

Towards Training Librarian 2.0 through A Community-based Participatory Group Project: A Case Study

Abstract: Librarian 2.0 adopts user-centered approach. This paper reports the case study of a community-based participatory approach for training librarian 2.0. The findings suggest that this approach allows the students to practice user-centered interactions, identify and integrate the user's needs into design decisions, and develop ways of collecting the user's feedbacks.

Résumé : Les bibliothécaires 2.0 adoptent une approche centrée sur l'utilisateur. Cet article présente une étude de cas sur une approche participative et communautaire visant à former les bibliothécaires 2.0. Les résultats suggèrent que cette approche permet aux étudiants d'interagir avec les usagers, d'identifier les besoins, de les intégrer dans leur processus décisionnel et de développer des moyens de recueillir les commentaires des usagers.

1. Introduction

Library 2.0 model has attracted a lot of research and practice attention in Library and Information Science (LIS) discipline. Library 2.0 emphasizes the importance of user participation in creating and evaluating services that libraries provide both physically and virtually (Casey and Savastinuk, 2006). Moving towards Library 2.0 model, LIS professionals are challenged to start becoming "Librarian 2.0" – a term first proposed by Stephen Abram, vice president of Innovation at SirsiDynix (Abram, 2006). Since then, there have been numerous discussions about what the skills and knowledge that LIS professionals should have in order to provide Library 2.0 service. In spite of the various lists of librarian 2.0 skills and knowledge, all agree that Library 2.0 is about a user-centered approach to provide and improve library services, and a librarian 2.0 needs to be able to take that approach in his/her daily practice.

A user-centered approach is not just about using technologies to reach users such as the use of Twitters to collect users' feedbacks or weblogs to inform the users of latest activities in Library, it is also about encouraging and fostering active user participation and integrating users' needs into the processes of planning and design in library services and library space. From this perspective, a community-based participatory teaching approach is proposed towards training Librarian 2.0. In this approach, the student groups work with community partners on their semester projects for a LIS course. There have been studies about using community-based approach in teaching LIS courses. In these studies, the emphasis has been requiring students to participate in the community-based projects and/or activities. Different from these approaches, the proposed approach puts an emphasis on encouraging the community partners to participate in the project-related activities as well. This emphasis requires the students to practice how to facilitate user participation, which is a key soft skill of Librarian 2.0.

This paper reports a case study that examined the use of this community-based participatory approach in a database management system (DBMS) class in fall of 2010.

2. Research Context

A Database Management System Class

The DBMS class consisted of ten students. Three student groups were formed by the instructor according to the students' technical background, group work and leadership history, schedule for group meeting, and preferences on the database projects.

Three community groups worked with the class for their database development projects. The three databases to be developed for the groups are: a volunteer management database, a visitor information database, and a collection management database.

3. The Characteristics of the Community-based Participatory Approach

All the database projects had three milestones: to understand the users' needs, to design the relationship diagram, and to implement the database and web interface for interacting with the database. To reach a milestone, the students groups were required to carry out a list of tasks and submit a group report in the end about their work and results. With the implementation of the community-based participatory approach, the students were required to collect the community partner's feedbacks regarding their work for each milestone. Specifically, the students were required to interview the community groups to understand the users' needs, to present their work-in-progress database design to the community groups and encourage the community groups' feedbacks on the design, and to deliver the databases to the community groups and have them test the databases. The students were required to document in each group report the community partner's feedbacks. Figure 1 presents an overview of the project process.

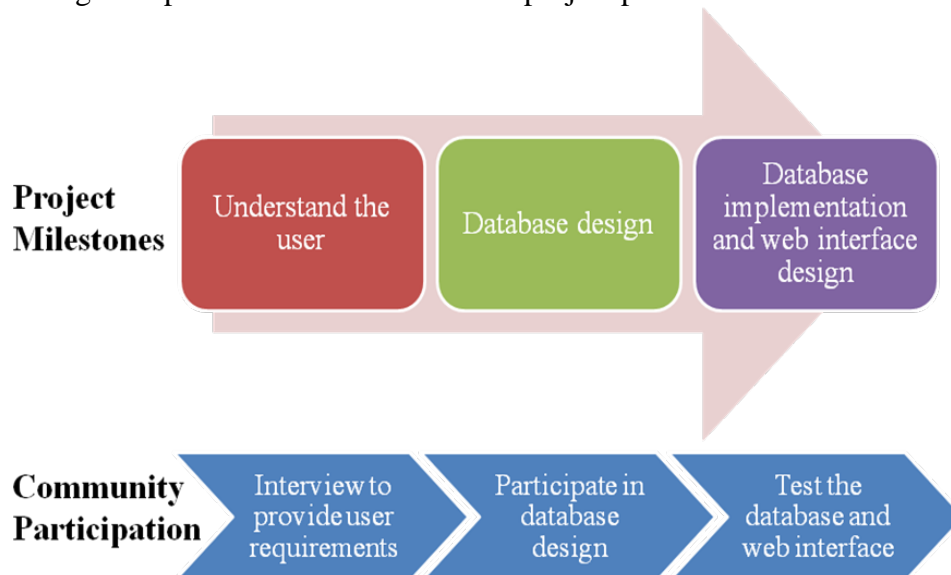


Figure 1 The Group Project Process

In these activities, the instructor was NOT acting as a middle person coordinating the meetings and tasks. The community partner was not asked to commit to these types of interaction either. Instead, it was the group's responsibility to keep in touch with the community partner and to collect the feedbacks. This strategy was used to mimic the situation in library services where users are not obligated to participate in planning and

design of library services and it was librarians' responsibility to engage and foster users' active participation.

The second characteristic of the implemented approach was that the students were required to write reflective journals throughout the term about their learning experiences and learning progression. Constructivists believe that it is important to encourage reflexivity, helping learners to think about how they approach problems, and how they look for and find solutions. Noblitt and Pochis showed that requiring students to write reflective journal along the course activities is a valuable method of engaging students with deep learning of a subject (Noblitt and Pochis, 1997). In this DBMS class, the students were encouraged to reflect on not only the course subject and the technical challenges in the project, but also the non-technical challenges in the project. It was expected that the use of reflective journal would help the students learn from their experiences of interacting with the community partners, and gain knowledge on how to work with users in user-centred work practice in the future.

Data Collection and Analysis

We collected the students' coursework including their background survey, their reflective journals which were about their reflections on the learning progress and on the group project, and their group reports. We conducted semi-structured interviews to understand the students' experiences of working with the community groups and the community representatives' experiences of working with the students. They were conducted in a face-to-face setting and lasted between 25 and 45 minutes. The interviews were recorded. In the end, there were 30 codes and 256 quotations from eight reflective journals and seven interviews.

4. Findings

4.1. Conduct user-centered meetings

All student groups took considerable time to discuss preparations for their meetings with the community representatives. For example, before the first meeting with representatives, they brainstormed the questions for collecting information about the community organizations, e.g., the community groups' envision of the database, the potential use of the database in the organization, and the people who will be interacting with the database.

The community partners all acknowledged the effort that the students put into for the meeting preparation and the fact that their opinions and feedbacks were the focus of the meetings. One representative said, "*(T)hey come very well prepared... They do not come in with preconceived ideas of what should be done, what needs to be done. They listen to what I have to say...*" He further commented that, "*... They do care about an organization they've had no connection to. That's... something that don't always get with the consultant that looks at it you know, this is a business project one off then I'll move on to something else...*"

4.2. Collect users' needs and feedback

The students practiced different ways of collecting users' needs and feedbacks taking into consideration the community partner's situation. For example, the organization that needed a volunteer database actually did not have any volunteer data collected yet. Without the actual data, the students found it difficult to grasp the role of database in the

organization's daily practice and to envision volunteer management activities. After consultation with the instructor, the group emailed the representative suggesting her to write a couple of hypothetical scenarios to describe how one would use the database to manage volunteer information in the organization. Later the group identified relationships between entities based on the scenarios provided by the representative, and created preliminary business rules for the database.

4.3. Refine and integrate the user's need into design decision

The active participation of the community partners allowed the students to work with the potential users to refine their needs. For example, the students group thought they would develop a reference librarian like database when a representative described the database project in the class. They envisioned the database to have just bibliographic data such authors, publication year, publisher, titles, etc. But as the group interviewed the group leader collecting more information about the group's needs, the group members totally changed their perspective on the database. One member reflected on this and said, "*One of the key things that we got out of the meeting was that he did not necessarily want a database that collected a lot of bibliographic information. This changed my concept of the project dramatically, as my initial idea of how to create the database revolved around an understanding that the bibliographic records would be the primary focus of the database*".

References

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