Developing teaching competences of academic staff—experiences, dilemmas, challenges

dr. Barica Marentič Požarnik, prof.emer.
University of Ljubljana
Barica.marentic@guest.arnes.si
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„If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow.“

John Dewey
Outline of my presentation

1. Why the quality of academic teaching has become „a core mission and therefore a core responsibility“ of HE institutions
2. Systemic approach to develop teaching competences of academic staff
3. „A case study“ of Slovenia:
   - A short (hi)story of initiatives in academic SD
     Underlying philosophy, methods, evaluation
4. Conclusion: dilemmas and challenges, suggestions for further development
Why the quality of academic teaching is getting so important?

- Massification of studies, widening access,
- Increased heterogeneity of students,
- Rapid developments in all fields of science and technology, including digital technologies,
- New developments in psychology and neurophysiology of learning, (cognitive neuroscience)
- Education for an unpredictable future means a move from „content“ to „process“ goals and to the development of „soft“ competences in students: systemic, creative, critical thinking, entrepreneurial qualities, life-long curiosity, cooperation, responsibility for an ethical, sustainable development of society...
Report to the European commission…
Modernisation of higher Education… (2013)

- We have to achieve a sound rebalancing between research and teaching mission,

- It is the responsibility of institutions to ensure that their academic staff are well trained as professional teachers and also the responsibility of staff to ensure that they are proficient in the very best pedagogical practices and striving for excellency in teaching“

- 4th recommendation: all staff teaching in higher education institutions should by 2020 have received a certified pedagogical training“.
Numerous international and national initiatives in the past

- Maidstone (semiformal network of experts)
- NETTLE - Network of European Tertiary Level Educators
- EFAD --- European Forum for Academic Development
- SEDA - Staff and Educational Development Assoc.

What about „sustainability“ – long-term effects of such initiatives?
…but „there is still a gap between high-level goals and everyday reality“ (Report, 2013)

- „Daily lived reality is an embarrassing disappointment“ (lot of teaching by 19th century standards)
- „Commitment to best practice … is sporadic at best and frequently reliant on the enlightened commitment of a few individuals (EU Report, 14)
- Big differences between the countries!
- 3 “leagues“; 1st – GB, Scandinavian, Baltic countries…
- WHY?
Criteria of quality still favor scientific production and not excellency in teaching

At institutional level:
- Academic ranking of universities (Shanghai ranking) – (purely scientific criteria) versus
- U-Multirank initiative (also social relevance, impact on practice, excellency in T&L)

At individual level:
- Criteria of recruitment and promotion: quantity of scientific production versus excellency in teaching („pedagogic portfolio“)
Developing the three dimensions of professional competences – a demanding task

Knowledge, understanding -> Professional skills -> Attitudes and values
How to promote professional development and change in all three areas of competencies: knowing – acting – valueing?

No general shift from teaching to learning in the process of higher education is possible without taking into account the subjective side of this shift – the teachers’ (mis)conceptions, implicit theories and attitudes about university teaching, student learning, their role and the role of students.
Professional development of academics – changing focus (Kugel)

1. focus – self („Will I survive?“)
2. focus – subject („Do I cover all ideas, facts…?“)
3. focus – student
   - As receptive („I have to improve presentation“)
   - As active (discussion, questions are included),
   - As independent (is able also to study on his own).

Transition is not easy; role of conflicting experiences, need of training, support

A good teacher is like…
A good teacher is like...
2. Some characteristics of successful SD activities – systemic approach

- Cognitive – constructivist and humanist orientation – knowledge can not be „given“ (transfer theory)
- University teacher as „reflective professional“
- Trying to develop competencies (visible part) and also „quality from within“:
- personal identity, sense of mission.
The onion model of professional development (Korthagen)
3. A case study of Slovenia - a short (hi)story

From the 70-ies to 2000 - »Early birds«:
- Prof. Vlado Schmidt - my „mentor“
- First programmes, seminars, publications
- A series of public talks to raise awareness
- Many short and a longer (systematic) course
- International contacts (UNESCO/CEPES, TEMPUS, NETTLE), also with colleagues from Croatia dr. Bratanić, dr. Ledić, dr. Mužić, dr. Švajcer…
- Summer schools with eminent guests
A short (hi)story – from 2000 on

- The first accredited 45-hours' course
- Textbooks (on group work, assessment, lecturing)
- Research, publishing, reporting (ATEE, ISATT),
- Courses for special groups (nurses, engineers…)
- International conferences in Slovenia - IUT, CMEPIUS
- Professional association SDVD (-2013)
- Staff development included in the EU project on quality (KUL 2013-2015).
Example of a course (45 h.)—principles and methods

- Team teaching (two trainers)
- „Teach as you preach“
- Experiential and collegial learning
- Varied methods that participants can use later
- Alternating action and reflection
- Open to participants‘ suggestions and reactions
To start: problems and expectations of participants; also students‘ perspective

- Central problem: students‘ motivation
- Expectations: to get useful ,,tips“
- Students‘ perspective:
  - Best and worst study experiences
  - What should professors learn?
“Teach as you preach” – the use of “student-centered” methods

- interactive lectures
- different models of group work
- mini lectures with video feedback
- discussion on reading assignments - LTD
- peer observation of “real” teaching
- written report on mini research
Evaluation of courses

- Formative – „the talking wall“
- Summative – internal, official
- Long-term effects (1 - 2 years later)
Conclusions: Strong points

Good evaluation results

- 90% of participants: the course gives useful informations
- the course motivated 87% of participants to improve their teaching competencies and introduce changes, like more interaction, group work...
- „I started to see and understand learning process through student eyes“. 
Conclusions – what was not so good?

- We do not know about long-term effects of these courses on student learning and results,
- Participants „lonely“ - colleagues often indifferent,
- Those teachers that need it most, do not come, (is „mandatory“ a solution?)
- Our HE policy still does not encourage excellency in teaching (by election criteria, establishing centres, rewards etc.).
4.1 Dilemmas and challenges of academic staff development

- How to balance quality and quantity - maintain high level quality with big numbers?
- How to adapt it to different needs? (different disciplines, junior, senior staff…)
- How to „train the trainers“?
- How to avoid bureaucratisation?
- How to foster „culture of teaching“ as a natural part of academic culture?
- How to maintain enthusiasm, „flow“?
4.2 Some suggestions

- Combine stick-and–carrot policy,
- Award excellency in teaching,
- Build it into promotion criteria,
- Promote R&D projects (grants), conferences…
- Treat students as partners,
- Create learning communities,
- Establish centres, SD units with best experts,
- Widen international networking…

PATIENCE AND COOPERATION!
„Not alone“
More in:

- Marentič Požarnik, B. How do university teachers perceive incentives and obstacles in modernising their teaching. Conference Improving University Teaching, Ljubljana, 15-17 July 2015