

THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD

Tripwires and golden moments as academic staff and teaching librarians at the faculties of Nursing and Teaching and Interpreter Education, Sør-Trøndelag University College, Trondheim work together to put information literacy on the agenda.

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Abstract

Is “information literacy” confused with “information skills” in the technology-based learning environments of today? Does mastering of basic information skills lead to higher order understanding and improved competence? We present two examples of how librarians and academic staff strive to collaborate on what librarians usually call “information literacy”.

Introduction

In 1967, long before our present students were born, the French philosopher Jaques Derrida postulated: “La fin du livre et le commencement de l’écriture”.¹ As regards books, we have heard over and over again that books as closed, completed structures have no future against writing, seen as an unlimited process. PCs, multimedia, the Internet and Google have their natural place in Norwegian schools. The effects of these converging media take us from the fate of books to Derrida’s “commencement de l’écriture” – the beginning of writing. Almost every school child has Internet at home and uses it regularly. The German professor Thomas Ziehe claims that most young people use Internet not as a source of information but rather as a medium of communication: e-mail, chatting, blogging and SMS offer constant possibilities for keeping in touch.² René Descartes’ famous “Je pense, donc je suis”³ has become “I’m accessible, therefore I exist”.

Books do most certainly have a past. More or less in the same way as we were socialised 30 years ago, the students of today are socialised to work with textbooks during 13 years of compulsory education, despite the cross-curricular and project work introduced in Norwegian curricula during the 1990s. After having browsed through teaching material designed for pupils in primary and secondary school and studied a number of books about learning methods and project work written primarily for teacher training students, one thing is very clear: information skills and library use are not part of this discourse. Which impact has the

¹ “The End of Book and the Beginning of Writing” Derrida, Jaques (1967). *De la grammatologie*. Paris : Minuit.

² Ziehe, Thomas (2004). *Øer af intensitet i et hav af rutine : nye tekster om ungdom, skole og kultur*. København : Politisk Revy.

³ “I think therefore I exist” Descartes, René (1637). *Discourse on method*.

converging media of today in ordinary school settings? Is the media still the message?⁴ One might say that while at school students become socialised through textbooks, privately they socialise through writing, but not on paper.

Skilful writing, however, does require effort. To learn anything, you must direct your attention towards the task. And again, without correction, there can be little learning. That is why most universities and university colleges now focus on individual tutoring and portfolios as major forms of assessment. Learning does not just happen by osmosis during the process of professional socialisation, but demands involvement and participation in situated learning processes.⁵ During the course of their long school careers, students have probably often copied or reproduced texts freely from books or the Internet. Helping yourself to texts in this way is a habit which is not easily broken to be replaced by strict standards requiring tidy references and thorough reading, as well as a formal style which is far removed from that of students' highly informal social writing.

The problematic transition from pupil to student

New students enter a unique context: the communicative, academic community. Initiation into this community involves "listening" to the voices which the novice can hear. This process involves reading academic texts, capturing the academic tone and developing the style themselves by, for example, using the existing codes, languages and signs expressing their own ideas and reflections in portfolios and receiving response from tutors and peers.

Unlike more experienced practitioners, new students lack knowledge of the underlying structures and principles of their subject areas. This knowledge is vital in processing new information since it allows relevant information to be sorted out from what is less relevant or even irrelevant. As a result of this structured knowledge, the expert is able to place fragments of information in a meaningful frame of reference.

In order to develop this academic competence, students must establish solid in-depth knowledge of their subject.⁶ This means that they should be stimulated to participate in learning activities where they explore a topic thoroughly over time. Another way in which in-depth knowledge can be encouraged, is by assigning tasks through which students are made to confront the traditions, history and contexts which are associated with the subject or the profession. Scholarly texts provide an arena for this kind of learning.

Due to the Bologna process, higher education in Norway, as in other European countries, has undergone major changes. One of the Norwegian Government's white papers on higher education, *Do your duty - Demand your rights* (Report No. 27 to the Storting (2000-2001)), stated that priority is to be given to "a combination of teaching methods involving a high level

⁴ McLuhan, Marshall, Quentin Fiore and Jerome Agel (1967). *The medium is the message : an inventory of effects*. New York : Bantam books, 1967.

⁵ Lave, Jean and Etienne Wenger (1991). *Situated learning : legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

⁶ Bransford, John B. ...[et al.] (ed.)(2000). *How people learn : brain, mind, experience, and school*. Washington DC : National Academy Press.

of student activity, new forms of assessment and regular feedback that promotes learning”.⁷ As a method for generating student activity, writing is important because it reflects the habits of the academic staff: they are used to reading and responding to written material. Research on reform processes shows that where the various reform initiatives both support the values of those responsible for implementing them and require not too extensive changes in existing practice, the greater the chance of successful implementation. Consequently, compulsory student writing tasks do not require that teachers acquire new skills, although the quantity of work which such tasks generate is much more problematic. In this respect, implementing learning management systems (LMS) and electronic portfolios has been of vital importance.

At most institutions of higher education in Norway, academic writing has undergone considerable development. International trends stress communication skills as important academic competencies. These changes, of course, affect both courses and students, but also very importantly, teachers. Academic staff must also become aware that they must meet these higher standards in their own academic writing.

In the faculties of teacher education and nursing, where we work, the main concern of teachers has been to provide students with learning opportunities through which they can acquire good professional identities, attitudes and skills.⁸ The overall aim has been to educate competent, reflective practitioners. During the course of their studies, the cultures which students meet in practice situations and in working life have a great impact on their thinking. These communities of practice are important when it comes to the spreading, interpreting and use of information.⁹ Information literacy can in fact not be defined in “splended isolation”.

However, the situations, challenges and problems which students meet in the occupational communities are not necessarily those which are dealt with in scholarly journals and R&D publications. The academic language in these publications contributes to widening the gap which students experience between the world of the university college and the ‘real’ world.

Students are required to learn how to organise knowledge in context and must understand it in relation to their field of study. This involves planning how to structure an assignment, finding relevant information, elaborating on argumentation and supporting assertions. These are just examples of the wide range of skills which are integral to the academic tradition. Different kinds of texts exemplify different traditions and styles. Many courses at our faculties evaluate students on the basis of portfolio assessment where production of portfolios involves close mentoring. When this method is supported by clear quality criteria, it produces significantly better results than traditional writing methods. Useful information about the conventions of various forms of academic texts is available on Internet or in the library. However, students must be made aware of this and may need help in accessing the information they have use for.

⁷ Ministry of Education, Research and Church affairs (2001). *Do your duty – demand your rights : Fact sheet : Reform of the quality of higher education*. http://odin.dep.no/kd/english/doc/white_paper/014071-120002/dok-bn.html

⁸ Lave, Jean and Etienne Wenger (1991). *Situated learning : legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

⁹ Wenger, Etienne (1998). *Communities of practice : learning, meaning and identity*. New York: Cambridge university press.

Sundin, Olof (2002). Nurses’ information seeking and use as participation in occupational communities. *The New review of information behaviour research*. 3, p.187-202.

Librarians are aware that many students encounter problems when they must leave the Internet to try to find what they need in library databases. In addition, the students have only vague ideas about the existence of scholarly journals, they have difficulties understanding bibliographic references not to mention the difficulties in using references correctly in their own work. This obviously affects the quality of their scholarly texts, something which concerns teachers. The concern of librarians is partly the excessive time spent on answering simple questions and the consequent lack of time to demonstrate use of the best sources thoroughly. So librarians and faculty have obviously converging interests which are actually much more important and basic than those about possible plagiarism and cheating which get much greater publicity every spring when most exams results are due.

As mentioned previously, new students are often quite unfamiliar with the academic rules concerning plagiarism and need close guidance.¹⁰ So it is vitally important that students are socialised into research culture.¹¹ Do our examples show that they do?

First, a short presentation of the university college and the library services.

Sør-Trøndelag University College: facts and figures

- Founded in 1994 as a result of merging eight colleges in Trondheim.
- The third largest university college in Norway, and one of the two dominant academic institutions in Trondheim.
- 8000 students, seven faculties, 5 campuses.
- Offers a wide of range vocational studies (bachelor's and master's programmes) as well as continuing education programmes and other courses.
- Has R&D solidly on the agenda.

The library services

Library services at Sør-Trøndelag University College are organised as one unit with approximately 20 staff filling 16 positions. Each of the college's five campuses has a library which offers a full range of services. The online catalogue BIBSYS provides access not only to the resources of the local library, but also to the catalogues of all universities and university colleges in Norway. The libraries offer services to faculty and students as well as to members of the public.

Since there are few librarians, there is little time available for teaching students information skills. Library web pages have links to a selection of the many sophisticated self-instructive tutorials which may compensate for the lack of general, on-campus library instruction. Teaching staff take advantage of the "librarian-to-your-office-service", and students both on and off campus can make use of the "ask-a-librarian-service", successfully started last year. In order to cope with the needs of students and staff both off and on campus and with the demands of a wide range of vocational studies, library services have chosen to give priority to

¹⁰ Love, Patrick and Janice Simmons (1998). Factors influencing cheating and plagiarism among graduate students in a college of education. In: *College student journal*. Vol. 32 Issue 4, p 539- 551.

¹¹ Freedman, Aviva and Peter Medway (ed.)(1994). *Genre and the new rhetoric*. London : Taylor and Frances.

developing electronic collections, especially full text journals and reference databases. In this connection, a cross-institutional project to develop a search portal is to be launched this year.

In this paper we will present two examples of courses which were tailor-made in collaboration with faculty to meet the specific needs of groups of students in connection with writing processes, student nurses in one case and student teachers in the other.

The Faculty of Nursing – some facts and figures

- One of the largest of its kind in Norway
- Offers a bachelor programme in nursing with approx. 750 students
- Offers a number of postgraduate programmes within nursing, e.g. midwifery, public health nursing, mental health care, paediatric nursing with approx. 300 students
- Has approx. 75 employees
- Located with the larger Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, with approximately 130 employees and more than 1200 students on different bachelor programmes and postgraduate programmes
- Has 7 library positions, mostly librarians.

In 2005 the library provided 122 hours of instruction which was attended by 1200 students as well as by faculty. Some of the instruction is in the form of lectures on such topics as e.g. evaluating the quality of Internet sites. Hands-on courses for smaller groups are also offered on topics such as using the library catalogue and selection of reference databases. These courses focus on the needs of the various programmes with relevant search examples as well as specific exercises. For faculty there are both hands-on courses and the “librarian-to-your-office-service” for individual help.

Lectures for students are scheduled in collaboration with academic staff to coincide with periods when students are involved in writing processes. General courses are no longer given for the simple reason that they were very badly attended. The present phase in which a variety of training programmes and different forms of collaboration with the academic staff are being tried out, is exciting but at times frustrating.

An example of academic support

In February 2006, the library was contacted by academic staff of the Faculty of Nursing when 4th term bachelor students were about to start working on a home assignment. This assignment specified making use of "scholarly information", specifically peer reviewed journal articles: the required textbooks were no longer sufficient. Students could also expect to show that they could meet the same scholarly requirements in the written exam in June.

The 200 students needed to learn "how to search for and find journal articles". They had not previously attended a library course and many were not even familiar with the library catalogue. However, they were, according to their teacher, highly motivated.

When the library was contacted just two weeks before the start of the assignment, they were already pressed for time due to other commitments. The standard 3 hour hands-on course for groups of 20, usually offered in connection with the bachelor dissertation in the 5th term, was

out of the question. So students were divided into 2 groups, each of which had a 2 hour lecture which covered general theory and search techniques, a brief introduction to the library catalogue, how to loan and to order copies etc. There was also a demonstration of the databases Medline and Cinahl.

After the lecture, students were invited to attend a workshop where they could practice searching under the guidance of library staff. Attendance at both lectures and workshops was good, so good in fact, that two extras workshops had to be organised in order to give all student an opportunity to participate.

So far, so good.

However, during and after the workshops, groups of students approached librarians with worries about their assignment and about the requirements concerning the use of journal articles. During the lectures librarians had formed the impression, confirmed later by students, that there was general enthusiasm about this "information literacy thing". Students had asked questions and had seemed eager to discuss various issues that had arisen during the lessons. Later, however, students began to be anxious about working at home without the support of teachers, librarians or fellow students. Would they really have access to the databases and the journal articles in full text at home? Librarians tried to give reassurance and encouraged students to make their teachers aware of their concerns.

Eventually however, through their representatives, students requested that the journal article requirement be withdrawn. Although they claimed to have recognised the importance of being able to locate and use different kinds of information, everything had been too sudden and seemed too complicated.

To begin with teachers stood their ground, but gradually it became clear that there was internal disagreement about the value of the requirement. While some considered it high time students were introduced to academic and professional standards of writing, other were of the opinion that skills in using scholarly information were not at all important at bachelor level. There are of course, many reasons for this split. One may be that many faculty members themselves are still in the process of acquiring R&D skills, and are not; therefore, fully "academised". In the end, the teacher responsible for the class decided to withdraw the requirement on the grounds that the timing was wrong and that "information literacy" would have to be introduced more gradually and at an earlier stage in the course, and that it should be integrated in topics and assignments.

What can be learned from this experience?

The fact that academic staff did not have a shared understanding of the need for requiring scholarly standards may account for the difficulties which were encountered in trying to socialise students into the professional community. But there are several factors to consider as well. There obviously were some good ideas and a lot of enthusiasm from the two professions, both librarians and teachers, but the necessary *process* of discussion and collaboration prior to the lecture was deficient. There was no *time* for that.

To their credit, the students involved in this particular case seemed to have become aware of the importance of being "information literate". Following the lectures and workshops, they

pressed teachers for far more detailed plans for teaching information skills and library use in the future. This gives grounds for optimism.

The Faculty of Teacher and Interpreter Education – some facts and figures

- Offers 4 year teacher education (primary and lower secondary school) with different majors, 5 Master programmes (special education, mathematics, science Norwegian and social science) and a Bachelor programme in interpreting for the deaf
- Offers a number of postgraduate programmes both within teacher education and school leadership and shorter courses
- Has approximately 1000 students and 100 employees
- Has 3 library positions

In the National Curriculum for teachers' education of 2003,¹² concepts usually associated with information literacy are not mentioned. The use of ICT, on the other hand, is frequently emphasised, perhaps in an attempt to close the generation gap, since many adults are newcomers or outsiders to the technology while pupils are not. Maybe present student teachers are likely to be technologically literate, but less likely to be information literate.¹³

In the new 2006 Curriculum for the primary and secondary school¹⁴ the school library is mentioned only in connection with Norwegian language and literature. However, ability to search in databases and on the Internet, to incorporate the traced resources in texts, to have a critical attitude to sources, to manage references and to have knowledge of legal and ethical aspects of information are listed in connection with several subjects. In fact, information literacy has a more prominent place in the National Curriculum for compulsory education than in the National curriculum for the teachers' education.

Another example of academic support

Last spring, after several newspaper articles dealing with the problem of students copying texts from the Internet, a new social science teacher and a librarian met over a cup of coffee. The teacher, who has contact with 5th term students, expressed shock about these students' lack of information skills. A teacher of Norwegian language and literature in 2nd year joined the discussion. There was general agreement that information skills needed to be put on the agenda and that at least one explanation for the sad state of affairs at our college was fragmentation of responsibility as the students meet different subjects and various focuses. The new national curriculum for the primary and secondary school made it even more important that teacher students learned information skills while at the university college.

This lunch break marked the start of the process towards establishing information literacy as the responsibility of the campus rather than of individual departments or teachers. The first

¹² Utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet (2003). *Rammeplan for Allmennlærerutdanningen*. <http://www.dep.no/archive/ufdvedlegg/01/04/2Ramm012.pdf>

¹³ Some differences between information literacy and technological literacy are summed up by The University library at CSU Stanislaus. http://www.library.csustan.edu/wjacobs/Class_pages/Infocomp.htm

¹⁴ Utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet (2005). *Kunnskapsløftet : læreplan for grunnskolen og videregående opplæring*. <http://www.odin.no/filarkiv/254450/Laereplaner06.pd>

important step was to launch with the dean, who gave his approval and also granted some money. Then planning of a course for 1st year students was started. At the same time, a guide and standards for scholarly text was developed as well as a document addressed to tutors who would obviously be involved in evaluating these products. Both were presented to the faculty and after some rather heavy discussions it was decided that the course also should be offered to 2nd year students this first time. Both the course and the documents should be evaluated and, if necessary, revised after one year. The documents are accessible on the faculty web site.

In the autumn, when they had just started on work on texts which would be presented for assessment in portfolios, a one day course was offered to 2nd year students. There were 3 groups with approximately 60 students in each. Students were asked to bring their own drafts of texts to the course to provide the basis for discussion. Various aspects of information literacy were taught by a teaching team of librarian and two teachers, topics being shared between them so as to make most use of their respective strengths and interests. During the course of the day, students were taught and participated in discussions about how to formulate research questions, to find and evaluate information, to handle references; they considered scholarly texts from the point of view of genre and confronted ethic and legal questions.

As far as their reaction to the course was concerned, students' reaction was a unanimous: "Why did we have to wait until now for this course?" There was, however, general agreement they would have been make less able to benefit from such a course if they had been offered it as new students. The timing of the course is important. The course was repeated for 1st year students in January. We experienced that the 2nd year students were much more eager than the 1st year students to discuss their own texts and ask questions during the teaching sessions. Some were familiar with some of the topics or had had previous experience which made the discussions lively and interesting. Most students participated fully in the problem solving and information gathering process and following the course students came in small groups to ask for drop-in assistance or formally requested one-on-one assistance in the librarian's office.

Many 1st year students, on the other hand, resented spending a whole day (6 hours) on the subject and some dropped out halfway through. They were also much more reluctant to discuss their own texts. So clearly the timing and other practical details of the course must be re-considered. Even more important, however, is how to involve faculty in the project and in the teaching of the course, particularly those who are directly involved in the teaching of 1st year students. It would be unfortunate if as a consequence of the course, information literacy came to be defined yet again as 'not my job', something to be taken care of by young, enthusiastic teachers or fussy librarians! There is still considerable work to be done in building effective collaborative relations across the campus. Hopefully at least, the bottom-up initiative taken in this case is perceived more positively than top-down mandate would have been. Information literacy is not yet seen as a campus necessity nor is it embedded in the internal culture. The course-integrated approach shown in the primary school curriculum is certainly something to work towards. The next step then would be to establish various aspects of information literacy as part of all subjects in our 4-year programmes, and in all master programmes as well.

As we stated in the introduction, competence demands participation and activity over time. Information literacy does not exist in a vacuum: one day crash courses most probably reinforce this misconception, no matter how perfectly timed. Success will depend on whether teaching librarians and faculty develop ways of collaborating closely over time and of offering appropriate tutoring at the start of student projects.

Conclusion

“Information literacy” has been on the librarians agenda for years. We usually define the concept according to ACRL¹⁵, as “a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information”.¹⁶ This understanding gives a definition that lists a standardized set of operations intended to develop information literacy. We thereby ignore that the teachers, whom we want to collaborate with, most likely would use a more conceptual definition, also taking the whole context into consideration.¹⁷

Nevertheless, “information literacy” should be put on teachers’ agenda, and we, as librarians, should take part in the discussion both to challenge and broaden our own understanding and to make it clear how we can make a contribution. If we are going to progress from working with “skills” to implementing the whole “literacy” concept at our faculties, we think it is necessary to operate on common grounds. Teaching with "information literacy" in mind must be seen as a natural part of developing skilled nurses and primary teachers. This requires of course close co-operation; involving both teachers, librarians and hopefully representatives from the nursing and primary teacher occupation in developing plans for information literacy teaching.

In our examples from the nursing and teacher education, teaching librarians have cooperated with faculty in different ways. Students expect the same kind of tutoring support whether they ask for it at the reference desk or in a teaching setting. In the library, librarians are confident about their professional authority, but lack the formal qualifications and consequently much less confident and in the role of teacher. In attempt to remedy this, some teaching librarians will participate in the course which is offered at the university college to faculty who do not have formal teaching qualifications. The aim is to gain insight into how teaching in-depth, subject oriented information literacy skills can be implemented.

We have been talking about on-going work in developing both the understanding of concepts (skills versus literacy, instruction versus tuition) and some changes that are desirable in subject related teaching. Teaching librarians can play an active role in these processes. How? For example, by offering to form a binding partnership with academic staff and students, by being reflective partners, by asking questions, by demonstrating for teachers how we can contribute with practical work involving information literacy in the various programmes and by confirming students’ need for information skills. Academic support is about far more than scheduling, just-in-time and topic-related hand-on courses. It is about cooperating on a deeper level. It is about form, but most off all about content. Are we as librarians ready to meet these challenges?

¹⁵ Association of College & Research Libraries is a division of ALA (American Library Association)

¹⁶ Information literacy competency standards for higher education. American Library Association. 2006. <http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilcomstan.html> (accessed 27 Jun, 2006)

¹⁷ Sundin, Olof (2002). Nurses’ information seeking and use as participation in occupational communities. *The New review of information behaviour research*. 3, p.187-202.