Abstract
Arcada is part of the national project Toteemi (http://www.amktoteemi.fi/) which focuses on skills validation and more generally on work life skills. As part of the project Arcada has decided to develop the work placement learning for students, co-workers, degree programs and the work life partners. Placements are important and a mandatory part of the studies in the university. However, the learnings and the possibilities are not always fully utilized. There could be more sharing and learning and work placements can bring information that helps developing the education per se. It can be a two way learning process.

This article is about discussing how we can develop and utilize the work place learning through student' work placement blogs and podcasts. It is a discussion of the current status of the placement learning and a comparative insight into the newly developed and piloted model using blogging and podcast.

At Arcada the aim with the project initiative was among other things to replace the traditional, written placement reports with blogging and creation of podcasts for, in firsthand, the business students. The traditional report has not been shared and the new form for reporting would enable the shared learning for students, staff and other stakeholders. The pilot started with a few students in January and will be tested full scale in April when the placements start. The students are 2nd and 3rd year business students. Every student has two mandatory work placement periods of ten weeks each (fulltime work).

The article builds on the ideas of a changed work life where more cooperation between higher education and work life is a necessity (OKM, 2018). Support and insight found in SITRA’s studies on work life skills and the future of work (www.sitra.fi). Models for work life skill development and ways of cooperation are discussed.

The main method used in this development project and study is participant observation by coaching teachers which here includes an analysis of the students’ contributions in the online environment. On top of this teacher’s reflections (interview) on previous methods and procedures related to placements are analyzed.

This study will result in an evaluative insight into the current and new mode of work placement sharing and will offer concrete learning and best practices for developing the work placement procedure further. It will be useful for anyone wanting to develop work placement processes in higher education. The project and this research are still continuing.

Keywords: work placement, blog, podcast, work life collaboration, knowledge sharing.

1 INTRODUCTION
In this article the cooperation between HEIs (Higher education institutions), especially universities of applied sciences, and work life is addressed by discussing primarily work placements as a great possibility to work closer with work life. The closer connection between HEI and the surrounding society and work life (both private and publics sector) is highly promoted and encouraged by the Ministry of Culture and Education in Finland. Recently one could see that we got a 4th task for the HEIs: continuous education. The tasks are: education, research, regional cooperation (focus on co-operation to the surrounding society) and then continuous learning. These tasks are also connected to the result indicators and funding structure for HEIs (public funding in Finland) adding pressure to the HEIs. (OKM; 2018, OKM 2019.) However, pressure or not, one can assume that the connections to the work life are getting more and more important. We need to collaborate and co-create the future learning.

HEIs and work life simply need to do more work together. The OECD report about education 2030 and other reports on a national level [1],[2],[3] clearly points out this necessity. Work life skills are discussed more and more together with generic skills. All of these require tighter relations and better understanding
between the educational sector and the private and public sector parties in order to ensure that we have a competent work force. Another aspect that reveals this need is the fact the line between education arranged in traditional education institutions, for example HEIs, and in the form of professional development as part of the work life is getting more blurred. Cooperation, needs analysis and specialization is a prerequisite for success. [2]

One of the benefits with studies in a university of applied science is the fact that a part of the studies is already taking place in a real-life work context. Since the education prepares for a job in the specific professional field, work life experience, the work placement, is integrated in the curricula for everyone. During the work placement the student will gain work life experience and first hand knowledge in the own field.

Here the work placement is exemplified through some of Arcada’s activities within the Toteemi project. [4] The project as such had a more general aim to solve and work with solutions for work life skills development, skills validation and recognition and as well to come up with best practices related to work life HEI cooperation. Arcada (UAS) has, within the project, been working with simulation, work placement and validation initiatives - a few place where work life collaboration becomes obvious. In this article, as mentioned one discusses and describes the developments and the collaboration with a main focus on the work placement for the business students at Arcada. The project and this research is still continuing. At Arcada the aim included finding flexible and efficient study paths and collecting and utilizing learnings from different arenas in work life and as a part of this also make the competency and knowledge progression more visible. This includes becoming better at recognizing skills and competences that are gained for example in work life.

The article is an example of so-called research into the own practice and therefore of a pragmatic nature. At the end, the authors address a few ideas on what can be done to develop and increase the mutual benefits the cooperation in general and specifically when it comes to seeing possibilities for all parties involved in the work placements.

2 METHODOLOGY

As stated above work life needs more cooperation and dialogue with the higher institutions. OECD among other talk about the need to network, to share and collaborate. An eco-systematic change is needed in the development of the future curricula that should be more aligned with and developed together with industry or private and public sector. This in order to fill the needs of the future. [5]

The figure below illustrates the important relation between the work place, the student and the HEI. One can also see the shared arena where the student (opiskelija) transforms and eventually becomes an expert (asiantuntija). It shows the importance of collaboration and cooperation for a successful work life development. What happens in this transformation and how can one contribute to make it even better?

Figure 1. Toteemi’s view on the relation between work life and HEIs connected by the student and soon to be expert. [6]
2.1 Models for collaboration

Define abbreviations and acronyms the first time they are used in the text, even after they have been defined in the abstract. Do not use abbreviations in the title or heads unless they are unavoidable. In this article a suggestion for how to make the cooperation better is suggested. Before we come to the suggestion, which is related to work placements, one can look at the model below which tells that work placements are among the most common or popular form of collaboration between universities of applied science and work life (companies) in Finland.

Based on a survey by EK [7] 70% of the companies (N=338) have done some kind of cooperation or collaborated with the HEIs. 50% of the respondents say that they see that the UAS’ meet the needs of the companies (hyvin tai melko hyvin). 90% of the companies in the survey estimate that the need for collaboration will have to increase. They need to update their skills and also totally new skills. Both companies and HEIs seem to think like this. Also, the Ministry of Culture and Education [2] as well as many other agents talking about what future needs we have pointed this out.

The most common forms of collaboration are: work placements, summer job, thesis work, study visits to companies, company guest lectures and joint research and development projects. In the survey it is also said that companies need more information about collaboration possibilities. This is a request and a gap that we of course need to meet. [7] How can HEIs answer to this need?

From the figure we can also see that the forms of cooperation are not used a lot are companies presence in decision making (boards etc). Also, the cooperation when it comes to training of their employees is on a rather low level 12%. Here we can see a clear potential for development through more meetings and collaboration. Many companies also say that they arrange a lot of the professional training themselves and that they do not have resources for education. For example so called “digi-osaaajat” (digitization professionals) are often trained by the companies themselves. About 50% of the companies say that they do not turn to or use collaboration with HEIs and professional education for gaining more digitization skills. [7] It is clear that there are possibilities to develop the meetings, the collaboration and co-creation to develop our workforce. In fact, in the new model for HEI funding this aspect is being embedded. More professional or so called continuous learning alternatives on top of degrees are need to keep the workforce updated and forward striving.

Jääskelä, Nykänen & Tynjälä [8] have been investigating models for developing the work life skills in HEIs. They have found four models: these are called the specialist model, the science-based renewal model, the project base integrative model and the networked culture model. They describe the models...
with the help of different structural and pedagogical factors as well as interrelations between teaching, learning, guidance and student wellbeing.

The specialist model is a model where the HEI have the work life relations taken care of by a professional. The science-based renewal model is a model that sees the HEI as a change agent and not as an actor who “serves” the enterprise or looks specifically to the needs for competence that a company might have. The project-based integrative model is a model where collaboration is arranged by individual departments or teachers, but not in a systematic way connected to curricula. Finally, the model that seems to be most in line with the curricula integrated work placement process is the networked culture model. This model is the one that have the work placement structure built into the curricula. Furthermore, this last model is supposed to be great for learning and sharing for all parties as well as being a good way to integrate theory and practice and also for promoting students’ wellbeing due to good procedures for guidance etc.

However, we can see that there is still much to do and recent research by Kunttu & Neuvo [9] address the importance of trust building when it comes to university industry or work life relations. Personal relationships, adaptation and consensus are seen as crucial components when lowering barriers that might exist between the parties who do need to balance learning and protection and in general make the information flow more easily in the collaboration.

3 METHODOLOGY

The article draws on data participant observation, interviews and material in the Learning Management System (LMS).

The authors of this article, which is a so-called research into practice article, are at the same time both coaching teachers and involved in developing the placement. This means that they have a double role and have had to rethink be extra cautious not to affect the processes. Subjectivity is always something one need to pay extra much attention to in qualitative research due to the closeness to (and possible involvement) the field, data, respondent etc. However, due to their complex role the teachers do in fact have a great insight into the placement procedures.

The new model for work placement reporting and knowledge sharing is being piloted as this article is being written. The pilot ends early summer 2019. The data include first perceptions on how the developments are perceived by the students. The main input is however from preparatory stages based on teachers’ viewpoints and LMS insights.

3.1 Data collection

Data was collected through observation and unstructured interviews.

Unstructured interviews (N=4) with teachers involved in the placement took place during the academic year of 2018-19. An unstructured interview can be seen more as a discussion or conversation between the researcher (developer and colleague in this case) and the respondent. This is a kind of a in depth interview where the researcher comes to the interview or the discussion with no predefined theories on his/her mind. The topic for the discussion in this case was the current placement system as well as pros and cons and it was crucial to get new openings and genuine thoughts fro the development process at hand. An unstructured interview is also seen as an ethnographic interview and is often connected to research that uses participant observation. [10]

Participant observation is an observation where the observer is involved and takes part in the activities.[11] Throughout this development process it has been clear to the institution that the workplace is being studied and developed within the program and as part of Toteemi project.

Observations are made both among the involved teachers but also within the LMS. Inside the LMS one can see the students’ contributions.

4 RESULTS

In this section we describe investigation into the current work placement process at Arcada together with the insights from discussions with the teachers (unstructured interviews/discussions). After this we present the new model that was developed as part of the Toteemi project and based on the

0951
insights from the teachers as well as insights from the students’ activities and reporting in LMS using the current or old model with work placement reports in a written format.

4.1 Work placement at Arcada

We have seen throughout the years that maybe we do not get the most out of the placements, learning and sharing wise. We believe that we have a great potential to develop the learning, reflection for all parties and to at the same time find more opportunities for meetings and collaboration with work life. One of the Toteemi initiatives that we have worked on at Arcada was to increase the shared learning from maybe the most common form of student meeting work life while still studying - the work placement.

The placement is part of the curricula, the study plan, and has clear learning and competency goals that are to be met. There are two placement periods, Work placement 1 and Work placement 2. In total the placement is worth 30 study credits, which in turn is about 10 weeks of fulltime work per placement period. The work load for a student during the placement should be the same as for a fulltime employee during a week. Fulltime is defined separately in the branch specific agreements. A part time work placement period is calculated based on a 40-hour workload per week. This has to be mentioned in the work certificates of the student [12].

The placement is according to the study plan placed in the fourth period for second and third year students. This is more of a recommendation than a rule. The student can flex and decide to do the work placement during other times of the year, for example during the summer or whenever it fits into the individual study plan or life situation [12].

Work placement procedures in the business department follow the general Arcada rules discussed earlier in this paper. In total the placement is worth 30 study credits, which in turn is about 10 weeks of fulltime work per placement period. The work load for a student during the placement should be the same as for a fulltime employee during a week. In the business department the students are to find their work placement by themselves. They are often contacted directly by companies. A lot of networking takes place via multiple company visits during the normal courses and this clearly helps the matching. Arcada also organizes a recruitment event called My Future Work for this purpose. This event takes place at the latter part of January so that students have enough time to apply before the placement start. Work placement 1 is always a more general business related internship, often related to customer service but the work placement 2 needs to be linked to the topic student is majoring at. Currently Arcada Business department has four topics to major in: Logistics, Tourism, Marketing and Financial Management.

4.1.1 The written placement report

Once the students has found a suitable placement the placement supervisor agrees on the terms of conditions and accepts the placement. Students are supervised by a coach from the placement company’s side. In the past students wrote a reflective report to the placement supervisor after the placement period was over. The supervisor then registered the credits. This report was never shared to anyone else and was often perceived as a less important and unnecessary by the students. Also the supervising teacher perceived these reports more like “a job to do”.

Work placement is a great place for a dialogue between HEIs and work life, between students, teachers, co-students, HEIs, and the company where the work placement is. Often though, the dialogue does not reach all parties, all parties that could benefit from the new insights, according to the teachers. In our case we have mostly used a written report for summing up the learning, a teacher says. The insights in the report have stayed between the teachers handling the placements and the students. At Arcada we as well have tried to have sharing sessions, oral sessions, where students are invited to listen to each other face to face. These have however never been popular and the number of attendants is small.
The written report has of course been a simple and familiar way to sum up experiences. It has been easy to handle according to the teachers.

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4.2 Work placement blogs and podcasts – the new learning and sharing model

The developments of the new model with a blog and podcast started in the summer of 2018. It was a result of Toteemi aims and goals as well discussions in the business department with the teachers. A teacher had also reported that blogs had previously been a successful tool for learning and sharing. The teacher had used the blog in a course and saw that the students seemed to like this way of working. It inspired them to share and even show off their insights and learnings in a public space. The quality of the texts in those blogs went up, says the teacher. This among other things lead towards the new model which is presented here.

All in all, one can say that the placement supervising teachers welcome this new change and the blog and podcast model for reporting. They also seem to believe the dialogue between all stakeholders will now improve.

4.2.1 Benefits with blogs and podcasts

The blog and podcast that is piloted as a part of Toteemi can be read or heard by everyone interested! Co-students, other teachers, companies etc. If successful learning and sharing will increase dramatically. The old reporting, or the written work placement report stayed only with the teacher who graded it. The teachers see that the following benefits, when it comes to learning and sharing, can occur:

- Great knowledge sharing: the experiences reach other students, teachers, work life etc
- The reporting will be more focused
- Listening to podcasts and reading blogs is good preparation for anyone who is going on a placement.
- The link between what is learning goals in course and work life experiences of students.
- Networking is made easier through insight and awareness of where the students do the placement and how it is perceived
- Competency gaps can be identified
- The blog can is a bridge to working
- The blog is a forum for that can help developing the education
- Transparency is increased
- It is a modern and easy to approach
- The students will have a forum for sharing ideas and for learning and preparing form other’s insights.
- The evaluation and accreditation process will be faster

4.2.2 The pilot phase model

When this article is being written the new model is still being piloted by a group of 8 students.

The initiative per se is simple instead of just writing a reflective report students can (in the pilot phase) choose between following forms for reporting. This is the pilot phase model:

1. Create podcast (see instructions in itslearning)
2. Write a work placement blog (see instructions in itslearning)
3. Write a placement report (see instructions in itslearning)

Below and illustration of the developments and where we are heading with this particular Toteemi initiative.
The pilot phase

In fall we prepared the final model at Arcada and discussed with our communications department and other involved in the process. We decided that we will pilot in early spring with a few students and then go for full implementation in fall 2019.

In December we recruited 5 students to pilot and we took on a few more in January. These were students who were interested in creating blogs and podcasts and students who had recently or were just about to start the placement. (Most students do their placement during spring-summer.)

We renewed our placement instructions planned the blog, said the teachers. All instructions and steps were discussed with the pilot group. During the pilot the students could choose tools and forums for the blog more freely. By doing like this we also wanted to see what their choices were and then based on this we might then develop the initial plans further. The pilot blogs and podcasts are not public. Pilot phase ends in April/May and then we will collate experiences and plan for full implementation in the fall 2019. This is order to have instruction ready for the work placement period during the next academic year.

After the pilot and into the future

When writing this we are as mentioned still in the pilot phase, but we have seen that students are eager to work with tools like podcasts and blogs before. Teachers do believe and hope that eventually the written reporting will be minimized and that the new forms, which are more creative and of course stress openness and sharing will take over. We will emphasize this, says the teachers. They hope these new reflection work placement reporting styles also will enhance reflection. Not only among the students, but also among other stakeholders who read about the experiences of the student. They believe that this will be a success pedagogically and learning wise for many parties.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The project is continuing and it is difficult to draw many conclusions at this point.

However, the students have expressed a great interest in trying out the blogging and podcast tools for reporting their work placement insights and at the moment we wait for final results from all the students enrolled for the pilot.

The teachers involved in the work placement process are still positive towards the change. It is also a way to make use of new technology and make things easier. It is maybe also be a way to on top of learning and sharing insights about work skills related to writing text for a wider public are gained.

Since the communication related tools and channels are currently being updated the project has had some technical issues to solve. We however believe that this can be dealt with when the pilot is over. The pilot is being done within the own LMS (itslearning) and is therefore semi-public.

Students’ initial feedback is positive and they seem to warmly welcome all kinds of new tools. We can only at this point hope that it will lead to great learning and skill development. At least the new model

0954
has followed recommendations from previous research when it comes to insight and reflection with the help of collaboration as part of the learning. Jääskelä et al [10] mention that the networked model should be a good learning for all parties. We can here only hope that this will be even better now in the case of work placements at Arcada. Future research into this practice could be taking on a work life perspective to see how the learning, development and collaboration are perceived from their point of view.

In the next steps the pilot will be analysed and the full implementation will be during the next academic year.

REFERENCES


