THE ROLE OF BROKERS IN CULTIVATING AN INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COMMUNITY AROUND OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Context of the study

- In the Netherlands there is a strong focus on discipline-specific inter-institutional communities

Session: The Truth Is Out There
Wednesday 11.00 Salle 200

PROJECT TOGETHER NURSING
(2018-2020)

ONLINE COMMUNITY

Offers opportunities to connect with colleagues, discuss (teaching) practices, showcase OER

OER REPOSITORY

The place where teachers across all institutes can find, select, rate and share OER.

What is a broker?

- Brokers are individuals in an inter-institutional Community of Practice who facilitate transfer of knowledge and resources, and coordinate efforts across boundaries of organizations.
The role of brokers

Each institute has 1 or 2 broker(s)

15 UAS participate in the project
Broker between activity systems

Activity system of project

Activity system of institute

Research questions

1. What is the role of brokers within the collective activity system of cultivating an inter-institutional community around OER?

2. What actions do brokers undertake to cultivate an inter-institutional community around OER and what impact do these actions have on the activity?

3. Which conflict experiences do brokers encounter in their role of fostering sustainable collaboration on OER among higher education teachers across institutes?
Method

• Qualitative descriptive study

• Data of Together Nursing
  – Project documents
  – Minutes of meetings
  – 92 process reports

• Data collected at the end of Together Nursing
  – Focus group with 7 brokers
  – Reflection reports of 10 brokers
Contradictions

• ‘historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems’ (Engeström, 2001, p. 137)
• Contradictions are needed for an activity system to develop
• Four levels
  – Primary (within nodes of the activity system)
  – Secondary (between nodes)
  – Tertiary (between an old and a more advanced activity system)
  – Quaternary (between the main and a neighbouring activity system (e.g. the activity system in an institution))

Findings
Brokers’ role (RQ 1)
# Brokers’ actions and impact (RQ 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of actions</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incite teachers</td>
<td>Encouragement and awareness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teacher support</td>
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<td>Use of OER repository</td>
<td>Creation of OER</td>
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<td>Sharing and reuse of OER</td>
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<td>OER quality</td>
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<td>Use of online community</td>
<td>Cultivation of community</td>
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<td>Organizational</td>
<td>Organization institute</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Project organization</td>
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<td>External promotion</td>
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## Brokers’ conflict experiences (RQ 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Perceived conflict experiences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Primary: Ambiguity of broker role</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Secondary: Imposed rules of the project</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Lack of management support</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tertiary: Limited use of inter-institutional community</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Quaternary: Organizational and societal issues</td>
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Conclusions

• Brokers were essential in cultivating the inter-institutional community due to the unique positions they held among colleagues.

• Brokers’ actions yielded the intended transformation of the collective activity, albeit to a more limited extent than expected.

• The role of the broker was hindered due to conflicts they experienced.

• Management did not empower the brokers within their role.
Recommendations

- Brokers encountered stressors in their role. This could be lessened if:
  - the institute provides time, empowerment and organizational support;
  - the project manager provides clear expectations on tasks, responsibilities and intended outcomes;
  - teachers would recognize and value the act of boundary crossing across institutes;
  - address the multi-voicedness of such large collaborative projects with all stakeholders.