

Research group librarian — a cooperating partner in research?

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Abstract

Academic libraries encounter many challenges when providing services for researchers and it is evident that use of the library in information searches has reduced significantly over time and continues to decrease.

However, a study in Norway in 2007, at Vestfold University College (VUC), demonstrated that there is great potential to increase faculty staff's use of the library's digital resources with the right form of engagement. The findings led VUC's library to focus on its services for this particular user group.

In 2009, VUC library initiated a study to investigate the possible effects of a librarian participating as a 'Research Group Librarian'.

The research project, in which this new role was tried out, was called 'Kindergarten space, materiality, learning and meaning-making'. This was a three-year project, funded by the Research Council of Norway. There were eight part time researchers involved in this project, two senior researchers and the research group librarian.

The study adopted an ethnographic approach. The research group librarian was a fully participating member of the research team throughout the project.

The empirical sources for the study included:

1. semi-structured interviews with the project leader and the participating researchers:
short individual interviews at the beginning of the project with each of the research group participants; several group interviews with the majority of the research team midway in the project;
2. observation and field notes

The results are presented under the following categories:

- implications for the researcher; emphasising behaviour in relation to information search and reference management skills;
- communication and information within, and evolving from, the project;
- collaboration in writing a review article;
- implications for the library – internal, and at VUC in general;
- the librarian's role – a 'boundary worker'?

The study demonstrated that as a member of a research group a librarian can have positive impact on the researchers' work. Appropriate library services become more distinct. Ideas for new library services for the user group evolve and develop naturally during the engagement process.

Although this is a minor study and insufficient to make generalisations, the findings are interesting and worth considering in the further development of academic library services for faculty staff and researchers.

Key Words: research group librarian; academic libraries; library services for research

Acronym List

DEFF – Denmark's electronic resource library
EECERA – European Early Childhood Research Association
HiOA – Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Science
ICT – Information and Communication Technology
OCLC – Online Computer Library Center
SHP – Strategic Projects – University Colleges, Norwegian Research Council
VUC – Vestfold University College

The Role of the Academic Library

The academic library in university colleges and universities has two main target groups: the students and the faculty staff. With the increased need for information and literacy teaching over the last decades, the focus has been more on the students. This article, however, presents a project, which focuses on the other user group.

At Vestfold University College (VUC) in Norway, a number of projects are being conducted to develop and adapt the library services for faculty staff. The project presented here concentrates on the context of the library and the researchers at VUC.

VUC is a state-owned University College with about 4,500 students and 450 employees. By Norwegian standards this is a medium-sized university college. VUC trains teachers (from pre-school to secondary level), nurses, engineers and maritime officers. The college offers masters courses in 10 different subject areas.

There are 29 professors and 51 associate professors among the staff. The library at VUC employs 10 librarians. VUC's core areas of research and development are kindergarten development, health promotion, micro- and nano-technology, pedagogic texts, women's — children's — and family health, pedagogy and regional innovation¹.

Over the last 30 years, fundamental changes have been taking place regarding research in most disciplines. New forms of collaboration have developed. Researchers have established much greater cooperation between institutions, countries and disciplines. New technologies and digital tools challenge the researchers both in terms of mastering the actual tools and in orientating themselves in the increasing sea of information and publications (DEFF, 2009).

In Norway, there is an increasing demand from government to produce academic publications and these have become an important source of finance for institutions of higher education. At the university colleges, this development has led to an increasing number of faculty staff, both teachers and researchers, conducting research. Most staff conduct research projects for a specific period of time and not on a constant basis.

Previously, the library was a necessary source of information for students and researchers. No serious researcher or student could work without the library's collections and loans from other libraries (Law, 2010a). The legitimacy of the library is still dependent on adding value to the institution it supports. However, the necessary role of the library is not as obvious as it was before. There are now more ways of finding required information. On this point, some may ask whether it makes a difference, *who* is responsible for facilitating access to the available digital literature? Another highly relevant statement and question posed by Jo Webb is: "Researchers will always need information, but will they always need libraries?" (Webb, Gannon-Leary, & Bent, 2007, p. 124).

Lotta Haglund has done some investigation relating to the new researchers' search habits. She found, as others have, that the youngest generation of researchers search for information mainly through other resources than the web pages of the library (Haglund & Olsson, 2008; University College London, 2008). The next question then, which libraries need to respond to is: How could the researcher benefit from using the library as a source for research?

In the publication: *Providing effective library services for research*, Jo Webb, Pat Gannon-Leary and Moria Bent adopt the approach of practitioner-researchers (Webb et al., 2007). The authors' backgrounds are from academic libraries in the UK, but most of the content is equally relevant to the Norwegian context. From the practitioner perspective, the book recognises that research support is a core activity for the continued existence of libraries. In an attempt to define researchers, research and librarian services to facilitate research, the authors present some key challenges for the future of libraries. They want librarians to be able to answer the question: "How do librarians add value to the research process?" (Webb et al., 2007, p. 3)

David Lankes has an ambitious statement in his comprehensive publication — *The atlas of new librarianship* (2011): "The mission of librarians is to improve society through facilitating knowledge creation in their communities". He discusses and shows a way forward for librarians. He concentrates on librarians, not on the resource collections. Lankes believes in the potential to develop the profession of librarianship, where "...preservation and improvement of society" are central values. The atlas presents a huge topic map, consisting of six threads emanating from the opening statement.

Lankes does not see this as a finished piece of work, the discussion is meant to have further life through the blog and companion site linked to the book.²

The research institute Ithaka S+R conducts regular surveys about researchers' information searching behaviour (Schonfeld & Housewright, 2010). The first survey was conducted in 2000 and the latest in 2009, which was the fourth in the series. The respondents' answers to questions about the library indicate a decline in both library use and the perceived importance of the value of the library services. One of the statements in the report suggests that a future function of the library could be providing an "electronic hub" which focuses on support resources for teaching, learning and research. This could be one appropriate answer to the current challenges the library is facing.

James Michalko, Constance Malpa and Arnold Arcolio were engaged by Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) in 2008 to try to identify "the most significant risks facing research libraries" (Michalko, Malpas, & Arcolio, 2010). A risk analysis was conducted, based on interviews with library directors in research libraries in the United States. The respondents report common challenges regarding the university libraries. Two elements classed as having the highest risk are:

1. the reduced perceived value and relevance of the library services and
2. certain challenges regarding staffing and human resources.

This report is intended to help librarians reach a common understanding to be able to respond to the challenges in a concerted way. OCLC has also published a call for action in relation to library support for the research process (Bourg, Coleman, & Erway, 2009). Ten critical points for libraries to meet are presented in this Academic Library Manifesto. These are considered necessary for libraries to "continue to play a central role in the support of scholarly research and publishing".

Sue McKnight (2010) brought together some international experts in academic librarianship to form a platform to predict and shape the future of academic libraries. The articles in her book cover a wide range of subjects, from 'Web 2.0'³ and libraries in 'Second Life'⁴, to the leadership of the future

libraries. The focus of the publication is on how to contribute to an effective and future-orientated change in libraries. A recent publication by Luisa Alvite and Leticia Barrionuevo from the University of Leon in Spain (Alvite & Barrionuevo, 2011) describes a similar context. The current and future services of the library are the subject of the book, which also presents some of the formal frameworks in which the academic libraries in Spain have to operate; such as methods of evaluating quality and the new teaching/learning model in European higher education.

The Danish State organisation Danmarks elektroniske Fag- og forskningsbibliotek [Denmark's electronic resource library] (DEFF), launched a comprehensive report in 2009 (DEFF, 2009) in which the researchers responsible for the report try to answer three questions:

1. "Is there a future for research libraries?
2. Which possible roles can the research library adopt?
3. Can we draw a roadmap to help us move towards a new desired future?"

(DEFF, 2009, p. 7)

The report is based on data collected from interviews and observations, trend- and communication analysis and two workshops. Eight areas are identified as being of special importance, among them a focus on the library's identity; skills required in the library of the future; and the role of the librarian.

With this back drop, some librarians at the VUC library wanted to respond to attitudes like this: "... wait for the future to come to them rather than go out to engage with it" (Law, 2010b, p. 1). In 2009, VUC secured funding for the project 'Kindergarten space, materiality, learning and meaning-making'. The project leader had a long-established cooperation with the VUC library and wanted to include the library actively in this project by engaging a librarian to join the group. The library's contribution to the project was mainly financed by the engaged librarian's participation in a training programme for senior librarians.⁵

The research team developed the title 'Research Group Librarian' as an appropriate term for the engaged librarian, because it described the role as time-bound, adaptive, and easily linked to activities outside the library. An

alternative term was 'Research Librarian', but this was thought to imply a more permanent significance to the position and was also confusing, since it is a term already in use in Norwegian university libraries relating to a different role.

Kindergarten Space — Materiality, Learning and Meaning Making

The main research project, in which the research group librarian's role was tried out, was entitled "Kindergarten space, materiality, learning and meaning making — The importance of space for kindergartens' pedagogical activities". This was a three-year project funded by the Norwegian Research Council. The project falls under the Strategic Projects of University Colleges (SHP), which have a special focus on strengthening research activities in the university colleges.

There were eight part-time researchers involved in this project, two senior researchers, one research fellow (PhD) and the research group librarian. Four different subject areas were represented in the group, with research projects focusing on different aspects of the overarching subject — 'Kindergarten Space'.

Each participating researcher had an individual research project based on separate and over-lapping empirical data. Two researchers planned to publish review articles. All the participants in the Kindergarten Space project are experienced teachers, but the majority have little research experience. The research group librarian was a member of the research group, participating in all the joint activities and the individual research on which this paper is based.

The research group librarian engaged in the Kindergarten Space project was a senior librarian. She completed her library school education almost 30 years prior to the study and had extensive work experience both from different libraries and ICT-companies. She also had a Master's degree in Pedagogical Texts (2008). In her Master's thesis, she studied the faculty staff's use of electronic resources offered by the library. At the time of the study she had been working at VUC library for almost ten years.

The research group librarian was also participating in a development programme for senior librarians, and because of this could arrange her working hours in the project largely according to the needs of the research group participants. The hours devoted to the group varied greatly throughout the project period and it was therefore difficult to specify accurately. In forthcoming projects it would be expedient to be more specific about the time commitment of the research group librarian for the project.

Staff who are going to participate in this form of library service need to have some understanding of the research process. Courage is also required to step out of the established librarian's role as well as willingness to think critically and analytically about the librarian's tasks and responsibilities. Flexibility probably rates as the key requirement.

The research group met regularly; five to six times a year over the three-year period. The research project group also organised two writing seminars, one academic writing course and group members have participated in the European Early Childhood Research Association (EECERA) conferences.

The results from the projects were presented in poster form and as papers at national and international conferences. Some of them have been published in a special edition of the periodical *Education Inquiry* (3/2012).⁶

The project period was from 2009 to 2012 and brought together all the research in a final conference in September 2012.

Purpose

The starting point of this research project was based on the hypothesis that:

A closer cooperation between librarians and researchers can be beneficial to the work of both.

The librarian can gain greater insight into the work demands of the researcher and through this acquire a better understanding of which library services will be most relevant. On the other hand, the researcher can acquire greater knowledge and familiarity with the potential services available through the

library and how to exploit them. This relationship may also implicate the development of new library services.

The key questions addressed by the project were:

- Can a greater collaboration between librarian and researcher change the demands and expectations the researcher has of the librarian and the library?
- How can a closer collaboration between librarian and researcher affect the ways in which the librarian works?
- How can a research group librarian influence and benefit the competency of researchers, (mainly) at the beginning of their research career?

Design and Methodology

An ethnographic approach was applied in this study. This was thought to be most appropriate, since it would be difficult to identify the use of services not known to the researchers without presenting them and it would be impossible for the research group librarian to see the effects without being close to the users. This approach was also seen as appropriate in order to find the “unspoken”.

All the participants in the Kindergarten Space research group were respondents in this project.

The interview outline for the first, individual interviews included the following semi-structured questions:

- Please describe your professional background.
- Please describe your specific project within the Kindergarten’s Space research.
- What kind of user experiences do you have with the library, if any?
- What expectations, if any, do you have of the research group librarian?

The interview guideline for the second set of interviews (group interviews and discussion) included the following open questions:

- What do you associate with the term 'research group librarian'?
- Has the research group librarian had any effect on your work in Kindergarten Space, and if so, could you share this?
- Would there be any services or knowledge you would now feel were lacking without the participation of the research group librarian?
- Will this project, which has included the research group librarian, lead to any changes in your use of the library in your future teaching or research work?
- Can you think of further activities, which might be useful or beneficial for the research group librarian to engage in?

The research group librarian took notes based on observations and feedback throughout the project period. These notes were non-structured and in three different forms; some personal comments, some open notes shared with the supervisor and some open thoughts shared through a blog.⁷

The research group librarian was a fully participating member of the research group throughout the project. This had its advantages and disadvantages. Being close to the researchers provided good access to information, but it also meant that the empirical data could be characterised by a lack of objectivity and distance.

One obvious weakness with this project was that the empirical data came from only one project group and one context. For this reason, it is not possible to draw general conclusions from these results, but rather to identify context bound indications, for further and wider exploration.

Findings

The participants' experiences of having a librarian as a peer in the research project were of course one of the main indicators as to whether the research group librarian approach could be a useful way of developing librarian work to meet changing research needs.

The participants' library experiences and expectations of the research group librarian were one of the focus subjects in the first set of individual interviews.

The respondents all reported to be keen users of the physical library, with mainly positive relationships to the library and the librarians. The only person with extensive experience using the digital library was the project leader. Most of the participants had little or no research experience or knowledge of the usefulness of the reference system EndNote⁸.

The participants were very positive about having a librarian participating in the research project. The research group librarian was regarded as an assurance for effective and knowledgeable library support; particularly in terms of guidance on database searches.

The project leader, being one of the original thinkers behind the research group librarian project, had high expectations for the added value of this role in the research group. During the mid-project group interviews he described the role as a success. Among other things, he believed the participating researchers had become more skilled in literature searches and the use of EndNote than they would have been attending some of the general courses offered by the library. The participation of the research group librarian also made it easier for the project to require the research group members to use these tools. He was additionally convinced about the benefit of using intranet and blog as methods for information sourcing and communication, even though this was not a great success in this particular project⁹.

In the group interviews, as well as in informal conversations in the course of the project, participants gave positive feedback about the influence of the research group librarian. Both the project management and the participants claimed that the research group librarian had provided a 'central nerve' to the research group. They used expressions such as 'hub', 'driving force', 'team mate', 'support' and 'confidence builder' to describe the role in the interviews. The participants reported feeling privileged to have their "own librarian", and described this as a "luxury situation".

The research group librarian being referred to as a 'confidence builder' could be exciting to explore further, as it was used by all the participants on different occasions. For example, how can a research group librarian contribute to confidence building? Some key issues may be based on the fact that someone from 'outside' knows your research project, provides computer skill support, and is accessible.

Another important role of the research group librarian was facilitating, pushing and encouraging, at times, almost nagging about working with literature searches and using EndNote.

Facilitating, teaching and supporting literature searches and reference management skills were obvious tasks for the research group librarian. After the first interviews, it was clear that participant experience and skills in these matters were poor.

The research group used the opportunity to experiment with an alternative to the usual one-to-one support and supervision. A form of cross-group learning and sharing was developed.

A programme of 12 workshops was organised by the research group librarian for the research group. Most of the workshops were arranged during the first year of the project, as this seemed most relevant for supporting literature searches. The sole participants in the workshops were the research project group participants. The aim of the workshops was to support and give guidance on independent work with the research participant's own literature search and reference management. This took place in a meeting room where the research group librarian was present. Each workshop was open and lasted three to four hours. The number of participating researchers in the workshops varied greatly; from one to six. All the research group participants, except two senior researchers, attended the workshops several times. Informal accessibility was an important principle for the workshops and was probably one important factor for the development of the understanding amongst the group of the special 'availability' of the research group librarian.

This way of facilitating proved to be effective and very successful. In the mid-project group interviews, the workshops were mentioned as very important, even though attendance varied greatly. Research group participants described the workshops as central for their work in the project. The main positive outcomes expressed by participants about the workshops included:

- Developing 'eye opening' skills for literature searches.
- The discovery of new sources of research in a specific field.
- Discovering an unknown research milieu relevant to the focus of individual research.

- The use of EndNote as a useful reference management tool.
- A forum for building a sense of common understanding, important for further development within the group.
- An arena for mutual exchange of experiences and literature references.
- Important in establishing the research group as a 'safe' arena.

One result of some group members' recently acquired skills regarding literature searches, was reflected in their role as teachers. In several of their classes, the students were subsequently required to use digital literature databases to find additional curriculum materials themselves. This is now happening on a far larger scale than before. The project also led to changes in some teachers' semester plans to include instruction in literature searches.

In a group interview, one of the participants related: "Without you facilitating the literature searches, I would still be using the 'old method' for my references". The old method, she explained, was to use the known literature and the reference lists in this literature. However, she experienced that by searching through the literature databases she discovered new, and most relevant authors, publications and research milieus.

The project leader described the workshops at the beginning of the project in the following way: "The participants are brought together with a shared agenda that is important for everyone, in a way they are working with publishing related matters even before their empirical data is collected. This means that something collective happens in the project at a very early stage".

The workshops helped several of the research group participants to start the subject specific work at an early stage; searching for literature was seen as an effective start. One of the participants said: "It was also a way of making the most of the waiting period". There are numerous authorisations required by the Norwegian Data Inspectorate before empirical data can be collected from children. This leads to extensive "waiting" in the first phase of a research project, while applications are processed.

Two of the participants in the research group were planning to publish literature review articles. Both experienced that the presence of the research group librarian made it easier to acquire the necessary skills for mapping relevant literature.

The research group librarian observed that the workshops reduced the researchers' 'computer anxiety' (Brosnan, 1998). Computer anxiety and self-efficacy are central issues in the research relating to teaching computer skills. It is likely that in part this alleviation of anxiety was due to the high-level of collaboration in the workshops and the group. Here participants could observe that no one mastered all the computer skills. In addition, the research group librarian was, in this case, also an experienced computer teacher. The respondents all reported that the research group librarian role was an important factor for their increased computer literacy.

The research group librarian's inputs in the workshops were seen both as a resource and a "whip". Several of the research group participants reported that they appreciated being exposed to this kind of pressure to advance their application of the skills.

Reference Management

The findings relating to EndNote, the reference management programme used at VUC, deserve a more thorough description. None of the participants had extensive knowledge or experience with this programme. The project leader and research group librarian thought the use of EndNote should be an essential skill and decided that all publications from the project Kindergarten Space would use EndNote.

According to the project leader, having a librarian in the research group made it easier to make arrangements to support the participants' initial use of EndNote. In the research group, a reference library was established to motivate the use of EndNote. This library consisted of 220 references relating to several aspects of the kindergarten and space.

The reference library was described by group participants as a useful assistance to get an immediate understanding of the advantage of using EndNote. The research group librarian also found this an effective way of introducing EndNote.

The co-operation to establish the mutual reference library had the additional effect of enabling the research group librarian to work closely with the researchers. The project leader and the research group librarian published

a literature review article in the book *Rom for barnehage*¹⁰ in 2012 (Moser & Olsen, 2012). The article presents and categorises literature relating to the kindergarten and space from the last decade.

The references in the review are collected in an EndNote library, which is published and available on the web.¹¹ At the time of writing, this library consisted of approximately 250 references and it is planned that it will be updated on an on-going basis over the next years.

Both the project leader and the research group librarian experienced that this cooperative process made the literature review particularly useful and consider this one clear result of the project with the research group librarian. The combination of professional experience in this specific field with experienced librarian skills, were particularly valuable in the literature review.

Information and Communication

Information and communication tasks are soon brought up, when investigating how a librarian's skills can be useful outside the library. Most librarians are competent users and up-to-date on the existence and use of ICT-tools. These abilities are necessary to understand how digital tools can be best exploited for research.

In the Kindergarten Space project, the research group librarian assumed the responsibility of building and maintaining the project intranet site. The information strategy of the project was to use intranet as the internal information support, more or less replacing email. The intention was to make sure that all project information was easily accessible, using the research group librarian's skills to develop the intranet structure. As mentioned previously, this was not a success. It worked for a while, but was replaced by email after a year or so. Unfortunately, there is no space here to expand on details, nevertheless, it would be worth further examination at a later date.

Another experiment involved trying to find a way to communicate between peers in this research topic. The Kindergarten and Space research milieu at VUC is part of a national research network focusing on children and space. There are another four similar research milieus involved in the network. The blog 'Spaces and places for children' was launched during the project

as a channel for communication between researchers in this network.¹² The research group librarian was responsible for the initial idea, designed the blog and became its editor.

The blog initiative was received with excitement and apprehension. It represented a new genre and another 'thing to be done'. Several of the research group participants, among them the project leader, were ambivalent about finding time to contribute (by writing blog posts) during their busy days. At the same time, nearly everybody saw this as a new expedient of professional communication.

Quoting one of the participant researcher's comments in a group meeting discussing the blog: "Much of research is about being in a process, when you publish it is the final product. I think a blog could work as a way of discussing the important issues along the way. But, of course it would be demanding to get going".

As predicted, it proved to be a demanding task to get contributions for the blog. This is probably an experience shared by others, who have tried to establish such a resource. However, it is recognised by many, that weblogs will have an increasing importance in scholarly communication in the years to come. This may advance more rapidly when more researchers belong to the 'Google generation' (University College London, 2008).

The blog 'Places and space for children' was still in existence at the time of writing, more than two years after it was launched. However, its continued life span depends on more blogging motivation and effort from the researchers in the network.

In summary, the use of intranet and blog was not particularly successful in this project. At the same time, both the project leader and several researchers in the national network claim that the blog remains a good idea and that it should be continued.

Experiences of the Librarian

It is interesting to examine what outcomes and influences can be seen from the point of view of the library and librarian: Did the position outside the library reveal new or better ways for the librarian to perform?

Through the field notes taken throughout the project the research group librarian collected some experiences and observations.

The main observations were:

- The research group participants, despite being keen library users of the physical library space and materials, had surprisingly little overview of all the services available to them through the library.
- The research group librarian was welcomed from the start, as if the researchers had a more intuitive understanding of the use of a librarian than the librarian herself.
- The personalised workshop model as an arena for facilitating literature search training within the group was very successful.
- It was necessary for the research group librarian to draw some boundaries to avoid, at times, being given the role of group secretary. However, a common understanding of the research group librarian's role developed throughout the project.
- The librarian developed a sharpened attention and greater knowledge about the different phases of a research project.
- Ideas for numerous potential and new library services evolved from the engagement.
- Being 'one of a kind' in a group became more demanding than expected.
- Collecting empirical data while doing the practical day to day librarian's work was as difficult as expected.
- Sharing project experiences in a beneficial way with library colleagues was challenging.
- The project served as a way of marketing the library to other faculty staff in the institution and the administration at VUC.

One of the prerequisites of the research group librarian experiment was to share experiences with library colleagues. This was achieved to a certain extent, but less than planned. It was challenging to develop functional ways of sharing experiences in a very busy working day. It was also difficult since experiences became implicit, embodied and tacit knowledge and not easy to identify by one self or explain to others (Schön, 2001).

The overarching experience was that this form of participatory librarian engagement in a research project was extremely useful for both the research participants and the research group librarian.

Discussion

This was of course a small-scale explorative study and hence insufficient to make generalisations or definitively answer questions about the potential role of a research group librarian. Nevertheless, the findings can hopefully be seen as interesting and worth taking into consideration in further work developing the academic libraries' services for faculty staff and researchers.

Experiences and observations from this project affirm emerging tendencies reflected in the current discussions about academic libraries; they confirm that the librarian's role changes and acquires new content when s/he moves outside the library (Lankes, 2011; Webb et al., 2007). The participants' feedback is unambiguous; they discovered the library services in completely new ways by having a librarian as peer in the project group.

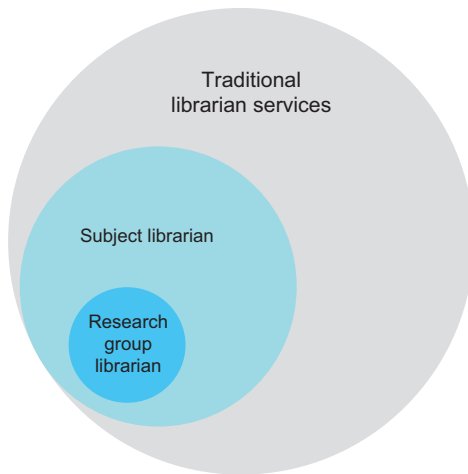
All the Kindergarten Space project researchers were, as mentioned earlier, experienced users of the physical facilities of the library. Even though they described the library staff as mainly "welcoming" in the first interview, it is worth noting that the librarians were also perceived as "quite busy" and "unavailable" by some of the participants. The latter is quite the opposite of the self-perception of librarians. One of the participants put this in the following way: "You know it is not very easy to interrupt when you [the librarian] sit in your library very busy with some of your mysterious library stuff". One of the elements of success of this project was based on having the librarian as a peer in the research group, which made the librarian more 'available'. This availability was further supported by the librarian being outside the physical environment of the library.

It can be useful to illustrate different levels of librarian practice in the following way:

The traditional librarian service in this model indicates a library service where the researcher seeks out the physical library and librarian as needed. The library services in question could be either physical or digital. The services may be, for example, borrowing material, using digital databases, attending a tutorial or asking a reference question.

The term 'Subject Librarian' in the model describes a librarian role with responsibility for a certain subject area or department. In the academic

Fig. 1: Three levels of librarian service.



libraries in Norway, there is no common definition for this role, even though the term is used by many libraries.¹³ The subject librarian role often includes giving information literacy classes for students, organisation of curriculum material and providing professional assistance to the faculty staff. The role implies a more active and focused approach, nevertheless most of the initiatives or requests for action come from the faculty staff, not the librarian.

The research group librarian, as has been discussed above, is a librarian role that is closer to the researchers than the subject librarian. The research group librarian would often be active outside the library environment. S/he has a more independent and proactive role in his/her relation to the researchers and faculty staff. The research group librarian is required to take more independent initiatives to support the work of the research group. In this way, as the title suggests, s/he is closer to being a team-player and partner, rather than solely a service provider.

The above model was developed as a back drop for the project with the research group librarian. The active, cooperative, facilitating librarian is frequently discussed in literature (Alvite & Barrionuevo, 2011; Lankes, 2011; Law, 2010a, 2010b; Webb et al., 2007). Law however claims that the librarian's role has developed in the opposite direction in recent years; to be less a partner and more a servant in academic libraries (Law, 2010b). This may be due

to the fact that the research tradition is much stronger in universities than in university colleges. Hence this may be a trend in university libraries, but it does not appear to be reflected in librarian practices in the university colleges in Norway.

Looking for more general terms to describe the future librarian role, the term 'boundary worker' appeared. A boundary worker is a person acting as bridge between worlds (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). The term is derived from 'boundary object', which was introduced by Susan Leigh Star and James Griesemer in 1989 (Star, 2010; Star & Griesemer, 1989). Both a research group librarian and a librarian can be considered boundary workers; working between disciplines, bridging areas of knowledge, information and services. In this respect, viewing the librarian from the perspective of this theory may provide a new basis on which to consider the future role of the librarian.

A key challenge in a project like this relates to the distance of the researcher from the subject in focus. Since the researcher in this case is also the subject in focus — the research group librarian — it is difficult to separate out the experiences that are related to individual and personal engagement (as a research group librarian in this particular group) and the experiences that are related to the role (independent of this case).

Conclusions

The study showed that a librarian as a peer in a research group can have positive impact on the researchers' work and be perceived by researchers as adding value. Through the role of the research group librarian, appropriate library services became more distinct and accessible. Ideas for and the development of new library services for the user group evolved naturally during the process. The project also showed that the role can be extremely useful for the development of the librarian's research process insight and for the library facility as a whole.

This way of working is of course time consuming. Most academic libraries are not well staffed and will not have the possibility to offer this kind of service engagement to all the research projects in their institution. This may not be an equally effective way of facilitating the library services for all projects or all researchers. In the research project Kindergarten Space most of the participants

were inexperienced researchers. At VUC, at the time of writing, a research project had just been started to explore the research group librarian role in a completely different research project, where all the participating researchers are very experienced. The conclusions of this project have yet to be seen.

It is likely that there will be great differences between how a research group librarian can be useful in different disciplines. There are also huge variations regarding information material, empirical data, methods of research, and of course, the researcher's ways of working, traditions and skills.

What probably does have transfer value is this proactive way of working as a librarian. When the librarian performs his/her work outside the library, s/he can be freed to some extent from the traditional librarian's way of thinking. In this way, the librarian's expertise may be seen in new contexts, possibly leading to new ways of working. It is hoped that further studies and reports will be seen from similar attempts facilitating the library's services outside the library space, closer to the users.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the project leader Professor Thomas Moser, who was jointly responsible for this project idea and implementation. In addition, I am grateful to the participants in the Kindergarten Space project for enabling me to do this research as part of their group and Professor Hans Siggaard Jensen for his most valuable discussions along the way. Also, without Head librarian Åsta Hagen's enthusiasm and my colleagues' patience, this project could never have been realised – Thank you!

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Notes

¹ Regional Innovation is a cross-disciplinary field of research and development also involving education.

² Link: <http://www.newlibrarianship.org/wordpress/>.

³ Web 2.0 is a loosely defined intersection of web application features that facilitate participatory information sharing, inter-operability, user-centered design (source: [Wikipedia](#)).

⁴ Second Life is a free 3D virtual world where users can socialise, connect and create using free voice and text chat.

⁵ The training programme for senior librarians is offered by the Learning Center and Library at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Science (HiOA).

⁶ Education Inquiry (<http://www.use.umu.se/english/research/educationinquiry/>) is an electronic, open access journal.

⁷ The blog is called Heidis bibliotektank(er) (only in Norwegian): <http://heidiko.wordpress.com>.

⁸ EndNote is a software package for reference management; it is used to organise references and create bibliographies. For more information see: <http://www.endnote.com/>.

⁹ This is further discussed under 'Information and communication'.

¹⁰ The book title in English: *Space for the kindergarten*.

¹¹ The library can be downloaded from this webpage: <http://www.hive.no/bibliotek/barnehagensrom/referanser>.

¹² The blog can be found here: <http://barnehagerom.wordpress.com>.

¹³ The term used in Norwegian is 'Contact Librarian' (verbatim translation).