According to Gillam and Siriwardena (2014), quality improvement efforts should be based on sound evidence, and this is one example on how the workplaces used the opportunity to improve the quality. The services had met their aim associated with the TDE regarding the development of EBP in their own workplace. This is in line with earlier findings which, however, represent benefits gained by workplaces in ASPs associated with baccalaureate nursing education (Beal, 2012; Dobalian et al., 2014; Stone and Wallace, 2007).

This TDE was part of a national project on 'Creating a strong R & D profile for Master's degree programmes' which aimed for strengthening, developing and renewing transfers of knowledge and competence between higher education institutions and workplaces, and striving for a more multidisciplinary quality in workplace innovations, bringing teaching and workplaces closer together. The results of this study point out that these aims were achieved well. First, the informants valued the workplace-based student assignment topic, which can be seen as one thing that has brought teaching and workplaces closer together. This kind of cooperation is recommendable in order to provide the students with 'real' working-life related topics to motivate them and to motivate the workplace representatives to help and guide the students in their work, as was brought up in this study. Second, the working life representatives valued receiving external views to support the development of EBP in their workplace, as has been reported before (Beal. 2012; Dobalian et al., 2014) Third, the working life

representatives had received opportunities to gain new insights, as also reported by Stone and Rowles (2007). This may support the implementation of EBP on workplaces, since a lack of competencies has been reported as a barrier for the implementation of EBP (Fairbrother et al., 2016; Gerrish et al. 2008; Franklin and Hopson, 2007; Khammarnia et al., 2015; Melnyk et al., 2012). One of the learning experiences was the development of critical thinking. However, it can be assumed that the idea of critical thinking was not totally new for the workplaces, because it is obvious that they had already practiced it, as it involves reflection on the practices carried out and questioning whether the way of doing is based on evidence and whether if there would be a need for a change in practice (Taylor, 2010). Giving the commission to the students was a sign of an intention to change the practice. Fourth, interprofessional collaboration in the social services and health care sectors is important, but applying it in practice can be challenging (Isoherranen, 2012). It had been noticed by the informants that some students came from very different educational and workplace backgrounds compared to the context of the commission their small group received. Still, their work was well-managed. This may result from the fact that the students knew the theory behind the implementation of EBP well enough before starting the assignment. In other words, the cooperation may have become successful because this background knowledge, especially, was combined with the knowledge that the working life representatives possessed regarding the context and the needs of the workplace. As such, the professional background of the students was not crucial issue.

The representatives of working life valued the use of the theoretical approach and the fact that they had learned new things about how to utilize this approach. Ullrich et al. (2014) report about the varied use of an implementation theory in implementing evidence into practice and also the lack of any implementation theory being used. In light of this, they suggest that guidance for using an implementation theory could increase the explicit use of a theoretical approach. Having students apply a theoretical approach in their work in a commission is one way of transferring knowledge about applicable theoretical approaches to workplaces that can be recommended.

The informants pointed out that for a successful implementation of EBP, there is a need for a strong will and adherence to EBP from all sides at the workplace. A new way to develop the work by challenging practitioners to find new ways of thinking was also envisioned. These findings refer to a culture supporting EBP, which "must integrate evidence-based care into its vision, philosophy, mission and strategic plan, which must then be visible and clearly communicated throughout the organization" (Melnyk, 2012, p. 79). The will to continue and develop

the partnerships with the faculty was expressed. Satisfaction with the arrangements was expressed in terms of a clear contract including descriptions of the aims, roles and duties of the students, working life representatives and the faculty. Such outputs for promoting the collaboration in ASPs have been reported by Dobalian et al. (2014). Furthermore, the teacher's contribution by guiding the students in preparing the plan, while leaving room for the working life representatives to have the final say on what was appropriate concerning the context was mentioned, which is associated with the importance of open and frequent communication (DeGeest et al., 2013) and teamwork (Dobalian et al., 2014).

The lack of time has also been reported as a barrier for the implementation of EBP (Fairbrother et al., 2016; Gerrish et al. 2008; Khammarnia et al. 2015; Melnyk et al., 2012). In this study, however, the partnership had helped the working life representatives in their time management for EBP.

The weakness of this TDE was the fact that the ASPs were brief and the students could participate only in the planning phase. As such, the ASPs in this TDE can be described as being unstructured, limited in time and focusing only on a specific project (DeGeest et al., 2013). DeGeest et al. (2013) report that more structured ASPs often reflect ongoing relationships serving mutual objectives, while Dobalian et al. (2014) report on basing stable relationships on long-term commitments; both of which will become future aims of the faculty. Nevertheless, the faculty succeeded to achieve their aims in developing the quality of teaching about EBP on the program and the students achieved their learning aims as seen with the evaluation of the EBP plans prepared by the student groups as course assignments.

This study aimed at mapping the experiences of the working life representatives about the ASP they had participated in. As a study result, the informants expressed a will to continue and develop the partnerships with the faculty. As concrete outcomes, two out of the six organizations took an initiative regarding the continuation. The first initiative was to offer the students an opportunity to continue within the EBP implementation they had planned, and to write their Master's Thesis about the whole implementation process. Out of the small group, two students accepted this offer. The second initiative regards an enhancement of the EBP competencies of the nursing staff. This partnership, that started in Fall 2016, includes an educational intervention organized by the faculty and funded by the hospital. The outcomes of the education will be evaluated in a follow-up study.

This study produced new findings on the topic in the context of a Master's Degree programme. Previous studies in the context of nursing were associated with baccalaureate degree education. As only scant literature is available on the experiences of social workers working with ASPs, these study results especially add to the available knowledge about the topic in a social work context.

CONCLUSIONS

This study produced some tentative results about the experiences of the representatives of working life pursuant to the development of EBP within ASPs. The majority of the informants found the EBP plans prepared by the students to be useful. Moreover, since the ASPs had been significant for the development of working life in many ways, the use of ASPs is recommended.

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