

Let library loose: teens and young adults as content creators at Hattula public library

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Abstract:

In the recent years we have put a lot of effort in developing digital content for and with our young clients in the Hattula public library. This paper discusses three projects that were fulfilled during the years 2012-2013.

During the summer 2012 three teens who worked as summer help wrote, filmed, edited and acted in several digital videos that dealt with breaking common library stereotypes. Our goal was to increase client participation and human agency and on the other hand use our young clients' view in service design. The videos were subsequently published on our library's YouTube-channel¹. The following summer (2013) the summer workers developed an information retrieval game which doubled as a murder mystery. The idea of the game was to engage youth in to using library in a new way as a 'game board'. The summer workers' team produced a cinematic trailer for the game. The third part of the project during autumn 2013 was a digital story workshop for ninth graders (15 years) called 'What bugs you in Hattula?' The participants were asked to think of things that irritate young people living in Hattula; e.g. infrastructure, recreation possibilities, transportation. Working in groups they produced digital stories of their views and ideas.

We have been able to use the videos in promoting our library services and in developing co-operation with local schools. There has also been an evident growth in the amount of teens and young adults using the library in the past two years. On the other hand, the project has had an effect on the employees of the library: we are now more open to new ideas and new ways of working, not to mention that we have learned to experiment more freely.

Keywords: media education, young adults, teens, digital content, agency

1. Our Library and the operational environment

Hattula is a rural municipality with approx. 9700 inhabitants with almost 25% of them under 20 years of age. It is located next to the city Hämeenlinna which has 68 000 inhabitants. The railway and the motorway from Helsinki to Tampere pass through Hattula, so we are well located near the major traffic routes. Hattula is geographically vast area, so the distances between the center and the villages can be up to 30 kilometres. Also the location next to a bigger city means that although Hattula is mostly rural, we still have a considerable amount of suburban problems, especially with the youth and their families.

Our library is an integral part of the *Education & Culture services* along with schools, youth services and early childhood education. We have one main library and a mobile library. The staff consists of the director of library and cultural services, one librarian, four library assistants and one mobile library driver. Our budget is approx. 460 000 € per year and annual amount of loans is about 150 000. Hattula library is part of the library consortium *Vanamo*² with Hämeenlinna city library and Janakkala public library.

Our main partners in co-operation are schools. There are five primary schools: one in centre about 1 km from library. Other four are in villages around the municipality. Our mobile library visits those schools on a weekly basis. There is also one upper comprehensive school and one high school in the centre. There are also several kindergartens in Hattula. From September to May we have a storyhour once a week and kindergarten groups visit it regularly.

There are also other ways of co-operation. Our librarian is an active member of vocational co-operative network *Hattula-verkko* which includes members from educational services, youth services, social services and third sector. We work also closely with the youth workers of the municipality, when planning media education and other events. During the past year the director of library has also participated in the planning of the new primary school, which is supposed to be in use in 2016.

2. Focusing on Media education

In Finland Ministry of Education and Culture and Finnish Library Association took a strong initiative on developing media education in public libraries during the 2000s. There was a project coordinated by Finnish Library Association from 2007 until 2011, which produced publications on media education in libraries, developed tools and arranged for course studies for librarians from different regions in Finland. Heli Roisko, then working as librarian in Hattula Public Library, completed the course 2009. She promoted the idea of media education in Hattula-verkko with moderate success. Ilkka Marjanen started working in Hattula Library three years ago. He has a background in art education and cultural production. He was immediately interested in developing media education at library. He completed Media Education Studies in HUMAK University of Applied Sciences 2013.

Nowadays media education is important and integral part of the library work in Finnish public libraries. However there are still big differences in how different libraries carry out their media education projects. For example compared to our neighbouring library in

Hämeenlinna (with bigger resources and more staff), we have managed to carry out more projects during the past years. We have also been asked to lecture and demonstrate our media education ideas in Hämeenlinna. That is to say, it is possible to get good results, when there is inspiration, even though the resources are limited. Quite often you hear complaints that in libraries there are no equipment for doing media education in practise, or that the equipment are too expensive. We have produced all of our videos and products with one digital video camera, one digital camera, two tablets and a laptop and creative minds – you don't really need much more.

3. Let library loose -projects

Breaking the stereotypes

In our first media education related project our purpose was to acquire equipments to make it possible to create digital content and go outside the library walls. Our library building is from the beginning of the 1990s and we don't have adequate space or rooms to give instructions in information retrieval for students. We keep lessons mainly at schools and videos help us in introducing our library services and shelf classification digitally. During this project we made four videos with our summer help. They decided to make three videos about common library stereotypes teenagers and others usually have and break them with comical approach. The fourth video was fact-based and it introduces library work not seen by customers, for example acquisition and accession and also our services and shelf classification.

Murder mystery

In the beginning of each summer we take part in our community's event week. We arrange the Crime Novel Evening, where the guests are popular and/or upcoming crime novelists. We also organize the Night Library, an event which lasts until midnight and has wide-ranged cultural program including for example craft workshops, book talk, poetry karaoke etc. We created last year a murder mystery for customers to play in both evenings. The story was set in imaginary 1920s Hattula with twist of Agatha Christie and the Roaring Twenties. In the story, the young and beautiful librarian was murdered and customers were asked to play the part of the private detective. There were hints hidden around the library and also on our web-pages and Facebook wall. People took interest in playing the game, and at the end of the Night Library we had a Christie-style gathering where the real murderer was revealed. We had an actress playing the part of the master detective. This summer we have plans for another murder mystery set this time in the Seventies.

Murder mystery led us to think of a new way of teaching information retrieval to teenagers. We asked our summer help to design and execute both an information retrieval game and a cinematic trailer for promoting it. These three teenagers were sort of a 'dream team' - they wrote the script, filmed it, played parts and edited the whole thing by themselves. The protagonist of the trailer is a young private eye who starts investigating the murder of the local librarian and keeps finding hints and traces inside the library and from the web. Based on the experience, we strongly believe that by giving young people freedom to use their own imagination and skills, they learn responsibility and have a chance to build their human agency.

What bugs you in Hattula?

At the end of the last year we arranged also a digital story workshop together with upper comprehensive school's 9th grade and their teacher. Digital stories have been used in the past few years as a means to empower people using their personal stories in connection with digital technology, images and movies. We have noticed through our summer workers that the youth have a lot of relevant ideas about their living environment, but often they don't have the forums where to present those ideas. The participants in this project were asked to think of things that irritate young people living in Hattula; e.g. infrastructure, recreation possibilities, transportation - whatever they thought was relevant. Working in three groups, they produced digital stories of their ideas. The groups made digital stories about the transportation problems, the sports possibilities and traffic behavior with light quadricycles, which are very popular among Hattula teens. These stories were presented to the policy-makers at the beginning of municipal council in December 2013. There are youth councils in municipalities and cities in Finland, but they could use audiovisual and digital ways of communicating their message more.

4. Results and future

Hattula Public Library has been able to use the videos in promoting our library services and in developing co-operation with local schools. There has been also an evident growth in the amount of teens and young adults using the library in the past two years. Although not all of them make loans, they still feel that the library is a place where they are welcome to pass the time and socialize. We have also become the "most wanted" employer for summer help in the municipality.

On the other hand the project has had an effect on the employees of the library: we are now more open to new ideas and new ways of working, not to mention that we have learned to experiment more freely. One great prove of this is *Hattula Library Harlem Shake*, which can be found from our YouTube channel. All the staff participated enthusiastically in making the video and was excited about the result. We actually have received comments from our colleagues that their co-workers would never do such a thing! We have also showed the video at schools in the beginning of booktalk sessions. Thirty seconds is enough to get rid of the dusty stereotypes of librarianship.

We have just started a new sub-regional co-operation with Hämeenlinna-based *ARX Art center for children and young people*. We look forward to the possibilities in both media education and agency oriented art education. The decision makers in Hattula have quite recently decided to build a new school/activity building. Along with the planning of the actual physical premises, there is going to be a educational "mediapath" during the school years. This will mean that media education will be an integral part of each grade's program and our library will have a significant part in actualizing it.

The national core curriculum for pre-primary and basic education is being renewed at the moment. The aim of the Finnish National Board of Education is to encourage also parents and pupils to participate in the process. The renewed core curriculum will be completed by the end of 2014. Next stage in the renewal process is planning the new local curriculum, which is based on this core curriculum. Our library will participate in this work and our goal is to integrate library services and media education to the new local curriculum. The main

ideas in the national core curriculum are multiliteracy pedagogy and phenomenon-based learning. We feel that these ideas go well together with our media education and agency-oriented projects.

All in all these small projects prove that today's library can serve as a platform for promoting locally created content and what's more, help bridge the digital gap between young people and adults. YouTube and other social media platforms have turned out to be useful channels for us in promoting library services, events and materials and also in reaching out to younger clients. Our goal is to widen the projects to reach even more teens and young adults – not forgetting the other age groups. Our aim is to strengthen our role in school environment and youth services. Media education will be our strategic emphasis also in the future and we will value media educational skills when recruiting new staff members. We strongly suggest that libraries should give possibilities to local youth to express themselves: you will be positively surprised!

References

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/user/HattulanKirjasto>

² <https://vanamo.verkkokirjasto.fi/web/arena>