

Communities of Teachers and Learners at Universities

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As a general rule, teachers are confronted with a number of expectations: They are considered specialists for learning and are thus supposed to be competent in all matters concerning learning. They are asked to display a rich and well-funded methodological repertoire, while being experienced in diagnosing processes of learning. Furthermore, they should be well versed in dealing socially with their students (Helmke, 2003).

University teachers [– especially in the cultural context of Swiss and German academia –] have a slightly different professional understanding. A highly developed expertise in their specific academic fields is considered their main strength. They are expected to do research and contribute to the discourse within their scientific community. Although teaching is part of their job, it plays an ancillary role in their own self-conception. They share, however, an understanding to introduce students to scholarship by doing research while making explicit the steps involved (Tremp, 2005). Universities, therefore, have to create opportunities for learners to do research under the supervision and guidance of their academic teachers. But which steps are necessary that students view themselves as part of this community or that teachers view students as members of it? And what are, in the view of the students, good conditions for learning and teaching? What are the conditions that advance the teaching and learning aims of competent academic working methods and self-guided learning genuine to universities?

Since 2006, the "Credit Swiss Award for best Teaching" is awarded each year to the "best" teachers at Swiss Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences. The University of Zurich developed theory-based criteria for assigning this award (Futter & Tremp, 2008). A candidate has to conform to a number of standard criteria. Furthermore, so-called focus criteria emphasize each year a different dimension of good university teaching. This concept assumes that the expertise of award winning teachers is based on a number of criteria. This concept is supported by the study of Kember and McNaught (2007) who deduced ten criteria of good teaching by debriefing award winning teachers.

The design and development of our own valid and reliable questionnaire for ascertaining the award winner has shown that there are in fact items among both the standard criteria and the

focus criteria that indicate principles developed on a theoretical basis. Moreover, we are now assessing whether teachers that showed high achievement in one of the focus criteria (for example "counseling and coaching of students") are also among the best in regard to the general criteria of good teaching. We also check whether the qualitative and content based analysis of the students' open answers – and therefore their own understanding of good teaching – is in accordance with the understanding of experts and teachers. Should this be the case, we can assume that teachers and learners are in fact pulling in the same direction and could, therefore, develop into true communities of teachers and learners.

However, if these groups differ very much in their understanding of good teaching, we will analyze our rich set of data further. All groups concerned could profit immensely from the knowledge of the other's ideas of good university teaching. To the future development of support specifically aimed at university teachers and taking into account the specifically academic understanding of teaching, we assume that schemes like the model of Content-Focused CoachingSM (Staub, 2001; West & Staub, 2003) will make an important contribution. The model assigns principles of learning and core issues in lesson design to a frame of orientation that could be adapted to the specific context of universities and help, in the future, guide the dialogue between experienced and future academic teachers while accounting for the students' point of view.

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