Teaching in Higher Education

Consistency and change in context an role

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The project

• The **Teacher Survey**

• The **interview project**: Teachers’ views on:
  
  • Reforms and changes; their causes and effects; the teachers’ response
  • Developments in the practice of teaching
  • Academic leadership in HE teaching
  • «Quality Culture»: A useful term? And do we have it?
The myth of the ‘resilient’ academic

- The **anti-reform** teacher
  - Structural reforms threaten academic freedom and discipline autonomy

- The **unwilling** teacher
  - You are ‘allowed’ to do research and ‘obliged’ to teach
  - Little enthusiasm for teaching; teaching in the shadow of research

- The **complacent** teacher
  - Discipline knowledge is what matters; teaching follows ‘naturally’
  - Faith in direct knowledge transfer from teacher to student

- The **lonely** teacher
  - A lonely king in his own teaching realm
Change in a reform era (after ca. 2000)

• Mass education: a more heterogeneous student population

• Mergers and structural reforms

• «Bologna» reforms:
  • The degree structure: adapted to ‘mass education’?
  • More quality assurance
  • Expectations of tighter follow-up
  • Expectations of more ‘effective’ students
  • The Qualifications Framework
Reform and change: Some perceived effects

• Teachers say:

  • Reforms have had little impact on teaching
  • Instead: reform fatigue – and ‘resilient’ teachers

• The «paradigm shift»:

  • Disagreements over the usefulness of learning outcome descriptors
Change and impact: internal factors

• Teachers say:
  
  • Top academic management has little influence (and shows little engagement)
  
  • ‘Close’ academic management has little power but exerts fundamentally important influence on the discipline/programme community
  
  • Most important changes do not come from outside reforms or top-down management, but from the discipline community itself.
  
  • This particularly concerns the development of teaching methods in order to handle heterogeneity and teaching efficiency
  
  • Cuts in time resources: By far the most challenging change.
«Resilient» teachers?

• To sum up the teachers’ voice:

• Changes have not come about as a result of national reforms or institutional strategies. Or: as often in order to alleviate effects of these reforms. Teachers ‘accommodate’ to minimize change

• Changes have come about as a result of three factors:
  • Increased squeeze in resources: Less time resources for teaching and increased pressure to do R&D
  • Continued increase in student heterogeneity; the ‘instrumental’ student
  • General impact of professional debate
Collegial cooperation in teaching

• **Finding in survey:**

  Collegial cooperation on teaching seemed more developed than the myth of the «lonely, complacent teacher» would indicate.

• **This is supported in interviews:**
  • An open community of sharing and helping seemed to be the general rule (where formerly teachers often «kept their secrets»)
  • Teaching often planned in groups
  • More advanced team-based approaches to teaching were also common
Enthusiasm for teaching

• **Research** still determines appointments, extra resources and careers, but:

• «**Teaching** is the main part of our job» – in time spent and in importance;

• Teaching does not live in the shadow of research

• Teaching is better now than 15 years ago
  • It has to be, given the new challenges and demands
  • It employs much more varied methods, although the lecture is still a core instrument

• So the «four myths» were largely contradicted by our informants
What is «quality culture»?
  • A broadly shared attitude towards quality enhancement?

Quality culture and «close» academic leadership

Quality culture and (formal) quality assurance
  • Not as connected as it is supposed to be?
  • QA systems are accepted and implemented, but we saw little enthusiasm

Do we need the term «quality culture»?