CO-CREATING AN ORGANIZATION-WIDE PEDAGOGICAL PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Higher education is expected to prepare students for the future and develop their competences for dealing with rapidly transforming working life. The substantial changes in the digitizing, networking, and globalizing society and working life have recently challenged the pedagogical approaches of higher education institutions. At the same time, the tightening education policy and diminishing funding of HEIs require more efficient and effective educational processes. New ways of teaching and learning are also needed to ensure the well-being of the higher education community and the joy of learning. These remarks led to a year-long open and co-creative process at Laurea University of Applied Sciences in Finland to construct a pedagogical program that brightens the collective aspiration to renew teaching and learning. The purpose of this paper is to describe the process of co-creating an organization-wide pedagogical program and to show the first outcomes of that process. The still ongoing process has progressed through an open dialogue in small thematic groups and collective co-creative workshops. The core working group has involved about 100 persons in different positions in the organization. The first outcomes of the design process describe how the selected pedagogical choices will manifest themselves in the year 2025 at four levels: at the organizational level, degree programme level, study unit level and student level. The co-creative process and vivid discussions during the process facilitate the organization-wide transformation that the new pedagogical program requires.

Keywords: Pedagogy, higher education, co-creation, learning, learning by developing.

1. Introduction

During recent years, the higher education landscape has been changing considerably due to the rapidly transforming society and working life (e.g. Goodyear, 2021). To be able to prepare student for the future, many HEIs have recognized various needs for developing their pedagogical approaches towards more learner-centered and project-based forms of learning. The transforming higher education landscape also calls for reshaped and expanded spaces for learning (e.g., Carvalho & Goodyear 2018; Goodyear 2021).

In this development path, Laurea University of Applied Sciences in Finland has been a trailblazer. The pedagogical model called Learning by Developing (LbD) was developed at Laurea already at the beginning of the century (Raij, 2007). In the LbD model, education is learner-centered and competence-based, and authentic working life projects or research, development and innovation projects form the learning environment. Thus, the LbD model effectively combines the three main tasks of a university of applied sciences, i.e., education, research and development, and regional development.

In the LbD model, students are expected to take greater responsibility for and control of their own learning, and they become equal partners with working life experts and teachers, whose main role shifts from traditional teacher roles to facilitators in the learning processes (e.g. Raij, 2018). This 20-year-old pedagogical model has lately proved to be something that society is strongly expecting from higher education institutions: the LbD model has provided a mechanism for individuals' and communities' knowledge creation and learning to keep pace with the complex transitions in the working life (e.g. Ojasalo, 2018).

Even though the LbD model is relevant and remains up to date in most aspects, the uncertainties and complex changes in the society and working life have been affecting its basic elements. Today, the world is much more technology-based, networked, and open than at the beginning of the century when the LbD model was born. Rapidly emerging new technologies and disruptive innovations are revolutionizing human life and the global economy. The physical and the digital worlds are converging,

and digital technologies are making the operational environment more open, collaborative, and global (Ojasalo, 2018). At the same time with this kind of substantial changes that widely affect universities, also the tightening education policy and diminishing funding of HEIs require more efficient and effective educational processes. New ways of teaching and learning are needed to ensure the well-being of the higher education community and the joy of learning.

These remarks led to a year-long open and co-creative process at Laurea University of Applied Sciences in Finland to construct a pedagogical program that brightens the collective aspiration to renew teaching and learning. The aim of Laurea's pedagogical program is to articulate the common understanding of the pedagogical thinking and clarify the selected pedagogical choices for the coming years. The new pedagogical program also aims to brighten the shared view of implementing the LbD model in the modern digitized, networked, and globalized society.

This paper describes the process of co-creating the organization-wide pedagogical program and shows the first outcomes of that process. The foundation for the renewal process have been the pedagogical guidelines, that are based on Laurea's strategic choices and the Learning by Developing model. Thus, the new pedagogical program aims to be aligned with the following pedagogical guidelines: all pedagogical solutions should be learner-centered, competence-based, working life oriented and flexible.

2. The co-creative design process

The main principle for the year-long process of creating the pedagogical program was the notion that the process should include elements of service design, which is Laurea's strategic choice for any internal development work. The recent trend of integrating design thinking and service design into a development process makes the process collaborative, open-minded, iterative, and holistic (Ojasalo et al., 2015). The most important characteristic of service design is its user-centeredness: all development is based on deep and empathic understanding of situations, needs, wishes, and activities of service users (e.g. Dyer et al., 2011). In service design, diverse methods are used to acquire this understanding, and thus various stakeholders are directly included in the creation of new ideas with the methods of co-creation (e.g. Ojasalo et al., 2015).

The design process for co-creating the pedagogical program has highlighted open dialogue during the whole academic year 2022-2023. In line with the service design approach, the aim was to closely tie the whole higher education community in the development work. The core development group of about 100 persons has been multidisciplinary and multi-professional, and has involved teaching staff, managers and leaders, and representatives of support services. Also, students have been involved in the process. In the open dialogue, the selected viewpoints and concepts have been discussed, and the desired future state and necessary changes have been concretized.

The development of the pedagogical program has progressed through facilitated dialogues in seven theme-specific groups. The themes for the groups emerged e.g. from the strategy, pedagogical guidelines and various feedback, e.g. the national quality audit done at Laurea in 2022. The themes guiding the development work were: (1) Competence-based assessment and recognition of prior learning, (2) Incorporating actual work into studies, (3) Internationalization and multiculturalism, (4) Utilization of research-based knowledge and involvement of key partner organizations in implementing the LbD model, (5) Guidance in building well-being, (6) Digitalization and large-group pedagogy implementing the pedagogical guidelines, and (7) Anticipation in education.

From the start of the academic year until the end of it, all these thematic groups have gathered to a shared 2-hour online workshop twice a month. Between these collective workshops that have brought all the groups together, the thematic groups have had their own group meetings online. All the thematic groups have also gathered for two half-day face-to-face workshops where for example empathy maps were developed to better incorporate learner-centricity to the development work. Thus, there have been plenty of possibilities for open dialogic. Also, the shared digital working space has facilitated the discussion during the process. The whole HEI community has been openly communicated about the progress of the development work: for example, a piece of news has been published in the intranet after every online and face-to-face workshop.

3. The outcomes of the design process: the pedagogical program

As a result of the year-long co-creative design process, Laurea's pedagogical program describes the pedagogical choices at four level: the whole Laurea University of Applied Sciences (UAS) level, degree programme level, study unit level and student level. According to the choices made for the pedagogical program, Laurea's pedagogy manifests itself in year 2025 in the following way.

3.1. UAS level choices: Common principles guiding pedagogical solutions

At the whole university of applied sciences level, the Learning by Developing model is still Laurea's main choice for individual and community learning and for creating new knowledge. In the LbD model, the student has an active role as a learner, experiencer, developer, and researcher, together with the working life partners and higher education community. Laurea's selected key partner organizations provide students with learning environments where they can learn future working life competences and apply research-based knowledge when developing working life and society. The competence-based education also means that all students can seek recognition of prior learning. The process and methods of recognizing prior learning are familiar to students, teachers, and partners as an alternative way of developing competence.

Laurea offers both self-paced and interactive online studies for students. As the number of Laurea's students continues to grow, self-paced online learning is systematically utilized in all parts of studies where it is appropriate for learning. Automated studies and parts of study units free teachers' time for more individualized guidance in the learning process. Open digital learning materials are widely used in teaching and learning. Open teaching practices ensure the quality and impact of education. The development of the necessary pedagogical expertise to ensure high-quality learning is taken care of.

Laurea's pedagogy is based on a guidance approach. Personal pedagogical guidance for the advancement and completion of studies is implemented so that the student receives equal and timely guidance services regardless of campus or education format. The students' understanding of their own competence and its development are built in interaction in a critical dialogue. Laurea's guidance activities strengthen the student's agency and functional capacity, self-direction, participation, career planning skills, and well-being. Guidance activities produce a sense of satisfaction and achievement. Students' diverse backgrounds, needs, goals, and abilities to reflect on their own competence are recognized. Students are also guided individually as needed. Multicultural students are a resource, and Laurea supports their integration and employment in Finland.

3.2. Degree programme level choices: Competence-based curricula and learning environments

The degree programme specific choices form the basis for high-quality and equal learning, appropriate resourcing, and the implementation of Laurea's pedagogical guidelines in all education. Competent pedagogical leadership ensures the implementation of the degree programme specific choices made and the necessary competence needed to implement them.

In the curriculum, the learning objectives of all degree programmes are formulated in a competence-based manner, and the objectives are clear for students, teachers, and working life partners. In addition to substantive expertise, the development of general, common work-related competences is also clearly visible in the degree programme learning objectives. The curriculum indicates how future awareness and foresight ability, international competence, sustainable development competence, and ethical competence are developed as a cross-cutting theme, strengthening the student's ability to act as an active actor and innovator in the future global operating environment. Key partner organizations selected by the degree programme are closely involved in the curriculum development. Various foresight methods, platforms, and cooperation processes support the curriculum development. An active cooperation between degree programmes supports the consideration of multidisciplinary and multi-professional opportunities in the curriculum work and the utilization of synergies in the implementation of education. The close interaction between the degree programme and the working life supports the consideration of changing competence needs also in the development of working life oriented continuous learning offerings.

The LbD model is systematically implemented in all degree programmes in cooperation with key partner organizations. The LbD model makes it possible to combine learning, work, and research in an innovative way. In all degree programs, there is an agreed amount of core and complementary studies that can be completed fully independently as automated online studies. The independent online studies meet the quality criteria and are suitable for advancing learning and progress. These studies are only available as automated studies. Additionally, at the degree programme level, there are selected studies that offer independent online learning as a form of implementation, which can also be common to different programs. The use of shared implementation templates is mandated at the education level, and their development is ensured. Selected key partners also participate in their content development, where appropriate.

Internationality and multiculturalism are a visible and recognized part of every degree programme. Each degree programme includes at least one project or study completed in genuine international cooperation. Additionally, all students can study languages extensively either at Laurea or at other higher education institutions.

3.3. Study unit level choices: Facilitating high-quality learning processes

At the study unit level, the learning processes are highlighted instead of teaching processes. Everyone recognizes their role in the student's learning processes, so that student agency is strengthened. When planning learning processes, students' different backgrounds, competences, and goals are considered. The planning of study units is based on the common quality criteria. The teacher plans the workload and learning tasks of the study unit so that the student's guidance and participation can be facilitated.

The implementation of the study unit is based on a pedagogical script. The projects, assignments, learning materials, and contents of a study unit are designed so that the learning process focuses on the development of the competences stated in the curriculum. The openly shared implementation templates and existing open learning materials are used in the planning and implementation of study units. The pedagogical script also shows how Laurea's general, common work-life competencies are developed in the study unit. Learning is guided by assessing the student's competence in relation to the learning objectives of the study unit. The learning process includes assessing the level of competence at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end, using common evaluation criteria, self-evaluation and peer evaluation practices. Students are guided to give peer feedback and receive feedback. In online studies, the teacher uses available assessment tools to reliably assess the student's learning.

In the processes of identifying and acknowledging competence and in the processes of recognizing learning, the different backgrounds and needs of the students are considered. Alternative completion methods of the course are provided in the implementation plan. Recognition of prior learning is possible for both degree students and continuous learning students, and it supports lifelong learning. The recognition of competence supports the implementation of studies and the development of the individual's own competence.

3.4. Student-level choices: An active and responsible role as a learner

The target is that students understand the importance of their own activity and responsibility in the learning process. The students are responsible for their own study path, and they have the responsibility to develop, recognize, and demonstrate their competencies in relation to the learning objectives of the degree programme. They feel that it is possible to shape their own learning path to support the achievement of their personal competence and career goals. The students know how acquired competencies and prior learning are recognized. Degree students can acquire competences and build personal learning paths by also utilizing educational offerings from other higher education institutions to support their professional growth and achieving their career dreams.

Laurea's key partner organizations, RDI projects, international environments and encounters, and digital platforms form a natural learning environment for the students. Self-directed digital learning solutions in selected study units allow the students to progress at their own pace and from anywhere.

The students' competence development, professional growth, and career planning are supported through regular guidance and feedback. The target is that the students develop into future-oriented actors in their field. They renew their skills and competences according to the learning objectives stated in the curriculum.

The student receives feedback on their learning and competence development depending on the method of implementation from their teachers, fellow students, and representatives from the working life. The students also learn to evaluate the development of their own competences. The students recognize the added value generated by different perspectives from teamwork in their own learning, and they are ready to openly share their own expertise with others. The students are committed to working together, agreeing on common schedules, and providing and receiving constructive feedback. The students understand that seeking guidance and supportive services for well-being is a key part of higher education and necessary in working life.

4. Discussion

The pedagogical approaches used in higher education need to be discussed, evaluated, and further developed as the transformation in the world around universities is speeding up. This paper described the process of co-creating an organization-wide pedagogical program at Laurea University of Applied Sciences and showed the first outcomes of that process. The organization-wide co-creative process has ensured that the pedagogical discussion has been vivid and wide for the whole academic year. This discussion has widely enhanced the understanding of the need for changes in everyday pedagogical solutions. Consequently, the co-creative process and vivid discussions facilitate the organization-wide transformation that the new pedagogical program requires.

The pedagogical program of Laurea University of Applied Sciences will be launched at the opening ceremony of the academic year 2023-2024, and its implementation will begin immediately as a part of learner-centered educational activities. The timeline for the goals and measures described in the program is intended to extend until 2025. While the pedagogical program clarifies the ambition, shows the direction for the future, and provides a framework for the pedagogical development, also creativity, innovation, and agility in pedagogical solutions are and will be encouraged. Also in the future, the experimentation culture, using foresight methods and research-based knowledge, and a strong service design expertise as part of all pedagogical activities are the foundation of high-quality learning at Laurea.

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