Tutoring as a Pedagogical Resource:
a Coaching Dimension of a Lecturer's Work

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Abstract

This paper aims to report about several recent pedagogical developments that have been taking place in HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences, Finland (Porvoo Campus).

To do so, the paper will summarise the training in coaching (ENTRE-COACH) that a group of HAAGA-HELIA lecturers have been taking part in and review its impact on the nature and the scope of tutoring as a pedagogical resource offered on Porvoo Campus to degree students of International Business and Tourism.

The review will highlight how the planning and the implementation of tutoring sessions based on coaching techniques can enable more responsible attitudes towards studies, relevant adjustments to pedagogical methods, and more fruitful cooperation among the staff and the students. The paper will also share the challenges and the solutions that the students, the teaching staff and the administration encounter when integrating and standardising tutoring practices on Porvoo Campus.

The results, based on surveys and interviews with the staff and the students, will suggest possible future directions for making the optimal use of tutoring as a teaching and learning practice that together with academic advising, project work and team work can contribute to faster graduation and better well-being of students on Porvoo Campus. The results will also suggest that continuous and consistent tutoring based on coaching techniques can be helpful in off-setting the decline in academic performance and motivation that are at times experienced by the students.

Additionally, the paper will discuss the evolving nature of learning environment in Universities of Applied Sciences, whereby much more learning takes place without actual teaching while the focus of the staff is shifting more towards administration and facilitation of learning, fund-raising activities, and cooperation with the industries.

1. Learning environment on Porvoo Campus

HAAGA-HELIA is the leading university of its profile in Finland that provides education in tourism and hospitality, international business, sales and services, journalism and IT, well-being and other fields. Education is offered in close cooperation with the respective industries and is based on continuous research, development and innovation. HAAGA-HELIA offers its degree programmes in several languages to about 10 000 students on several campuses in and around Helsinki, Finland. More information about HAAGA-HELIA is available on its webpages [1].

When it comes to the learning environment in HAAGA-HELIA, students are the priority. Their professional development, employability, careers, internationalisation, and well-being are the starting points of every curriculum change. HAAGA-HELIA provides its students with the most advanced infrastructure and equipment, personalised learning experiences and well-networked, competent, and approachable staff and administration.

HAAGA-HELIA's Porvoo Campus [2], was designed to host the most advanced curricula based on the so-called inquiry learning, whereby the students set their own learning goals, work in projects commissioned by businesses, reflect on their learning outcomes, and disseminate the results of their professional development. Inquiry-based learning on Porvoo Campus is coupled with the state-of-the art infrastructure and continuous facilitation of learning by committed staff.

2. Facilitation of studies

From the moment candidates become interested in Porvoo Campus until their graduation and the following alumni activities, the students encounter numerous professionals who are actively engaged in facilitating their development. Such facilitation includes academic advising, semester coordination, support by the degree programme directors, student office, student union, IT department, international coordinator, and tutoring, including tutoring by individual teachers and senior tutor students. While such options are diverse, the students and the staff still notice the need to translate facilitation into specific tangible achievements. Thus the staff and the students are eager to innovate and experiment with facilitation. Tutoring is a perfect field for such innovation.

3. Focus on tutoring

This section will cover recent initiatives in facilitation of students' learning experiences on Porvoo Campus, including entre-coach training for the staff and the students' impact on the design of tutoring.

3.1 Entre-coach training for the staff

In 2010 HAAGA-HELIA joined several European partners in Entre-coach, a project supported by the European Commission that aims at enabling the teachers to foster the students' entrepreneurial mind-set [3]. The main tools of entre-coach training range from conversation techniques and listening skills to goal-setting, resource planning, decision-making and other skills. While the project's focus has been on life-long learning and start-ups, Porvoo Campus teachers volunteered to further implement entre-coach training towards better facilitation of their students' studies. The value of entre-coach training has been in the application of coaching techniques to a variety of learning activities, including project work, academic advising, thesis seminars, consultations, tutoring, etc. The feedback from the staff has been positive and more teachers on Porvoo Campus will join the entre-coach training. A review of tutoring below shows how coaching can change the learning experiences of students and the pedagogical approaches of the staff.

3.2 Tutoring as developed by the administration and the staff

Porvoo Campus offers tutoring to enable a fast track towards graduation. Tutoring is organised by tutor-teachers whose resources allow for one or two individual meetings during a semester with 25-30 students. The students are not obliged to participate, yet do it voluntarily. Tutoring is not burdened with paperwork, yet tutors may collect students' expectations and impressions about the semester and use coaching tools such as "action plan", "time plan", etc. to guide their students towards the accomplishment of 55 credits per academic year. Tutoring also helps in identifying challenged students and helps academic advisors and the student office.

Tutoring during the first level studies may focus on helping the students to adjust to the learning environment and identify good learning practices as well as to build trust and the feeling of being welcome on Porvoo Campus. Tutoring during the second and third levels of studies guides the students towards personalised optimal decisions about their exchange studies, work placement, thesis, and employment. Tutoring can also help the student to achieve consistency and continuity across such decisions.

Tutor discussions may also differ in how they apply entre-coach techniques. Here is an example of tutoring offered to second-level students of tourism by the author of the paper: individual face to face

discussions with a possibility to form small tutoring groups and an invitation for the students to tutor each other (based on their aptness).

The sessions were based on pre-assignments: the student would collect data about the accomplished courses, grades, unfinished courses, missing assignments, etc. The student would then make a mind-map of the current semester (all the courses that she or he has enrolled into, etc.).

The sessions also included a review of their previous semester's peer assessment, since each student had received a set of anonymous appraisals of her or his qualities by her/his classmates. Thus, the sessions allowed a student to reflect on what others pointed as the needs for personal development.

Based on reviews of previous and current semester studies and peer assessment the students were coached to make individual plans of achieving 55 credits per academic year, setting time-tables and commitments for re-exams or alternative "entrepreneurial" ways of accomplishing the missing deliverables. As a result, the students emerged from the discussions with a mission (what the student is focused on) and a vision (what the student will achieve by the end of the semester).

Entre-coach techniques such as open-ended questions, exercises that help with values, networking, etc. were used to generate the student's own vision of the needed changes. The instructor took notes of the reflections and verified them with the student. Thus the student and the instructor would get an agreement on how to proceed with studies and personal development. The students also were encouraged to be entrepreneurial with their study paths through the curriculum.
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The students also discussed the challenges that affect their studies: family situations, team spirit, financial situations, etc. The tutor then navigated the student towards identifying the resources within the school that could help her or him in managing the concerns. If needed, the tutor encouraged follow-up meetings with the academic advisor, degree programme director, semester coordinator, etc.

Each student was also given an opportunity to reflect on the value and effectiveness of tutoring for personal development and academic performance. Such feedback was collected and discussed with other tutor teachers. Several feedback results are listed below.

3.3 Tutoring as seen by the students

The students' perceptions of tutoring on Porvoo Camus were measured by a survey of 28 second - year students of Degree Programme in Tourism, who participated in at least two 30-minute one-on-one tutorial meetings during autumn 2013 and had been tutored during their first-year studies. The response rate was 50 per cent, with all respondents answering all questions. The questions checked how students define tutoring, its relevance, roles, advantages and challenges. The survey also asked for improvement ideas.

The results show that the students define tutoring as a process of joint professional growth, whereby the student and the tutor learn from each other, develop trust, and contribute to the quality of studies. The goals of tutoring were defined widely as reflection, discussion; check-ups and reviews; sharing experiences and feedback; support, guidance, and advising; explanations and search for solutions; realising one's potential, career guidance, and insights into one's future professional life.

Opinions about the role and impacts of tutoring on Porvoo Campus varied. One student admitted that tutoring doesn't have much impact on his performance while several students said that tutoring was "nice" yet they would have been alright without it. Yet the majority of students praised tutoring as "useful", "helpful", "very important", and even "priceless".

The advantages are numerous. The students get to know their tutors better, they get timely feedback and support, a clear understanding of what to do and how, and a reassurance that "someone else than just myself is interested in my studies". The students also feel that the school cares for them in a "humane" way, shares their worries, and takes their personal concerns into account. Since most concerns focus on the students' professional development, tutoring is noted as relevant in improving the grades, obtaining internships, identifying optimal thesis topics, and inspiring fresh and clear thinking about professional future.

When it comes to challenges, the students were unanimous about lack of time for tutoring and motivation to prepare in advance. Complex schedules and multitasking led at times to situations where students skipped or forgot their appointments. There are occasional students who are intimidated by tutoring and see it as a "necessary evil". Such students doubt whether their tutors are skilled enough, prepared, or motivated to help.

Yet the majority of the respondents saw no challenges. What the students need are regular reminders, a clear description of tutoring goals and process, and communication skills that would make their participation more efficient. For example, a specific description of tutoring could identify how tutoring is different from academic advising and semester coordination, whereas training in communication could help students to ask the right questions, to give and receive constructive feedback, etc.

Several students wished tutoring made an elective course, whereby participation in a number of tutoring sessions throughout their studies would amount to one or two credits. Such measures could increase motivation and respect for tutoring.

The students also listed several expectations they have about tutors. An ideal tutor strives to provide detailed, correct, and helpful answers to all questions. The tutor reaches out to students initiatively and is available freely across all channels. The tutor should prepare thoroughly for the discussions and focus on career planning, brainstorming for thesis ideas, internships, etc. The tutor should also give tips on how to navigate the studies towards faster graduation.

When it comes to the tutor's personality, the students hope for an experienced, understanding, caring, patient, and positive professional, who is genuinely motivated to develop a closer relationship, to establish a deeper trust, and to consider the students' best interests as one's own. Tutors should have a solution-oriented mind-set and the qualities of a role model. Tutors should also avoid lofty ways of speaking and "new age therapies of self-improvement books".

When asked about how tutoring could be improved, the students wished for longer discussions, since 30 minutes is not enough to work out efficient solutions. The students asked for group tutorials and tutoring lectures for larger groups, whenever possible. The students also wished that tutoring sessions could take place outside Porvoo Campus during tutoring walks, study trips, leisure and sports activities, etc. Face-to-face tutoring could be complemented by virtual meetings and correspondence. Tutors could also store the agendas and minutes of discussions on the school's web-platform.

4. Conclusion

Entre-coach training clearly enabled the staff to attend to academic, professional, and personal potentials of students with communication tools that empower the students, make them more responsible, innovative, and efficient. Offering such entrepreneurial coaching to every student has its challenges: the need for more resources, flexibility, and commitment, the need to combine face-to-face and virtual tutoring, to match personalities of teachers and students, the need to move from the purely therapeutic talk to tangible solutions, etc. Despite such challenges, tutoring seems to be on the increase, in its popularity with students, staff, and administration, and in its role as a measure and a

catalyst of the success of HAAGA-HELIA's education. Tutoring stimulates innovation, more transparency, accountability and horizontal management of the learning environment, whereby students can provide a meaningful impact.

The above observations also suggest that the traditional teaching focused on one-way distribution of the learning contents will take less space in the work load of the staff. Similarly, the staff will be perceived less as teachers and their success with the students and administration will be measured less by purely academic credentials. Instead, the staff are expected to be role-models, career counsellors, people who enable trust and well-being, know the students personally, and can guarantee the students' future employment. The students will become more initiative in deciding the contents they need for their courses or project work, while the staff will be seen as partners responsible for the infrastructure behind learning, schedules, funding for school projects and arbitration when conflicts emerge. Such expectations will require each staff member to act first as a tutor and then as a teacher.

Thus coaching-based tutoring will continue taking more space in the teachers' work load both in job descriptions and in real/virtual classroom interaction. The entrepreneurial mind-set and other ideas of entre-coach project (innovative, disruptive, etc.) will also become more relevant both in how the students study and how the teachers facilitate learning. HAAGA-HELIA and its Porvoo Campus are noticing these tendencies and are very keen on advancing such developments, since the overall outcomes are rewarding for all the parties involved.

References

[1] http://www.haaga-helia.fi/en/frontpage
[2] http://www.haaga-helia.fi/en/about-haaga-helia/campuses/porvoo-campus
[3] http://www.entre-coach.eu/