

Pedagogical development at Karolinska Institute University Library (KIB) – a management perspective

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Abstract

Pedagogical research and empirical studies show that student learning is encouraged by a number of general factors. Enthusiasm for the subject is one such factor. User-education in research libraries is often highly repetitive and contact time with students is very limited. So the question is - how can one help library teachers maintain enthusiasm? At KIB, user-education is organised in a way to try to do this. For example, library teachers can choose the courses they teach, adapt teaching materials to their own teaching style, teach in pairs, get involved in pedagogical project work, etc. However, it is evident that during periods of intensive teaching even the most enthusiastic of library teachers tire, but perhaps our approach postpones the onset of teaching fatigue. In this paper, a model for pedagogical development will be presented in further detail.

Introduction

In 1998, I was employed as pedagogical developer at the Karolinska Institute University Library (KIB); a large research library providing service to the Karolinska Institute (KI) - medical university in Sweden (about 6000 undergraduates and 2000 doctoral students). My mission was to stimulate pedagogical processes within the library - but how should one do this? This paper will first present user-education and then go on to describe some of the current features of pedagogical development at KIB.

Positive working climate

KIB has about 130 staff at two equally large sites in the north and south of Stockholm. Under the leadership of the Library Director, Per Olsson, the library is characterised by a flat hierarchy, team-orientation and openness. The positive working atmosphere forms an important backdrop for pedagogical development.

User-education at KIB

KIB holds on average about 350 teaching sessions (consisting of 2,000 teaching hours) in medical information retrieval each year. The number of courses held by KIB is steadily rising as the teaching staff at KI becomes increasingly aware of the importance of developing the information literacy of students and it seems true to say that the university's teachers value and therefore ask after these courses. The library not only teaches students and doctoral students but also gives courses for KI staff as well as other health service professionals and medical librarians etc. User-education brings in about 1,1 million Swedish crowns per year.

Organisation of user-education

As pedagogical developer, I have the overall responsibility for user-education. I am helped by several enthusiastic co-ordinators who schedule user-education and mobilize library staff to teach. Since there is no formal user-education department at KIB, these co-ordinators and teachers not only teach, but also continue to work in customer services as well as being involved in project work (as do all other library teachers).

3-stage model for user-education for undergraduates

Generally, one can say that we use a "3 stage model" for developing information literacy in undergraduates. Stage 1, during the first term, is a basic introduction to the library. Stage 2, later on during the first term, deals with medical information retrieval from key databases and finally, stage 3, often related to project work in a later term, focuses on further databases and Internet resources. Other forms of user-education also exist in parallel to the 3-stage model but are the exception rather than the rule.

Pedagogical development at KIB

Generally, the library teachers are very positive about teaching. They talk about it, argue and are involved. I think there are a number of factors that contribute to this positive atmosphere.

Vision for the development of library teachers

That every library teacher at KIB has the confidence and knowledge to change pedagogical approach and method as needed to improve learning. This vision gives something to strive towards.

The existence and enthusiasm of the pedagogical developer

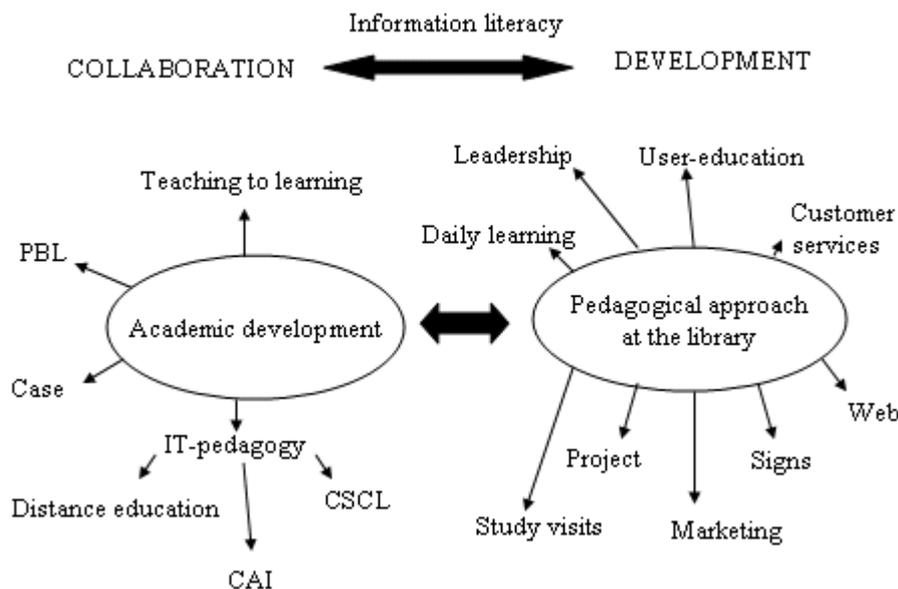
The fact that KIB has a pedagogical developer signals to the staff that management takes the area of user-education seriously. This is good.

Pedagogical platform

KIB has a policy document for user-education in the form of a "Pedagogical Platform for user-education" (1). It discusses the issues of learning, knowledge, teaching, user-education, information literacy and even pedagogical development. It is based on the belief that what one teaches and how one teaches is determined by how one views these issues (2-4). Library teachers are encouraged to reflect on learning and teaching. The platform reflects my preference for phenomenography (5)

Pedagogical models

I think that developing mental models is important. Here is a model for pedagogical development at the library, partially inspired by (6).



The idea behind the right-hand side (Pedagogical approach at the library) is that increased understanding of learning and teaching can help to stimulate development of library functions, typically user-education but also, for example, customer services. The idea behind the left-hand side (Academic development) is that an understanding of present day pedagogical theory, concepts and ideas can be used to create new forms of collaboration with teachers in the mother organisation, in our case, KI. The main focus is information literacy.

I often use this figure when discussing the development of user-education with the library teachers. For example, working with developing distance education has certainly created new forms of collaboration with KI teachers.

Goals for the development of user-education

We try to have clear goals about what we should develop each year in the area of user-education. Sometimes written and sometime not, it is clear that goals need regular discussion to keep them alive.

Library teachers choose the courses they teach

Library teachers are provided with the schedule from the coordinators for the forth-coming term's teaching. In the first instance, they can choose which type of session they want to teach. For example, a librarian might only want to teach nurses so she/he can learn something about the nurse's course and the subjects they study. In the second instance, individuals are asked if they can teach a particular session.

Teaching in pairs

The library teachers can also choose if they want to lead the teaching session or assist. The library teachers enjoy teaching pair-wise and point out the advantages: valuable to plan and discuss with a teaching partner (also a critical friend); chance for experienced library teachers and newcomers to work together; variation by teaching with different people; learn about different teaching styles etc. From my point of view, pair-wise teaching also means that teaching is no longer a private activity. Unfortunately, pair-wise teaching is expensive in term of resources.

Positive support from the customer services managers

The general policy is that those who teach a lot work less in customer services when the teaching load is heavy. We try to make it easy to say "yes" to teaching even when teaching clashes with scheduled work in the customer services since the customer services manager finds a replacement.

Active use of Educational Resources

At KIB, all the staff has on-line access to teaching information and materials from a site on the library's intranet: educational resources. This allows teachers who are short of time to teach using the materials available. But we also encourage teachers who have more time to use these materials as inspiration for developing an individual teaching style. Library teachers also freely deposit their PowerPoint presentations at this site. Again, from my point of view, this encourages an open and generous atmosphere around user-education.

Pedagogical skills development opportunities

The library teachers have a number of opportunities for pedagogical skills development; internal workshops, access to pedagogical literature, attendance at external workshops and conferences etc. Being involved in a project to develop teaching, however, seems to work best. For example, we have recently adapted the method of Web Quest (7) to user-education: (http://kib.ki.se/edu/ped_resurs/webbquest/sjukskoterskor/index.htm) (8, 9).

Variation in students and changes in teaching content

The library teachers have learned to adapt their teaching of medical information retrieval to a number of different target groups and this seems to provide some variation. The content of teaching has also changed to include more diverse ACT skills, which has proved both stimulating and challenging.

Quantity, quality and effect of user-education

In a statistical database, library teachers report on teaching: course length, preparation time, number of library teachers involved and number of students. From this information, it is possible to quantitatively define how much user-education we do, how and approximately how much it costs. The library teachers are usually very interested in statistics, which also makes user-education more widely visible within the library. Students also fill in a short electronic course evaluation, which gives feedback on the quality of teaching. We are currently developing a pre- and post-test to try to track the development of student information literacy. The next step - to assess the effect of our teaching on subject learning - will require more time.

Making library teachers perceptions visible

It seems to me that much of pedagogical development is about creating a common language. It is about understanding differences in how we perceive pedagogical issues. Recently, a Nina Ström interviewed ten of the librarian teachers at KIB and, through analysis of the interviews, she could pick out differences in perception (based on phenomenography) of user-education (10), partially inspired by (11, 12). The three main perceptions were: 1) user-education is about learning to use the library; 2) user-education is about learning the search process; and 3) user-education is about helping students to learn their subject. Here, we have the means to understand differences in opinion about what and how we teach. I think that the library teachers will enjoy talking about this. And it will help further pedagogical development.

A partial cure for teaching fatigue?

Do library teachers get less tired because of pedagogical development? This is some support in the literature for our approach (13) At KIB, there are lively pedagogical discussions in the corridor and, the other day, one of the library teachers told me that she really looked forward to teaching next term and how exciting it would be. But they still, at times, get tired of teaching - as I think all teachers do.

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