The Challenges of Improving University Teaching and the Role of OER

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Why the quality of academic teaching is becoming so important?

- Massification of studies, widening access;
- Increased heterogeneity of students;
- Rapid developments in all fields of science and technology, including digital technologies;
- Graduates need different new competencies like: systemic, creative, critical thinking; entrepreneurial qualities, team work, responsibility for an ethical, sustainable development of society…
“If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow.“

John Dewey
Teacher’s Multiple Tasks

• University teachers have to fulfil multiple roles in research, teaching, management…

• Question: How do the research and teaching roles compare regarding
  1. importance
  2. recognition – career
  3. training?
• 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*“.
…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“

• Large differences among countries – 3 “leagues“:

  1st – GB, Scandinavian, German speaking countries, Benelux (certified high quality training, centres, conferences, research…);

  2nd – some attention to the above (Baltic countries, Spain, Portugal..);

  3rd – nearly no staff development, publications…

**Question:** Where would you position your country?
Guidelines from Erevan:

• *Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education, 2015 (Erevan conference)* focus on quality assurance related to learning and teaching:

  • « A fundamental shift is needed to a more student-centered teaching«.

  • **Question:** What do you understand under „student-centered teaching“?
Student-centered teaching

- Encourages students to take an active role and control of their learning;
- Stimulates student motivation and self-reflection;
- Activates prior learning and experience;
- Fosters higher order (thinking) skills;
- Develops independent learning skills in students;
- Provides multiple representations of content;
- Uses multiple methods and approaches;
- Encourages student responsibility for their learning.
Changes in students‘ and teacher‘s roles

Student-centered teaching can only be successfully applied when teacher‘s and students‘ roles change:

• When teachers „step aside and let students take the lead“
• When teachers act more as facilitators, coaches, mentors, not only transmitters of knowledge;
• BUT: No change in practices without changes in beliefs, conceptions of teachers and students;
• No change without official support (centres, high quality courses, development of OER etc.)
Slovenia – A Case Study

- Long tradition of staff development (from 70-ies on), courses, publications, rich international contacts UNESCO/CEPES, TEMPUS, NETTLE, EFAD, conferences IUT, CMEPIUS…

- At present: some shorter courses, a certified 45-hours‘ course at University of Ljubljana;

- Student questionnaires about quality teaching;

- Some institutions apply e-learning, IKT;

- BUT still no clear policy support (quality of teaching in promotion, use of OER etc.)
Characteristics of quality staff development courses – principles and methods

- „Teach as you preach“
- Experiential and collegial learning
- Varied methods that participants can use later
- Alternating action and reflection
- Introducing students‘ perspective
- Open to participants‘ suggestions and reactions (participant-centered)
OER & modernisation of higher education

• How does massive development of web-based material affect teaching and learning in HE?

• Enormous volume of information and professional resources is accessible on the web.

• Teachers’ tasks: to introduce students to quality web-based learning, to act as mentor and coach, to select and produce teaching materials of high quality.

• Precondition: starting from the best up-to-date knowledge about quality learning (memory, attention, motivation, effective learning strategies, deep processing, developing creative and critical thinking, problem solving…)
Remaining open problems

• How to motivate university staff to improve their teaching competencies, to introduce sustainable improvements in their teaching, to innovate (OER::😊)?

• To cooperate with colleagues – nationally and internationally, also interdisciplinary;

• How to increase policy support – promotion criteria, innovation projects, R&D centres...?
„Not alone“