

## **Library Professionals' and partners' implicit principle of non-interference and writing-related interventions**

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**Abstract:** The utilization of the full potential of the staff of the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) is hindered by organizational barriers and prejudices about what represents the suitable contribution from the information searching and management professionals. Barriers related to the division of labor between teachers and library professionals in shared writing-related tasks are discussed in this article and an interventionist approach is suggested. A significant barrier disabling the information specialist's work is defined here as *the principle of non-interference*. The concept is sketched as a discourse that limits the contribution of the library mainly to the meta-information management. The limitation is further analyzed in terms of the activity system model from *the theory of action* and the actantial model from *the generative trajectory approach*. Changes in the positions of information specialists and library values towards the partnership in the research and development is suggested in order to overcome the limitations caused by the *principle*.

**Keywords:** information literacy, higher education, higher education libraries; case study, Finland

### **1. Introduction**

In addition to the teaching, the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) are involved in research and development activities. This happens mainly in the context of the regional development. The management of UASes is aiming to change their organizational cultures from mere educational organizations towards regional change agents. There the aim is to develop the institutions from their predecessors, i.e. the schools of nursing, technology and commercial colleges, towards higher education institutions that are also active in research and development activities. (Laukia 2008, 26.)

The multiple goals of UASes, as well as, the continual changes in relevant information environments pose challenges for the libraries to position themselves in relation to their customers, host organizations and networks. In Finland the only role model for UASes has been the university libraries, due to the fact that the Finnish school library network is virtually non-existent. Because the university libraries also in Finland have been built during the printed era, the UAS libraries soon found out that this model is not working and they changed their paradigm towards building learning centers for their institutions and put special emphasis on the IL-tuition (Marjamaa 2012).

In our recent paper (Kämäräinen & Saarti 2013) we showed that this paradigm shift is still very much library oriented and the real change towards an updated pedagogy through up-to-date connectivist approaches to the information usage has not yet happened in Finland (Anderson & Dron 2011). In this paper, we analyze what we call as the librarians' *non-interference principle* and give some suggestions how to change it towards a more open and networked culture of information sharing and usage in higher education.

## **2. The Principle of Non-Interference**

It seems generally accepted, that the orientation of the library profession is largely built on meta-information: i.e. the added value being in creating and managing descriptive metadata, but not so much in the creation of new knowledge and information. Thus the main library processes are still much limited to meta-level management of the documents. This is what we call the *principle of non-interference*: i.e. the role of the librarian is defined as that of an outsider.

The principle offered a very functional division of labor during the printed era where the division into the users of the documents and to the library staff who focused their attention to develop sophisticated, yet abstract and descriptive means to be utilized in searching printed information. At the present, this professional illusion of the need for handcrafted meta-information has been harshly broken by the networked and computer driven culture of direct access and digital documents. Knowing that this is also based on meta-information, but one created by data mining and data-analysis algorithms, actually suggests that there is continuity between these two cultures.

The concept of information literacy (IL) offers to the library community means to contribute to the information creation process, but it also somehow seems to maintain the principle of non-interference. Reading and finding something to read fits nicely to the idea of the non-interference, but active literacy challenges this passive role by containing the facet of creation of new information by writing. Information literacy is thus Janus-faced in that it also includes the creation of new documents. Interventionist research may offer means to analyze this dual essence of IL and help to join the information searching process to the

information creation. This, of course, means the reposition of the library work and work roles.

### **3. Conceptual Frameworks**

The Actantial Model and Activity System Model are used here to treat the tension outlined above.

#### **3.1. Actantial Model**

The *principle of non-interference* can be seen in the library professionals' actions when considering creating and organizing/describing documents. The Actantial Model offers tools to define the structural dynamics of the principle when analyzing detailed, contextual narratives. (Greimas et al. 1983, Hébert 2006.)

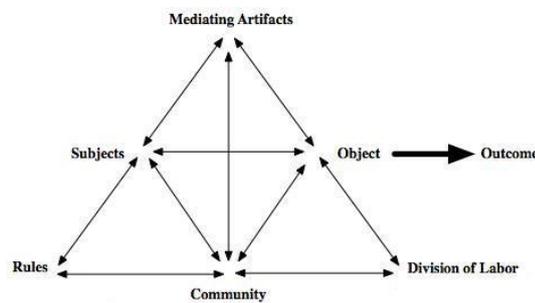
Libraries encounter the principle in different positions derived from the actantial model as follows:

- When a library is making decisions in order to avoid getting into positions in which authority should be used in ways that are not conventional, the principle appears as *sender*, confirming the *subject* to withdraw rather than move towards active roles. Thus the principle acts as warrant for library's conservative choices, when a library decides for instance not to participate in a project that would require a librarian to act as co-author in project publications.
- The principle acts as *receiver* in cases, where the integrity of the basic mission of the library has been restored or maintained after it was under threat. The slogan "Back to Basics" describes the principle as receiver. This appears e.g. when a library withdraws its support from a customer's project requiring co-authoring and reallocates its resources to assist only in information seeking or refocus in cataloging.
- The dynamics of libraries' contributions are not of course driven just by the principle. Instead, it is driven by values like democracy, freedom, the right to know or information literacy. Here, the principle has roles in confirming that actions are in line with the mission statements. The principle then appears either as a catalyst (*helper*) or an inhibitor (*opponent*) to maintain a suitable balance between the bias of the contributions and the library's values.
- The principle appears as a theory-in-use, not as an espoused theory: one can rarely find it made explicit as a policy that the library should be reactive rather than proactive, descriptive rather than executive, neutral rather than promoting a pointed message. The principle as an *object* stands for status quo rather than reforms or innovations. The principle of non-interference carries a connotation of non-action. Thus one needs to develop a *principle of interference* to create the positions of *subjects*. Libraries need for instance policies concerning their roles in R&D&I projects, that allow both proactive positions that make use

of the library staff's diverse competencies and the ones that maintain more traditional positions and related skill sets. A library should not trust in its clients' knowledge concerning abilities a (post)modern library has to offer.

### 3.2. Activity System Model

The activity system, basically a connected structure of generalized elements of action, is among the core concepts of the cultural-historical theory of action (Engeström & Sannino 2010, Engeström 2008). It is based on collective mediations of action discussed in terms of mutual connections (Engeström 2008, 26). The activity system model offers several views towards the activities by allowing one to change foci between the combinations of aspects in action currently discussed. Here the model is used quite straightforwardly and tentatively as a means to model the principle together with the actantial approach in the previous section.



**Figure 1. The Activity System diagram reflects the general structure of action (cf. Engeström 2008, 26).**

The activity system diagram (fig. 1) offers means to focus one's attention on the various aspects of the systemic structure of the activity. One can see the object characterized by the subjects who work within it, as well as, the community that shares the discourse, e.g. rules, reflecting the division of labor.

Thus both, the teachers and librarians, are using course-related literature as shared objects to help students to gain certain understanding about the course topics. Because of the principle, a different set of rules appear: for teachers, the aim is mediated through the contents of the related books and other materials, e.g. blogs, whereas for the library staff the course's goals are related to the co-occurrence of related catalogued and indexed objects in the library's collections and/or in the library database. The library sees the documents to be used mainly through its own collections - the teachers especially in UASes utilize a broader concept while deciding what to use as course materials.

#### 4. Challenging the Principle

In current higher education settings in the Finnish UAS, the environments of project-based education and R&D&I activities require efforts building bridges between the views of relevant and valid information. Significant emphasis is given e.g. to the tacit knowledge. How could then the meta-information focused actors in libraries be convincing partners in the efforts of knowledge creation?

Let us assume an information specialist (IS) at a Finnish UAS is being asked to participate in a R&D&I project. This can be done at least through the following settings:

(1) In traditional settings, the IS is assumed to *act as a librarian*, i.e. helping in finding relevant sources, especially in the information seeking phase of the project and withdrawing when information seeking turns to the use of information. Her/his base is of course the library and the person will serve the project as one of the library's clients. The principle is maintained.

(2) In pedagogical settings, the IS is responsible for the guiding and teaching about the information sources and collections, information seeking and quality, possible practices related to the references and plagiarism. Her/his clients are typically students, but the staff is also served, especially via teaching independent information searching. The principle is challenged, because pedagogically the IS may follow the traditional teachers' culture executing their tasks independently. The host organization may also position the person outside the library in order to emphasize the pedagogical aspect.

(3) In interventionist settings, the IS is assumed to apply her/his knowledge concerning information needs, searching and management in a broad sense. The person may act as a change agent e.g. in relation to the organizational cultures and methodologies in information usage. As a change agent, she/he challenges the principle as one's own zone of comfort together with the clients'.

(4) In co-authoring settings, the IS is most clearly a member of a project team. Her/his position can be compared with that of methodology experts, such as statisticians. Then the principle does not hold.

Setting	Goals	Observing subjects	Non-interference
(1) traditional librarian	satisfied customers, library's collections used, information literacy achieved, comfort zones maintained	holders of library values (inside and outside of the library)	existent
(2) teaching librarian /	information literacy achieved, library's collections used,	holders of library values, teachers (as	existent / questioned

information specialist	students' comfort zones challenged	colleagues), students as clients	
(3) interventionist	organizations' cultures and comfort zones challenged, knowledge added, information holders located, created, improved	management, research communities, staff and students as participants	questioned
(4) co-author	new comfort zones built, proper documents and other information objects authored, both creativity and literacy warrant maintained	communities of readers and authors, holders of library values	expires
<b>Table 2. Building positions by gradually releasing the Principle</b>			

### 5. Intervention: finding and evading the principle within a case study

In this section, a case study of finding and challenging the principle of non-interference is presented. From the autumn of the year 2005 to the spring of the year 2008 the Laurea University of Applied Sciences in southern Finland maintained a project introducing and developing a new kind of information specialist's position which was occupied by the first author. The effort was called *the Information Environments*.

Its aims were set quite broadly: to create new service for the students and staff. The project can be considered as a platform to test some of the viewpoints pointed out in this article. However, the Laurea experiment cannot be seen as an example of a predetermined development project towards the articulation of the principle. However, it can be seen as an example on how the principle was gradually becoming visible when our efforts to open the library's and our clients' views towards the library's new orientations was taking place.

The project was initially defined as a computer lab with information specialist's services. Some associations towards the concept of *ba* as a context, which harbors meaning of creative space (e.g. Nonaka & Konno 1998) was introduced by aiming towards co-operation between the students, teachers and the library staff with shared objects in shared spaces. The *Hospital at Home* case introduced in the following succeeded this as one of the experiments. This project was cancelled in May 2008 when the host organization was forced to cut its costs during the recession.

The Laurea UAS was developing its pedagogical strategy under the label Learning by Developing (LbD). In LbD, the students' learning activities are organized under a house application of a project-based learning approach. LbD emphasizes the involvement of extra-organizational partners as well as students' independent information seeking as a part of learning, especially during the bachelor thesis projects (Taatala & Rajj 2012).

The *Hospital at Home* offered a case to test and implement information environments' activities via developing new types of library services. The project lasted four months with an external funding of €20,000 and connected eight local organizational partners, including Laurea UAS and its library. Several types of information sources and gathering methods were utilized. The project was implemented by a team of a principal lecturer and an information specialist as editors, several other authors and a steering group (Kämäräinen et al. 2008).

The experiences that are relevant to this paper are related to the tight connections between the concept analysis, information seeking and authoring activities, as well as, to the co-operation between the subject matter expert and the information specialist. In the traditional settings the division of the labor for this kind of project is usually built by separating the information seeking and information use. It became soon apparent, that several concepts and term variants refer to the idea of taking some hospital services to the patient's home.

Our approach can be described by continuously writing our understanding down and repeatedly made new information searches to confirm and challenge our findings. Deep mutual trust and high motivation characterized the collaboration between the editors. The approach is thus quite different from the conventional step-by-step models of literature review often introduced in research guides (e.g. Bowers-Brown & Stevens 2010). Our approach required that the participants were always ready to modify their theories-in-use concerning both the objects and tools involved. The approach is characterized by continuously seeking meanings and tolerating uncertainty (Kuhlthau 2004).

The project revealed requirements for shared workspaces that can maintain simultaneous views related to conceptual sketching, writing and information seeking efforts. The objects to be built were to be seen as multi-layered and open for text- as well as metatext-related contributions. For instance, finding support and criticism for an argument to be worked out requires information seeking, where one needs a sketch version of the argument as a tool in formulating new relevant searches. The object is thus shared between the writing and information seeking parts of the process. In the *hospital at home* case, the participants were required to zigzag between related concepts, literary sources, orally presented experiences and tacit knowledge when building localized perspectives by comparing several, usually culture-dependent views

on home hospital -related concepts and efforts (Leff & Montalto 2004, Räsänen 2007).

For an information specialist, the case offered contexts to introduce tools like Wiki, RefWorks and mind-mapping in addition to the conventional library services. It also caused technical challenges: for example, when the brace notation used by RefWorks caused internal errors in the Wiki product in use at the UAS organization. The various access means and rights to relevant databases between partner organizations created socio-technical challenges, when one needed to discuss different information use conventions and habits between participants. In the project, traditional library tasks were thus combined with collaborative writing, as well as, efforts in the technical and personal support. The principle was thus deeply challenged.

From library's perspective, one may openly argue for the non-interference and indirectly against collaboration: e.g. how can a limited number of library staff manage several simultaneous projects going on? It seems that library's active role in some projects would undoubtedly endanger equal services for all the customers without sufficient resources. The issue seems paradigmatic: either you serve all the clients according to the standardized procedures or you prioritize for some focus groups and thus allow more dynamics. This is where one probably benefits from meta-theories, i.e. discussing the basic assumptions and related policies behind the idea of one's own library.

The library's dilemma in its focus selection can be called double bind, a term coined by Bateson and adopted into the *expansive learning model* by Engeström (Engeström & Sannino 2010, Engeström 1987, Bateson 1972). In the traditional library, the basic unit of the customer relationship is the circulation transaction. There is no counterpart to the customer's project or cost pool.

In LbD, the projects are the fundamental units, be they individual students' thesis projects or externally funded efforts building the university's strategically important networks. Evidently there is an ontological gap between these points-of-views and double binds are likely to occur: the library cannot be a trustworthy partner in a project, if the project is identified only as a number of individual customers usually arriving together at the library. On the other hand, the library could not associate to a project without ignoring the principle of non-interference.

## 6. Conclusion

We introduced the *principle of non-interference* as a conceptual means to identify a certain aspect determining the library-related ideologies. We are not arguing that libraries in the Universities of Applied Sciences should abandon their traditional basic tasks. Instead we are suggesting that it appears profitable to make the libraries various competencies more explicit. To establish the R&D&I-oriented positions of the information specialists that are empowered to

offer their full potential for the co-operative knowledge building may probably help the library to increase its role as part of its host organization.

Without challenging some of the traditional limits of the library-centered view of information specialists' roles at the UASes, one will probably encounter well-deserved situations where the significance of the library as such is questioned, especially in the R&D&I contexts. In addition, the open web-based dissemination, searching and use of information per se challenge the traditional library ideology of non-interference.

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