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Learning and Teaching in Action

Abstract

This article provides a reflection on the outcomes of an international collaboration between health librarians and academics at York St John University and Pacific University Oregon. In particular, it describes how a month-long visiting professorship from an academic with a clinical librarian background at the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences helped to develop and inform teaching practice in the areas of information literacy and evidence-based health practice on health programmes at Pacific University. Perspectives are offered from both institutions on the rich exchange of knowledge and practice that took place during the visit and the ongoing impact it has had on teaching practices.

Title

International collaborations in learning and teaching: perspectives from a visiting professorship

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1. Introduction

In October 2014 I was invited to attend a month long visiting professorship at Pacific University Oregon, in the USA¹. Pacific University is partnered with my employing organisation York St John University² and my visit came about as a result of this pre-existing relationship.

My role at York as a lecturer in research and evidence-based practice is based within the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences. As a member of staff within this faculty, I hold a unique position that draws on my expertise in health related information science and research methods. My teaching is largely focussed in the areas of evidence-based health practice, health and information literacy skills and research methods. Alongside a number of postgraduate health and social care related modules, a large proportion of my teaching is on the undergraduate occupational therapy (OT) programme, and I am an integral member of the programme delivery team.

In recent years, the partnership between York St John University and Pacific University Oregon has been strengthened particularly by the links between the OT departments at both universities. For example, the two departments have been involved in activities which have led to various reciprocal teaching visits, joint conference presentations, and the publication of a jointly authored book³. It was during these collaborations that the OT team at Pacific learned of my unique role at York St John within the OT programme. My role is one that does not exist within the staff team at Pacific, and the input I provide in terms of leading research and evidence-based practice related teaching in healthcare was of interest to both the OT academic team and director of libraries there. This resulted in my being approached jointly by the Director of Libraries and the OT Programme Director to attend a visiting professorship. In particular, they had hoped from my visit to gain a clearer sense of my role and also to benefit from my expertise within this role in a consultative way, through my provision of a number of mentorship, feedback, review and teaching/training activities during the visit.

2. Reflecting on practice

Jasper^(4,p1) describes reflective practice as being 'one of the most important ways in which we learn from our experiences in a professional context'. Developing reflective skills are an integral part of professional thinking and key to continuing professional development⁵. Reflection provides a basis for learning from specific experiences by considering what was learned, what impact the experience had on an individual's work, and also what impact it has on the future work, and personal/professional development of the individual⁶. Essentially, reflective practice means taking our experiences as a starting point for learning. By thinking about them in a purposeful way we come to understand these experiences more fully and take positive action as a result, often by making changes to existing practice⁷. My visit to Pacific University was a valuable CPD event within my career and also of great benefit to the hosting organisation because it presented a valuable opportunity to build on previous collaborations, and provide a rich exchange of knowledge and practice between the two universities. Considering the experience through a reflective lens enables a deeper understanding of it and a better insight into how the experiences can be applied in practice. The sections which follow provide a jointly written reflective account of the visit, offering perspectives about the visit from both myself and the key staff member who hosted me at Pacific, Marita Kunkel, Director of Libraries and some of her staff team members.

3. Reflections from the visitor

My visit to Pacific was hosted by the University Library and prior to my arrival Marita and I corresponded to identify what both parties were hoping to achieve from the visit. We anticipated that the visit would serve to strengthen the existing partnership and contribute to raising the international profile of both institutions, and we spent time identifying a number of shared goals which we felt were of mutual benefit.

This was particularly useful because it enabled us to proceed quickly and efficiently from the very beginning of my arrival. Based on the goals we had identified, Marita had created a timetable for the four weeks of my visit which incorporated a number of pre-arranged meetings and activities in the earlier part of the visit, but which allowed space and flexibility for me to fill the remainder of the time with things that grew out of these initial events. On reflection, this worked very well and my time at Pacific resulted in being very busy and fulfilling. We structured the visit to encompass health sciences more broadly, and include, but not be limited to OT. I therefore completed the visit by working between the College of Health Professions (our Faculty of Health and Life Sciences equivalent) and the Health Sciences Library on the Hillsboro Campus, and working with other Faculty members on the Forest Grove Campus including speech and language pathology, public health, learning and teaching technologists, and of course library staff. During my time at Pacific I kept a log of the visit. Each day I identified the activities I had been involved with and reflected on the outcomes of these activities, what I had learned from them and how they informed my own teaching practice. Below is a summary of these reflections presented within two broad categories: learning and teaching; and mentoring and feedback.

3.1 Learning and Teaching

My first experience during the visit was a conference (hosted by the University) on technologies in learning and teaching. I chose to attend presentations that were health related and gained an insight into some innovative teaching practices including how polling techniques were being used in lectures by speech and language pathology academics. This is something I have been able to apply in my own sessions since returning from the visit.

Attendance at Pacific University's own All Faculty Conference provided an interesting observation on how knowledge and ideas are exchanged across faculties within the University, and how inter-disciplinary collaborations can be initiated. Later in the visit, the networking opportunities afforded by this conference led to my delivery of some public health specific seminars across the university on media representation of health stories, their impact on public health and the role of health literacy. The seminars were open to all staff and students and were well attended not only by public health staff and students, but many other disciplines too including pharmacy, OT, physiotherapy and library staff. The post seminar discussions from these presentations were stimulating and provided an insight into the differences in UK and USA experiences and perspectives of the issues I had raised in my talks.

In the area of OT, I spent considerable time providing invited curriculum development input to the Doctorate OT programme. My attendance at curriculum development meetings at Pacific allowed me the opportunity to offer my own perspectives on practice. I was invited to comment and provide feedback on the research and evidence-based practice units on the curriculum at each study level and how information literacy can be integrated into the curriculum, and my contributions were welcomed by the team. This activity gave me the opportunity to develop and extend my understanding of differences in international healthcare and education systems (and associated

terminology and language) which I found particularly fascinating. I was able to make comparisons which helped me identify areas of good practice from both institutions, and also areas for development. This was particularly valuable for both the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences at YSJ, and also Pacific as the areas of good practice I identified taking place at Pacific I have been able, on my return, to feed back to colleagues on the OT programme at York and encourage discussions around curriculum improvement. In particular, this has led to changes in the approaches to assessment in the dissertation module at level 3.

In terms of face-to-face teaching, I observed information literacy sessions taught by faculty librarians on a variety of health sciences programmes. This gave me the opportunity to meet students from different healthcare disciplines and to identify areas of good practice in teaching that could be applied at York to enhance the learning and teaching experience on health programmes here. I was invited to contribute during these sessions and this was well received by both the students and the facilitating librarians and enhanced their learning experience. Furthermore, I also provided tutorials to OT students on research question development and search strategies for their capstone projects (equivalent to a UK undergraduate final year dissertation project).

Alongside these above outlined activities, I also visited the Oregon Health Sciences University (OHSU) in Portland and the University of Washington in Seattle. At OHSU, I received a tour of the new health sciences teaching and library facilities, and also met a number of health informatics academics. Seattle provided an interesting insight into a number of collaborations between clinical librarians and medical consultants. These included the development of a game to teach health information literacy to medical students, two health literacy and health promotion projects being delivered in rural North America, and clinical librarian input into curriculum development for evidence-based practice in emergency medicine. Details of some of these projects will feature in future Learning and Teaching in Action regular features of HILJ.

3.2 Mentoring and Feedback

During my visit two staff members within the health library directorate were changing roles with one stepping into a more active teaching role to cover the sabbatical period of another. This was an area the staff member was not fully confident with, but also she wanted to explore new approaches to her teaching. I was asked to support this transition by spending time mentoring her in the process. I had also been asked to complete a 'portfolio review' which was connected to this particular teaching. The portfolio review was essentially a process of reviewing all materials written within the health libraries directorate for the purposes of teaching health information literacy skills, evidence-based practice, and research. I spent a considerable amount of time working through the materials and providing written comments and feedback and offering constructive criticism on the content. This gave me an insight into how this subject area had previously been delivered, and I was then able to work with the member of staff stepping into that teaching role to identify appropriate content and to discuss methods of teaching it. I spent time sharing my own approaches to teaching the same content with her alongside some of my own teaching materials which I felt complimented some of the existing ones within the portfolio. We were able to engage in lengthy discussions and she asked a lot of questions which I was able to provide answers for, and appropriate general mentoring support for her in this transition. Drawing from my own area of expertise this was an activity that aimed to improve and develop current teaching practices within the organisation, and my input was warmly welcomed by the libraries directorate.

Participating in this ongoing activity during my visit was something I learned a great deal from too. From reviewing the portfolio of teaching materials, I was able to identify areas I felt showed good

practice and this has helped inform and develop my own health information literacy teaching methods since returning from Pacific.

3.3 Summary

During the visit to Pacific I was very much an ambassador for York St John University and aimed to offer good quality learning and teaching related interactions and activities. The opportunities I received for input in curriculum development, providing mentorship and feedback on health information skills teaching delivery, and learning about good practice at both Pacific and other institutions was invaluable. The visit helped to raise my own personal and international profile, and also those of both universities. It also resulted in a very rich exchange of knowledge, ideas and expertise which is having ongoing impact and influence on how learning and teaching is led by myself and colleagues within the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences back at home in York. With the publication of this article and future articles on other projects and aspects of good practice I observed during the visit, it is hoped the visit will also have wider reach and impact across the health LIS community. On returning to the UK I fed back to the OT staff team and disseminated more widely within both the York St John University and Pacific news channels^{8,9}.

4. Reflections from the host

4.1 Director of Libraries and Library Staff

Established in 1849, Pacific University, Oregon is one of the oldest universities on the west coast. In recent years, the University has accelerated in growth with many new programs and new campuses established. The most significant development has been the construction in 2006 of a new non-residential campus six miles from the historic Forest Grove Campus. The Hillsboro Campus is the home of the College of Health Professions (CHP). The CHP is comprised of nine health professions schools/programs including Audiology, Dental Hygiene Studies, Healthcare Administration and Leadership, OT, Pharmacy, Physical Therapy, Physician Assistant Studies and Professional Psychology. Today, nearly half of the university's 3800 students are enrolled in the CHP or the College of Optometry.

Pacific University Libraries (PUL) provides services to all our students on our several campuses as well as our distance students, those enrolled in online courses or on clinical rotations as part of their studies. PUL is a member of a regional consortium of 37 academic libraries, the Orbis Cascade Alliance, which greatly expands our capacity to serve students and faculty. PUL is also designated as a Resource Library in the Pacific Northwest Region of the National Network of Libraries of Medicine. As such, PUL is committed to improving the general public's access to health information.

PUL also has an active publishing services program, including our institutional repository, CommonKnowledge¹⁰. We publish a number of online journals, one of which is *Health and Interprofessional Practice*. Hannah's visit overlapped with the four-month appointment of our Open Publishing Fellow, who was here to further our efforts in open access publishing of journals, monographs and textbooks. That initiative continues and in spring 2016, we will launch the Pacific University Press.

When, in the fall of 2013, Dr. John White, then chair of our OT Program, discussed with me his idea to invite Dr. Hannah Spring to Pacific University and shared with me her professional background, we could see immediately the great potential of this opportunity. Her clinical librarian role at York St.

John is not a model we have in our College of Health Professions. However, there is a growing emphasis at Pacific on Interprofessional Education and Practice (IPEP) and Pacific librarians are seeking ways to contribute to IPEP. Hannah's visit and her work in the OT program could provide some valuable lessons for us. In addition, Hannah's research interests in health literacy and evidence-based health practice would provide opportunities for productive exchanges with our library faculty.

Length and timing of the visit, ensuring that there was institutional support from both universities, and determining the financial feasibility of the exchange were all early considerations, any one of which could have become an insurmountable barrier. Hannah, her supervisor, and I exchanged many emails to work through these basic requirements. The final barrier, housing, was quite serendipitously resolved. Pacific's Forest Grove Campus was building a new student residence hall, scheduled to open in late August, and Hannah became its first occupant – indeed, it was barely furnished in time for her arrival.

Also, over the course of many emails, Hannah and I developed our shared expectations for the visit, which she then compiled into the dynamic working document described earlier. It was a dynamic plan because while it included some very specific goals, such as 'delivery of library related information skills instruction' and 'giving presentations to faculty', there were also broader goals (networking and identifying possible collaborations) that would allow Hannah the flexibility to take advantage of unexpected opportunities. Having a solid agreement on expectations and goals was critical to the success of the visit. It was also important to leave some space for new goals to emerge.

As noted above, on-campus housing was a great advantage in many ways, but perhaps most importantly, this physical 'embedding' greatly facilitated Hannah's integration into campus life at both our locations (Forest Grove and Hillsboro). Her first two weeks were fairly heavily scheduled to connect Hannah to people throughout the institution. We were fortunate that her arrival coincided with a Pacific University conference on teaching and learning with technology. This allowed for an immediate exposure to the many areas of interest and research in which Pacific faculty are engaged. Hannah was able to follow-up on contacts made at the conference that did not appear in our original plan.

In reflecting on Hannah's visiting professorship, several benefits to the university are apparent. New ideas for teaching health information literacy were shared and demonstrated. Hannah consulted directly with our Health Sciences Librarian on techniques for effective teaching and presentation of material. This aided the development of a framework for integrating evidence-based health practice within the information literacy plan and curriculum of the programs of the College of Health Professions. Hannah's annotated review of our teaching portfolio represents a tremendous amount of thought and work and is a resource that continues to be of great value to Pacific's health librarians. She modelled a new role for librarians serving our graduate programs in the health professions. Including librarians as part of a clinical team or, as is more likely the case at Pacific University, as partners in interprofessional education and practice, is a strategic priority of our professional library services.

4.2 Occupational Therapy Department

Within the OT department Hannah worked with the students, first in individual sessions to coach them in various aspects of research: locating resources, data-base searches, and scholarly writing. She then consulted with entire faculty to share the YSJ model for scholarly development, mentoring,

grading, and application of the EBP in fieldwork. That led to both individual and small group sessions with several OT faculty members to more specifically compare and contrast educational practices and approaches, especially related to our program's level 3 *Scholarship and Evidence-based practice* course series and our doctoral capstone project, and how we can learn from each other to improve our respective curricula. Hannah also participated in several conceptual-level discussions with the OT program director to discuss how to integrate scholarship and information literacy into the curriculum and how it plays out as students progress into practice (i.e., practical application of the concepts). Hannah's expertise provided practical support for students and conceptual curricular development ideas for the faculty. This collaboration with Hannah was of great benefit to our program and we hope to continue it beyond the one-month visit.

5. Conclusion

It is hoped that this short overview has provided some useful practical and theoretical knowledge about how successful exchanges can work in practice. The faculty exchange program between Pacific University and York St. John offers rich experiences to all who become involved in the process: the visiting professor, faculty of the host unit, and both universities. Hannah's visit was particularly, and perhaps uniquely, successful in that it was itself an example of interdisciplinary and interprofessional collaboration. The interactions between Hannah and faculty from multiple colleges and the Libraries provided the seeds for further opportunities. Thus a short one-month visit has opened doors for the exploration and discovery of more in-depth and substantial collaborations between our universities.

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