

Scandinavian cooperation in teaching a joint Master's course on e-books

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Abstract

Purpose. The aim of the paper is to share the experience of collaboration among Scandinavian iSchools¹ in creating and implementing a joint course.

Methodology. The authors explore their own activity and documentation produced in relation to the collaboration around the development and implementation of the advanced course on e-books.

Results. The results of the collaboration are expressed in terms of new experience, knowledge, and implementation of a new course on the advanced level for library and information science students. The results of the paper generalize these experiences and present the challenges and lessons learned in the process of collaboration.

Originality/Practical implications. The paper presents a workable administrative model for cross-national joint courses. In addition, it outlines design and teaching methods for a Master's course on e-books for library and information science students.

Conclusion. A joint course with a shared syllabus and cross-national teacher teams gives added value to the students by getting the best out of the combined expertise. Administrative details should be implemented locally at the collaborating universities rather than try to standardise everything.

Keywords

collaboration; e-books; iSchools; library and information science; Scandinavia; teaching;

Introduction

In the spring term of 2016, the University of Borås and OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University (then Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences) offered *E-books: Production, distribution, reading* as a joint course for Master's students in their respective library and information science (LIS) programmes. The team involved in the course received financial support from OsloMet and the Nordplus programme for planning and implementation. The course involved a significant administrative and organizational effort, a number of innovative teaching methods and learning opportunities for both students and teachers, and continues its life in other formats.

¹ The iSchools organization: <http://ischools.org>

The aim of the paper is to share the experience of collaboration among Scandinavian iSchools in creating and implementing a joint course. We concentrate on the issues of organizing and administering the collaboration, constructing the idea, content, and educational approach of the subject and the course, the obstacles in collaboration, lessons learned, and achieving sustainability of the outcomes.

Organizing collaboration

The origin of the collaboration is a workshop about e-books and digital reading held at the Department of Archivistis, Library and Information Science at OsloMet, Norway, on June 17 and 18, 2013. A group at the department with an interest in e-books as a topic for research and education received local funding as part of the university's strategy for building international relations and partnerships. The group invited colleagues with similar interests at the major iSchools in Denmark and Sweden to the workshop to share ideas and experiences. The workshop resulted in the journal article "The e-book: Scandinavian perspectives on research and education" (Balling et al., 2014).

The 2013 workshop had shown that the three partner institutions in Norway (OsloMet), Sweden (University of Borås) and Denmark (University of Copenhagen) had mutual interests in teaching e-books to LIS students, so the collaboration developed naturally into the planning of a joint Master's course. OsloMet continued its strategic funding of the project with a premise that it should involve student or teacher mobility, which meant that an online course was not an option in Oslo. The planning meetings resulted in a course description for the 15 ECTS Master's Course *E-books: production, distribution, reading* that was legally accepted at all three partner institutions for implementation in the spring semester of 2016.

The course consisted of four modules on e-books

- Introduction
- Production
- Distribution
- Reading

The *Introduction* module was taught and planned locally at each university, but the other three modules had collaborative expert teams from all partners that would teach the module on each campus. The University of Borås took the initiative to apply to Nordplus for travel, hotel and dining costs for the teacher teams and a couple of further meetings. We received the money, which meant that we received external funding for everything except the salary costs for teachers in this project.

Implementation of the course

Each collaborating institution developed a separate course plan and these plans were approved as follows:

- OsloMet: The course plan *E-books: production, distribution and reading*, 15 ECTS, was accepted by the administration 2014-12-01 for the term from early January to late May, first time run in 2016. Given on campus.
- The University of Copenhagen allocated at most 30 hours of teaching each term starting with term from February to June, 2016, an elective course. Given on campus.
- University of Borås approved the following courses on 2015-05-13 (all conducted together):

- *E-books: production, distribution and reading*, 15 ECTS, obligatory for the international Master's programme Digital library and Information Services, second term, January-June, 2016. Distance with a residential period.
- *E-books: distribution and reading*, 7.5 ECTS, elective for students in the Master's programme in Library and Information Science, second term, January-March, 2016. Distance with a residential period.
- *E-books: distribution and reading*, 7.5 ECTS, independent course for the students outside regular study programmes, run in January-March, 2016.

The admission and registration of the students to the courses was announced in autumn 2015. Both OsloMet and the University of Borås had a sufficient number of students to start the courses. Forty students enrolled in the courses in Borås and 12 in Oslo. At the University of Copenhagen, the course did not attract a sufficient number of students and was therefore not offered. However, the Danish member of the team participated in teaching the Reading module.

The joint activities within the courses were as follows. The course started with the Reading module that was only taught in Oslo. The lectures and discussions were streamed to the Swedish students and recorded for all to access it at a later time. The Production and Distribution modules were taught on campus at both universities, which meant that the participating teachers had to travel to their respective partner institutions. The on-campus teaching events were designed almost identically at both universities. The students accessed the study materials and information through their local e-learning platform.

The methods of assessment and student evaluation were decided locally at the partner institutions. At OsloMet, the assessment had two parts: a project work (15-20 pages) made in groups with 2-3 students and an individual 3-day home examination (7-10 pages), written either in English or in Norwegian. In Borås the students were assessed on three home examination submissions and an integrating essay focusing on a topic from one module, but integrating relevant issues from the other two modules.

Content and teaching approaches

Creating the concept

E-book production – or rather digital publishing courses – are taught mainly in the departments of publishing studies, such as a one year MA Digital Publishing programme at Oxford International Centre for Publishing Studies (within the School of Arts at Oxford Brooks University)² or 1.5 year MA in Media and Digital Publishing at the Faculty of Communication at Vilnius University³. These programmes include the modules on digital publishing technology, digital design, digital publishing strategy and/or digital marketing, and are targeted to professional publishers. E-books may be mentioned as one of the digital products and the particular features of e-book design or formats would be a part of content of these courses. Thompson (2014) outlines the problems and conflicts between

² Digital Publishing: <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/digital-publishing/>

³ Medijos ir skaitmeninė leidyba: <http://www.kf.vu.lt/studijos/programos/magistrantura/leidyba>

teaching digital (or electronic) publishing and print publishing in the US graduate programmes in publishing and discusses the benefits of the courses of electronic publishing in EPUB format.

However, a large and joint LIS Master's course specifically devoted to e-books had not been launched before, certainly not in Scandinavia, and given the increasing presence and importance of e-books across the library field, we decided the time was ripe. The interest in library publishing⁴ as a subfield of publishing originates from several sources: the involvement of libraries in academic publishing as such through subsidizing and running the entire publishing process of academic publications; from the open access publishing of articles and theses in institutional repositories run by libraries; and from digitization programmes when libraries digitize their holdings and spread them online. Thus education and training in publishing should be regarded as an important part of LIS education. (Skinner, Lippincott, Speer, & Walters, 2014).

In addition, both academic and public libraries experience significant changes and difficulties with regard to commercial e-books that have become a part of their collections and require specific knowledge and skills in managing them (Bergström et al., 2017).

The LIS schools regularly experience certain pressures from the technologically savvy library communities. In combination with growing experience of teachers and researchers of digitization, e-books, and digital reading, the competence to teach this specific and interesting course has steadily accumulated, and it was the time to apply it in education. Thus, the initiative and support of OsloMet found a fertile ground with readily planted seeds. The participants decided to develop an advanced level course that could fit into the Master's or advanced programmes in all participating schools.

Three teams of teachers collaborated in the development of the course plan. All teams agreed that the course should include almost the full life cycle of an e-book from its production to the distribution and the use by readers, and should be taught at advanced level with the prerequisite of a completed Bachelor's degree. The three main parts of the course (production, distribution, and reading) were regarded as essential for the LIS students. Thus, authorial or editorial issues are only marginally present in the content. The final content included the following elements:

- e-book production process, equipment and technology
- e-books as part of the book market and the literary field
- e-books as material and cultural artefacts
- e-books in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish libraries and book market
- copyright, licensing and other legal aspects in production, distribution and use of e-books
- reading and readers of e-books from quantitative and qualitative perspectives

Each university had the possibility to use existing local literature and resources, and to highlight specific issues regarded as central in the local context, though the main focus was on the overall situation in the Scandinavian countries and on the international market.

For this part of the course development work, the teachers collaborated through a joint Google Drive document, where we started developing syllabi, course contents, literature lists, and activities for the students. The following part in this chapter highlights the content and teaching methods applied in each

⁴ Library Publishing Coalition defines library publishing as a the set of activities led by college and university libraries to support the creation, dissemination, and curation of scholarly, creative, and/or educational works, which is distinguished from other publishing fields by a preference for open access dissemination (<https://librarypublishing.org/>)

of the modules within the course, namely, Introduction, Production, Distribution, and Reading of e-books.

Introduction

The introduction module was not part of the mutual course plan and was locally implemented at each university. It included the presentation of the course content, aims, examination tasks and course literature; explained the structure of the course and the delivery modes. The two main overarching books in the course were introduced in this module: *Reading and writing the electronic book* by Catherine C. Marshall (2010) and *Changing our textual minds: Towards a digital order of knowledge* by Adriaan van der Weel (2011). There was also a focus on the national book market in the respective countries where the Introduction module was taught.

Production

All three partner institutions had experience from various courses where text encoding is being taught. The Oslo team had previously twice taught an e-books course on undergraduate level where students produced e-books from Norwegian classic texts in the public domain. This was a collaboration with Bokselsskap⁵, which is now part of the National library in Norway. The source texts were OCR scans from the National library's vast digital library. These texts were marked up using TEI guidelines and transformed into EPUB via XSLT⁶ and different stylesheets from Bokselsskap's toolbox. The Danish partner had similar experiences from courses on e-books and electronic publishing.

In Sweden, the department of LIS had been offering a 15 ECTS Master's course on cultural heritage digitization for several years (described and discussed in Dahlström, 2013; Dahlström & Doracic, 2009). In it, students worked with image capture and text capture through OCR to digitize handwritten or printed documents, then proceeded to encode the transcription text with TEI, transform the TEI files into XHTML (and at times additional formats as well) and finally published all the resulting digital files on the web in an open source mode, both as digital facsimiles and as encoded text.

The experiences from these courses were quite positive in all three universities, and we therefore decided to use this as a teaching model for the production part of the course, and agreed on the following learning outcomes for the module:

- explain and apply the main technology and equipment of e-book production
- produce a transcription of a digital text with XML coding in a way adequate to the e-book's character and intended use
- explain how an XML encoded text is transformed into EPUB or an equivalent e-book format
- be able to identify and evaluate different arguments used for selection decision in e-book production

As is evident from the outcomes, our focus was not only on technical hands-on skills, but equally as much on having the students analyse, understand and explain the process as a whole.

The students were provided with lectures and hands-on labs in XML, TEI, XSLT and EPUB, as well as more general lectures on scholarly e-books and digital humanities. They were also assigned course

⁵ Bokselsskap (Norwegian open access book service): <http://www.bokselsskap.no>

⁶ XSLT - the styling language for XML

literature on text encoding and transformation such as manuals as well as critical articles on text encoding from the field of digital humanities, and Catherine C. Marshall's textbook on e-books (Marshall, 2010), which includes dedicated sections on production issues. It would certainly have been possible to treat the actual e-book production as a trivial affair, simply pressing a transform button and then making the resulting EPUB files available. This would however have turned the process into a black box for the students, and we wanted them instead to have some fair understanding of what actually occurs during this transformation and editing process. This would equip the students with better skills to understand and manage future technical development in the world of e-book publishing. They were directed to online archives of freely available literary works as raw text (.txt).⁷ We decided a manageable size of the downloaded texts to be between 6,000 and 10,000 words, and therefore asked the students to work with short stories, e.g. by Arthur Conan Doyle or Edgar Allan Poe. An additional pedagogical aim in choosing short stories was that the students could subsequently collect all the EPUB short stories they produced into a joint short story anthology, formatted as an e-book in EPUB format. They needed to prepare the downloaded text for markup, such as checking it for possible transcription errors, markup the text in TEI (with an eye to subsequent inclusion of the story into the anthology), transform it into EPUB and finally make it available for teachers and course mates. Repeatedly during this process, we discussed with the students what was happening in the technical process, why certain problems and glitches occurred and how best to solve them.

As was our experience from our earlier courses, it was clear that the students really enjoyed getting their hands dirty with text encoding and transformations, and expressed satisfaction and joy in seeing their laborious hands-on work gradually result in real e-books on the laptop, tablet or smartphone screen in front of them.

Distribution of e-books

The working paper, used by the course developers in Google Drive and compiled using three Scandinavian languages as well as English, reflected the gradual formulation of the learning outcomes, several of which relate to the module of e-book distribution:

- advanced knowledge of the Scandinavian e-book markets and distribution models, including challenges associated with economic and legal aspects
- assess the value and potential of distribution models of e-books for various types of libraries
- critically reflect on the implications of global e-book distribution for small language markets and literary fields

Rather early in the process the team charted out the content that should be available for the students studying this module to reach the planned outcomes. The group decided to use the book circuit by Darnton (Darnton, 1991, pp. 111–113) and its latest developments to include the changes brought about by digital technologies (Murray & Squires, 2013) as the theoretical framework explaining the e-book market and its players. Cultural policy of Scandinavian countries was regarded as another important factor influencing e-book distribution together with legal provisions for library work, copyright and digital society. Due to the nature of e-books, all e-book market players were regarded as possible distributors of e-books. Thus, the students could explore the positions of the authors in relation to e-books, the activities of publishers in marketing and spreading their digital products on the market, and

⁷ Such as Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org>) or Hathi Trust (<https://www.hathitrust.org>).

the commercial book selling channels, such as traditional bookshops, online booksellers, subscriptions services and their international context with major players in the field such as Amazon. Both academic and public libraries received much attention: the business models of acquiring access to e-books, work with digital book collections, services to the readers, and their evaluation. Some other dimensions, such as piracy and user perspective, especially e-book usage patterns in Scandinavia, were included in the course.

As learning was based on self-studies by the students of a distance Master's programme in Sweden and the on-campus studies by the students in Norway, a list of course literature included texts on the advanced level mainly in English. At the moment of preparing the course, there was a lack of scholarly texts about the situation of e-books in the Scandinavian countries, therefore the teachers prepared a number of teaching aids, such as empirical data on publishing and book sales, library lending statistics, public debate articles and other materials. Lectures, seminars and workshops were planned for the residential period of the Swedish programme students in Borås and also for the students at OsloMet. They were concentrated on the issues of commercial markets of e-books in the Scandinavian countries, statistics of e-book sales, the e-books in libraries and the legal issues related to e-books.

In Sweden, the overall learning outcomes from this module were examined through a set of questions on e-book commercial and public distribution that students had to answer after reading the course literature and reflecting on it. There were also six topics on e-book distribution issues offered for the final essay.

Reading of e-books

The module on Reading e-books was organized by an external-only team, since the University of Copenhagen cancelled the Master's course. Anne Mangen from the University of Stavanger, who took part in the initial 2013 workshop at OsloMet, was heavily involved, and the content of the module was informed by the research in the EU COST action E-READ⁸ that is headed by Mangen.

The group formulated two learning outcomes:

- advanced knowledge of the implications of digitization of reading as a cognitive process, phenomenological experience and social practice
- critical reflection on how affordances of reading devices may affect the reading of different types of texts for different purposes

Digital reading was understood in a wide sense of the term and included several different aspects and perspectives in the content of the course:

- Psychological and phenomenological perspectives on reading and digital reading
- Ergonomic aspects of digital reading
- Affordances/interfaces/navigation in e-books
- Media consumption and e-books in its context
- Devices for digital reading and their impact on reading process

The group chose a number of recent research papers and books exploring the phenomenon of digital reading, while also grounding their teaching in their own research examining the difference between

⁸ Evolution of reading in the age of digitisation (E-READ): <http://ereadcost.eu>

reading in print and reading of digital texts (Balling, 2015; Mangen, 2016). They put emphasis on the different modes of reading, especially on the deep reading of fiction and non-fiction (Mangen & Weel, 2015; Wolf, 2007). Another topic emphasized in this part was children and digital reading.

The Reading module was only taught at OsloMet, because of restrictions on the number of student gatherings at the study programmes in Borås. The teachers focused on the theoretical approaches and reflections by the students. Thus, lectures and discussions of seminal papers became the main teaching forms. Prof. Adriaan van der Weel from the University of Leiden, the author of one of the main books on the syllabus, gave a two-hour lecture on the first day. The students also had a workshop to get acquainted with different reading devices. The distance learning technology was applied in the form of streaming and recording lectures and discussions to allow the Borås students in different locations to participate in them synchronously or to access the events later during the self-study period.

As there were no Swedish teachers involved in the development and teaching of this module, the University of Borås lecturer, who conducted reading research in Sweden, supervised the studies and assessed the submitted examination tasks. The examination consisted of a set of questions to be answered as a result of reflection of the read course literature. There were also nine essay topics included in the list of the final examination essays.

Experiences from the collaboration

The starting point of the project was to develop joint course objectives and learning outcomes that would be implemented in each partner university's syllabi. As agreed, each partner is responsible to follow national and home university guidelines for recognition of syllabi and integration into the ordinary curricula.

The countries share legislative similarities concerning the requirements about the main statements in the syllabus, such as course level, number of higher education credits, course objectives, requirements for special eligibility and the forms for assessing student performance. Additionally the courses in Borås must adhere to specific ordinance rules for syllabi design at the University of Borås (Dnr 339-15), which means supplementary requirements for the syllabus. However, there are some differences. For instance, the Swedish Higher Education Ordinance 1993:100 requires a certain number of examinations in the course. This legal requirement is additionally regulated by local Guidelines for examinations in due process (Dnr 724-14) from the University of Borås. It states that each examination should be offered on at least five occasions, of which at least three must take place within a year if nothing else is evident from the syllabus. This also applies to ceased courses. At OsloMet the number of examination opportunities is three (within a year) as regulated by *Forskrift om studier og eksamen ved Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus* (Forskrift om studier og eksamen ved Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus, 2012, § 5-7(4)).

Much effort was put into formulating the learning outcomes that would formally be acceptable at partner universities, without losing the main idea and the content of the course. Besides the common ground in the Bloom taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) and the Solo taxonomy (Biggs & Collis, 1982), the learning outcomes in each partner's course documentation needed to be defined in a particular way, concretely expressing the objectives of the Master's programme syllabus. Furthermore, learning outcomes ought to be stated in each syllabus with regard to the domains of *knowledge and understanding, skills and abilities* and *evaluation ability and approach*. While OsloMet does not use the last category (evaluative ability), it is a common praxis in Borås to include all three categories in

the course syllabus. In addition OsloMet defined outcomes according to “After completion of the course the student has...” while Borås “After passing the course the student should be able to”. A main difference between the two universities is that in Borås, the learning outcomes must be clearly tied to specific examination tasks. This means that there were special examinations for each module throughout the semester. In Oslo, there are no such requirements. Each learning outcome can be tested at examination, but that is not mandatory. This means that students must be prepared for tasks related to anything on the syllabus at examinations.

There was likewise a difference relating to the prerequisites for the courses. While the *E-book* course in Oslo did not have any prerequisites, the course in Borås required the students to have passed the examinations of a previous programme course, *Technologies for digital libraries*.

The teams considered launching and using a joint digital learning platform as a single area of teaching, a meeting place for teachers and students, and as an effective way of distributing joint course material rather than duplicating information and documents across two or more local platforms. The various learning platforms of the partner universities were considered as well as third-party non-commercial platforms. However, this intention had to be abandoned due to local administrative, economic and regulatory uncertainties. For instance, in Borås it was difficult to arrange for students from other universities to have access to the learning platform. To use a third party non-commercial platform required additional economic investments in form of teachers’ working hours that none of the partners could provide. Due to these challenges, instead of having one joint learning digital platform, each partner used its own, only providing access for the collaborating teachers. However, a Facebook group was set up by the students from both partners to exchange experiences and knowledge.

Differences in local schedules for the start and the end of the spring semester put a strain on coordinating and synchronizing the educational activities and teacher mobility. Oslo started the course almost a month before Borås, which affected the joint teaching week where Oslo students had progressed further in the Reading module in comparison to the students in Borås. However, despite differences in time frames, most of the activities overlapped.

The differences in local admission to the courses also had a negative result. As mentioned earlier, the Department of Information Studies in the University of Copenhagen did not attract a sufficient number of students to make the course economically viable, and so the course was delivered only in Oslo and Borås.

Courses in Oslo and Borås were evaluated by the students. The written comments throughout the digital evaluation survey confirmed the very positive experience of the courses. Several students expressed their great satisfaction with the quality of teaching and relevance of the content. In particular, students valued teaching with the colleagues from other Nordic countries who have elevated the course. Furthermore, a large majority of the students from both universities consider the learning objectives of the teaching methods of the course as suitable for the learning. In Oslo, the students without much experience in coding and markup languages emphasized that the hands-on approach in the Production module worked very well. However, the evaluation in Borås pointed out need for improvement in a few areas such as lectures, literature and course information. Concerning the lectures, students expressed need for additional recorded (and live) lectures and discussions. Overall appreciation for the course literature was very good. However, some comments brought up that some literature was repetitive. Finally, the structure of the course in the digital learning platform and course instructions received some minor criticism.

Summing up

The three partner institutions have a long history of various forms of collaboration, including joint courses at PhD education level. Joint courses at Bachelor's or Master's level have however previously mostly failed because of administrative obstacles and differences between the national education programmes. The e-book course did however come to fruition, mainly because of its administrative design. The course description, content and syllabus were the same at the three partner universities, but the course was run separately at each campus. This means that each university could adjust details such as assignments, assessment and examination necessary to the local higher education requirements. Furthermore, the students enrolled locally in their respective countries, which meant that we avoided hard discussions about distribution of money received for student credits.

We can sum up the added value of a joint course from the perspectives of students, participating teachers and the partner institutions:

- Students had an opportunity to extend their social networks into the related universities both among the students and teachers, experience new ways and methods of teaching, explore additional technologies of e-learning and teaching. They were also able to enjoy a much-anticipated course on the increasingly important topic e-books, where they not only apply critical analyses on a specific kind of digital object but also produce that very object themselves in the process.
- The teachers had to overcome some expected as well as unexpected challenges in collaborative teaching, exercising their creativity and trying out teaching methods in different environments. All three teams were able to conclude that the difficult task of international educational collaboration can be achieved with due resources, mainly, in the form of teachers' time, not to mention the good spirit of all participants.
- The participating institutions have invested in teachers' time and have acquired additional experience in running educational collaborative projects. Further, the educational approaches and course materials developed in the course project have been shared among the universities, and a new, timely and relevant course was developed. The University of Borås has added it to its Master's programmes and independent courses. The investment has proved to be sustainable at least in the medium term for now.

Overall, the collaboration was a success. The partner institutions were able to offer a joint Master's course that was richer and more advanced in content than they could do individually. The partnership utilized the expertise at the three universities with their different specialities. The workshops and teaching sessions have renewed the collaboration between the Scandinavian iSchools, also resulting in this collaborative paper.

Conclusion

The experiences of the collaborative development and implementation of the course is summed up in Figure 1, which defines the stages that we could identify in our collaboration and the success factors that lead to completion of each of them.

	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3
	Conceptual framework	Organizational framework	Pilot implementation framework
Success factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Initiative group ✓ Educational need ✓ Research base ✓ Educational competence ✓ Economic resource 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Relevance to the partner HEIs ✓ International team ✓ Educational competence ✓ Administrative competence ✓ Negotiation competence ✓ Willingness to succeed ✓ Economic resource 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Interested students ✓ Marketing strategy ✓ Teaching/learning methodology ✓ Coordination of activities ✓ Educational competence ✓ Economic resource

Figure 1. Stages and success factors of collaborative joint course development

This framework of our collaboration is based on our practical experience and so far we have not reflected on its wider theoretical base or implications. It can be useful for others developing international joint courses and draws attention to the fact that conditions in each stage leading to success or failure may be different. The initiative may fail even at the stage of the implementation, as was the case with one of the partners who failed to attract a sufficient amount of students to the course. It also shows that the initiative group, actual design team and teachers on the course do not need to be the same people, but in all three cases a high level of educational competence and flexibility is still necessary. The figure also draws attention to the role of financial support to the collaboration, which can be expensive and any potential savings may be made only after the pilot implementation.

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