Development of teacher competencies
(moderated by Dr. Saranne Weller)

Teaching and learning

In what ways could you introduce more student-centred teaching and learning activities in your everyday practice?
Three ways:
- Students meeting and discussing with other students (for example, with students 'association representatives);
- Teachers meeting with students (present students what is student-centred approach in higher education institutions, explain students how to learn (everyday learning, not before exam session), explain about teaching and assessment methods, monitor students' progress and support them when they face problems);
- Teachers discussing with other teachers.

What factors make student-centeredness difficult in your context?
Students:
- Big groups of students;
- Lack of students' motivation;
- Different academic background after graduating school;

Teachers:
- Lack of experience working in e-learning environment;
- Older generation teachers have difficulties adopting innovations in their teaching process (dominance of traditional teaching methods (teachers reading from the papers during the class, avoiding students work and discussions in groups and etc.)

What competencies do teachers need to develop to successful facilitate student-centred learning?
- Leadership;
- IT abilities;
- Abilities to organise learning process (appropriate proportion of time and scope of materials, constant material updates);
- Being a good story teller and a good listener (listen to what students are expecting from the classes);
- Abilities to work with different students (from different background, religion, with disabilities, etc.).

Enhancement of teaching and learning

In what ways do you get student and peer feedback on the quality of teaching and the student learning experience?
Every higher education institution periodically makes surveys of the students (formal and informal ways), organizes some focus group discussions; Higher education institutions often faces problem of low rate of respondents (students do not want to waste their time filling questionnaires as they believe that surveys do not make any changes).

Surveys are used in meetings with administration, teachers, and students' representatives; some institutions are using survey results for teaching staff certification.

What are the limitations of asking students to work with us to improve teaching practice?
Low students' motivation: big part of them are working (including full time and part time students), they do not have enough expertise to be involved in such activities.

Another obstacle - teachers conservative attitude, intercultural differences (especially with students from Asian countries, for example, they think that it is not polite to ask teachers any questions.

Recognition and reward policies for teachers

In what ways are teachers recognised and rewarded for adopting more student-centred approaches in your individual and department practice?

Higher education institutions are organizing best teacher's elections (some of them receive bonus payment).

What sorts of training or development helped you (or could help you) to improve your teaching practice most?

- Self-reflection;
- Mentoring;
- Feedback from students (or other teachers).

What mechanisms could encourage more teachers to be student-centred in their practice?

Support from administration: supervision, consulting, preparation of methodological guidelines (for example, some teachers do not know how to teach adult students).

What factors discourage teachers to develop their teaching or try new ways to be student-centred?
Usually teachers are afraid of changes – they are conservative and are afraid to leave their comfort zone. Some of teachers are afraid to be in partnership with students (they are afraid of questions; tradition that teachers are always right).

Curriculum design:

Do you think there are differences between the planned curriculum (the formally approved syllabus) and the curriculum-in-action (the curriculum as it is delivered in practice)?

Teachers are often complaining that time allocated to their subject is too short, they are asking to dedicate more ECTS credits for their subject (for example, instead of 3 – 6); then students'

workload is too big (especially before exam session) and instead of student-oriented approach we have teacher-oriented approach.

In what ways is your curriculum student-oriented? How does it value the resources students bring to their learning?

Student-oriented approach is relevant when students are sharing their work experience – some of the students (usually older ones) have even more practical experience than teachers, so they can share ideas and experience with younger peers and teachers.

How could you involve students in shaping their curriculum?

By constant student surveys about teaching and assessing methods – what good practices students appreciate, what they lack, what they would improve.

What are the arguments for not engaging students in curriculum design?

Maybe students' opinion and experience is less valuable while creating new study programmes – stakeholders are more important and experienced there.

Determining student workload

(moderated by Dr. Asko Karjalainen)

What is a typical Lithuanian student? What motivates Lithuanian students?

- Studies should be interesting and easy;
- Possibility to get a good a job;
- Possibility to study abroad, social interaction;
- Professional teachers, practical experience from the field;
- Being exposed to innovation, new developments;
- Typical Lithuanian student is related to pragmatic learning (same in Finland);
- In Finland students are shy;
- Students are demanding in Lithuania, they demand quality easy to reach, they require good facilities, good provision, source materials. What if they don't get it? They complain. They are able to do that;
- Students are usually young;
- They are critical of others, not themselves;
- The academic level of students is lower each year.

How much time students spend for learning?

- Students study during exam session mostly;
- Students attend classes, but teachers do not know how much time students actually learn;
- Students also get individual tasks;

- Participants are not able to say how much time students learn during a week;
- 20-24 contact hours and 20 individual hours per week;
- In Finland first-year students study 11 hours per week but they should have learned 40 hours. In Finland lectures are not compulsory to attend. Students only go to exams after the 1st year, they do not attend lectures anymore. The reason is that they did not get deep learning. That is why it is important to study what their students are doing.

Study time self-report

If the workload is too big, students study only the most important things. The best way to measure workload is to check the literature that students have to read, the amount of it.

In Finland there is no difference between full-time and part-time studies individual and contact hours. Lectures are the same.

Observations

Participants already make calculations about allocation of credits and study hours; it is not a new thing for them. They are mostly interested in the details as to how it is done in Finland. Learning culture was discussed (if students get an assignment, do they work as assigned?). It was emphasized that usually it is a good thing to work as a team but the process must be monitored. The most dangerous workload is in the beginning of studies (1st year) but if it is organized well, students will not be critical.

How to implement the student-centered approach in institutional policy?

(moderated by Dr. Manja Klemenčič)

Video

- It is important to be inviting when asking to volunteer.
- Lectures are not the most effective material to learn from.
- The video was shown in the beginning of the discussion as an example of what is able to do with massive classrooms. A lot of advertising is made in the beginning, great attention is put to design and music. It is made sure that all of the videos would be publicly available.

What discussion is about quality of teaching and learning – pedagogic and didactic approaches – at your institution? What pedagogic and didactic approaches are used? Sharing practices.

Methods that are lacking in pedagogics were discussed. Participants identified that only when evaluation period comes they start talking about methods used. Also, it is done when people have to prepare subject descriptions. Then they have to specify the methods to be used. When these two periods come, they start thinking about thse issues and discuss. At this level people know how these methods are called and which of these are related to student-centered learning. Is there a standard method, innovation in subject descriptions? There could be traditional and mixed methods.

Emphasis is put on projects, problem solving. It is important to share experiences. Not all teachers can equally deal with that, others can offer more solutions. Often lecturers meet at study department where they perform round table discussions. They discuss about problems (newcomers, how to motivate them), communicate the value of the subject.

Curriculum planning and accreditation are two crucial possibilities to start thinking about pedagogy.

It was emphasized that there are descriptors of study fields where all of the methods are described which should be used for a specific field. Now there are standards that teachers must follow.

There has to be someone who gives support for teachers.

Until now department was the most important decision maker, now there are Committees which decide a lot of things.

Student-centered learning – how it is understood and implemented? Concrete examples.

Private university already has institutional level of problem solving. They have contracts with teachers that they will use learning by doing. They are developing practical outcomes already. It started at the level of teacher initiative with the support from management.

The representatives of Vilnius University said there is not so much dynamics. Faculties are quite independent. They are careful with the definition of student-centered learning. Student feedback is very important. They have a lot of initiatives at different levels. They discuss at the first lectures what students would like to learn. They understand they have a long way to go in this area. They have a psychological councilor. Teachers are not very self-initiative. There is a programme for new teachers of how to teach at institutional level.

How should institutions/programmes be evaluated for student-centered learning?

If you are an evaluation group, what will you ask?

Questions:

- Do you have student academic support system?
- Do you have teacher academic support system?
- Are teachers evaluated according to students' feedback?
- Are you involved into the creation of curriculum? For students.
- What kinds of study methods are used?
- What kind of collaborative activities are used?
- Is there a feedback on your personal achievements? For students.

In student-oriented style – how is student assessment performed?

It is a huge topic with lots of problems. Participants do not know which methods are best. Supporting learning instead of checking is important but there is still a lot to learn. Confidentiality is important in all assessments. Very commonly used are interim assessments.

It is important that students would appreciate high marks; there should not be many of those. Negotiate grades within the group? You have to be prepared that students will not be happy about the grades.