Case Study : Open Educational Resources in Information Literacy

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1. INTRODUCTION

During 2007 the Lund University Libraries (LUB) administered a project to develop open educational resources (OER) in information literacy. The OERs that were developed treat different aspects of information literacy, such as source evaluation and search methods, and are intended for use by teaching librarians as well as academic teachers. A supplementary aim of the project was to provide librarians with an opportunity for competence development.

This presentation will focus on the reasons behind the project as well as on the use of the OERs as an aid for the university's teaching staff. Describing a work in progress, the presentation will not provide firm conclusions but instead offer the outline of a strategy for information literacy teaching and training.

2. INFORMATION LITERACY – A DEFINITION

The term information literacy designs the capability to search for and manage information. Johnston, Webber and Boon [3] offer the following definition of 'information literacy':

> Information literacy is the adoption of appropriate information behaviour to identify, through whatever channel or medium, information well fitted to information needs, leading to wise and ethical use of information in society.

To be information literate thus implies several things: you must be able to recognize a need for information and also be able to identify relevant and suitable information resources. This means that you must have knowledge of search methods and techniques. Perhaps most importantly, you must also be able to critically evaluate the information you find and know how to use and present it in an effective and ethical manner in your own work.

3. TEACHING INFORMATION SEARCHING OR INFORMATION SEEKING?

Wilson [10] identifies two models for describing the act of searching for information, *information searching* and *information seeking*. The term *information searching* stands for the individual's interaction with computer based information systems while *information seeking* is a wider term, denoting the individual's formulation of problems and search questions, his or her selection of search systems, as well as evaluation and use of the retrieved information.

In order to locate and retrieve the information they need, students need to be able to manage different computer based information systems, i.e. they need to master *information searching*, an area that often is considered to be the responsibility of libraries. Because library teaching seldom is allotted more than the odd hour per semester, the unfortunate consequence is that the libraries' teaching tend to focus the systems, i.e. to focus *information searching* rather than *information seeking*.

Information science research has demonstrated the importance of understanding information searching as a communication-oriented act in which the different approaches to search and manage information depend on the social contexts [5, 6, 8], i.e. that the information is integrated in the education's core subjects. By focusing on the systems instead of adopting a holistic approach, the libraries fail to support the students in developing a deeper insight in information management, i.e. in information literacy.

4. THE LUND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES' PEDAGOGICAL MISSION

At Lund University, the Bologna process[1] has led to learning outcomes for information literacy skills being specified in course curricula, something that in turn has led to an increase in the libraries' teaching activities as well as a need for libraries to explore ways to use available resources efficiently in order to fulfil their mission.

Limberg and Folkesson [4] has shown that there is a general tendency for libraries to try to mediate information literacy by teaching the information systems. Since Limberg and Folkesson have also observed a troublesome lack of conformity between content, expected learning outcomes and assessment in information literacy teaching as well as a connection between the quality of the student's information searching and the quality of his or her learning, it is obvious that teaching librarians will want to revise their pedagogical methods for teaching information literacy.

[1] http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna_en.html

Recognizing the need both to be time efficient and to use up-to-date teaching materials and methods, LUB initiated a project to develop educational resources for the use of all teaching staff. LUB is a decentralized library network, including the Library Head Office and approximately thirty subject libraries linked to the university's faculties. Engaged in the project were faculty members, subject librarians and staff from the Library Head Office.

5. OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN INFORMATION LITERACY

Contemporary research in higher education pedagogy states that varied training in general academic skills, such as information literacy skills, enhances learning within the subject studies [1, 7]. It is thus of major importance that information literacy skills are practiced in different contexts, in order to prepare students for problem solving in both study and work related situations (cf. [1]). OERs find their place in a supportive system, or *scaffolding*, that is considered to facilitate student learning [7].

Modern pedagogical models also advocate student active methods, based on authentic tasks and problems, giving opportunities for reflection (*task-based design* or *capabilities-focused curriculum design*, [1, 7]). Such models stress the importance of a rich learning environment, providing a palette of varied learning resources that students are free to use at their own discretion, allowing the students to develop what Bowden [1] terms *knowledge capability*, i.e. the necessary skills to identify different aspects of a problem and to use his or her knowledge to work out a strategy to solve it. Bowden's ideas are thus parallel to those offered by Johnston, Webber and Boon [3], identifying information literacy as the ability to recognize a need for information and to use information and knowledge effectively.

Sundin [9] has analysed the Swedish university and college libraries' online tutorials and concludes that they are characterised by a mainly source-oriented or behaviour-oriented approach, instead of a communication-oriented approach that emphasizes social aspects of information searching and is intended to support the students' learning. Our aim has been to develop OERs applying a communication-oriented approach with focus on the students as active learning individuals in a social context (see also [1, 2]).

At the same time the use of OERs help to free time for the libraries' teaching staff, since the resources are ready for use in a class room context or, indeed, for student self-study independently of time and space. The OERs can also be seen as a tool to help the individual student to develop his or her skills, in so far as they may be used to align skills within student groups or to offer advanced students a means for improvement. The OERs may thus provide e-learning opportunities to complement and maybe even replace particularly the more instructional elements of the libraries' teaching.

The OERs were developed within four main subject areas: search methods, source evaluation, scientific communication and academic integrity/plagiarism, and were launched in January 2008. Our strategy has been to develop small learning resources that may be used by teaching staff according to their needs in a specific teaching context, both on and off campus. The resources are stored in a repository under a Creative Commons licence, and may be adapted and combined freely and may also be presented in an LMS or any other suitable context.

The use of the OERs has been steadily growing during the spring semester and in June there will be a workshop to document the experience of the teaching staff so far. This event may be seen as the first step towards an evaluation that is scheduled for this coming autumn.

6. REFERENCES

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