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Fostering the Quality of Teaching and Learning by Developing the "Neglected Half" of University Teachers' Competencies

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For too long, the quality of teaching and learning in universities has been undervalued in comparison to research. Current social, economic, ecological and other challenges require that more attention be given to measures to improve the situation. Academic staff should receive incentives, policy support and high-quality pedagogical training to develop key competencies for excellence in teaching. Examples of key competencies in this area in different countries are presented as well as some schemes of policy support and pedagogical training. The case study from the University of Ljubljana is based on experiences gathered from four groups of participants during a course on Improving University Teaching in 2013 and 2014. They gave their opinion on the relative importance of different competencies in teaching, to what extent have they developed them during the course and, finally, which activities and methods used have most contributed to their development. At the end, some measures to foster excellence in teaching at the level of policy are proposed, as well as areas for further research.

Keywords: teaching competencies in higher education, pedagogical training of academic staff, key competencies, quality of teaching and learning

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Spodbujanje kakovosti poučevanja in učenja s pomočjo razvijanja »spregledane polovice« kompetenc univerzitetnih učiteljev

Barica Marentič Požarnik* in Andreja Lavrič

Kakovost poučevanja in učenja na univerzah je bila v primerjavi z raziskovalno dejavnostjo predolgo podcenjena. Zdajšnji izzivi na socialnem, ekonomskem in na ekološkem področju ter drugih področjih terjajo več pozornosti ukrepom, ki bi izboljšali situacijo. Da bi visokošolski učitelji razvili ključne kompetence za odličnost poučevanja, bi morali biti deležni spodbud in politične (sistemske) podpore pa tudi kakovostnega pedagoškega usposabljanja. Predstavljeni so nekateri primeri ključnih kompetenc na tem področju pa tudi primeri politične podpore in pedagoškega izpopolnjevanja v raznih državah. Študija primera z Univerze v Ljubljani sloni na izkušnjah, ki so bile pridobljene na seminarjih visokošolske didaktike s štirimi skupinami udeležencev v letih 2013 in 2014. Udeleženci so izrazili mnenje o sorazmerni pomembnosti različnih kompetenc v poučevanju, do kolikšne mere so jih uspeli razviti na seminarju in tudi o tem, katere aktivnosti in metode so k temu največ pripomogle. Na koncu so predlagani nekateri ukrepi na ravni visokošolske politike, ki bi spodbudili odličnost v poučevanju pa tudi področja nadaljnjega raziskovanja.

Ključne besede: kompetence poučevanja v visokošolskem izobraževanju, pedagoško usposabljanje visokošolskih učiteljev in sodelavcev, ključne kompetence, kakovost poučevanja in učenja

Introduction: Increasing importance of quality in teaching in higher education

Universities have three main functions: to conduct research, to offer education, and to serve society. University teachers' career development is usually dependent heavily on the first function, i.e. the quality (and too often quantity) of research, while the quality of teaching remains undervalued and overshadowed by research achievements; teachers also enjoy a thorough training in research methodology and have numerous opportunities to perform and report research results, while competencies linked to quality teaching mostly remain "the neglected half". The research results alone also count in official rankings of universities, such as the popular Shanghai ranking, because of the underlying, but unproven assumption that a good researcher is necessarily also a good teacher (Marentič Požarnik, 2007). Only recently has the U-Multiranking initiative proposed to improve the situation by including broader criteria.[3]

The massification of studies, the increasing heterogeneity of students, rapid developments in different fields of science and technology, economic, ecological and social problems on one side and new research findings about human learning from psychology, cognitive and neuroscience on the other, as well as the globalization and internationalization of higher education: all these require that much more attention be paid to the quality of teaching and learning in universities. As stated in the recent Report to the European Commission on Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Europe's Higher Education Institutions (Report, 2014), the 19th century model of teaching relying mainly on lecturing is no longer compatible with new developments in universities and with societal challenges (Report, 2014, p. 12). There are signs that this situation is changing, but progress is slow. While "the quality of teaching and learning should be at the core of the higher education reform agenda in Europe" (Report, 2014, p. 13), the commitment to this mission at present remains "sporadic and frequently reliant on a few individuals who give practical support for upskilling teachers" (Report, 2014, p. 14) with little or no institutional support or incentives.

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 excellence in teaching. The best teaching should support the development

3 The U-Multirank initiative of ranking universities, co-financed by the European Commission, is based on a wider conception; it takes into account social relevance, impact on practice, and excellence in teaching and learning at universities. It is becoming increasingly popular; in 2014, 650 universities applied. See: www.u-multirank.eu

of students' critical thinking, creativity, ethical responsibility and commitment to lifelong learning. (Report, 2014, p. 13)

The quality of teaching is also gradually finding its place among quality criteria, elaborated in connection with Bologna reforms. Thus, the Guidelines for National External Quality Assurance Systems of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) stated that "Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so", and further: "Institutions should ensure that their staff recruitment and appointment procedures includes a means of making certain that all new staff have at least the minimum necessary level of competence" (ENQA, 2007, cit. after van de Ven, Koltcheva, Raaheim, & Borg, 2008, p. 4).

What are key competencies of teachers in higher education in the area of teaching?

Although the concept of (professional) competencies is difficult to clarify and can be easily misused or oversimplified, it can represent a useful starting point for reflection and the planning of the professional development of teachers. Without entering into controversies about misused and overly narrow conceptions, we can still agree with Weinert's definition that emphasized the complexity of competencies in which three dimensions are tightly interconnected: cognition, skills and attitudes/values. According to Weinert, competencies are "multilayered complex systems of knowledge, beliefs and action tendencies that are constructed from well-organized domain-specific expertise, basic skills, generalized attitudes and converging cognitive styles" (Weinert, 2001, p. 53). All three dimensions are important; it is not productive to reduce competencies to (professional) skills, which is typical for one-sided behaviouristic approaches that should be evaluated more critically (Kotnik, 2006).

There has been a significant amount of effort invested in defining and describing competencies to be developed in students at all levels of schooling and also competencies of primary and secondary teachers (Razdevšek Pučko & Rugelj, 2006; Peklaj, 2006; Marentič Požarnik, 2006). While university teachers share many competencies with other teachers, some are specific, such as to be able to conceive and evaluate study programmes or to link research and teaching by mentoring student research work.

We find numerous attempts to identify key competencies of university staff in the area of teaching and learning, with examples at the level of individual universities, of groups of universities and (which is supposed to have more

impact) at the level of the whole country. The roles of "lists" of such competencies are manifold: to underpin initial and continuing professional development, to influence teaching and learning, to inform promotion and probation policies, to define job requirements and (as emphasized in the frame of the NETTLE project[4]), "to support justifiable pride in the role and work of the teacher, in synergy with their other roles – researcher, administrator, consultant and so on" (Baume, 2008).

In one of earlier approaches, Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin, and Prosser (2000) started with a basic question: what sort of teaching encourages effective learning? They developed a model of *scholarship of teaching* that sees teaching as part of a larger whole of academic work, in order to overcome teaching versus research arguments. This model has four dimensions (each is further elaborated):

- *Informed dimension* (being informed about theories of teaching and learning, etc.),
- *Reflection dimension* (reflection as a part of action),
- *Communication dimension* (communication about teaching with peers, but also on conferences and in scholarly journals),
- *Conception dimension* (changing conceptions from teacher-focused to student-focused teaching)

Bain, in contrast, asked the following question: What are characteristics of outstanding, excellent university teachers? He defined outstanding teachers by results they achieved, as those teachers that "helped their students to learn in ways that made a sustained substantial and positive influence on how those students think, act and feel" (Bain, 2004, p. 5). The result of his in-depth study of over 60 outstanding teachers from 40 disciplines was a rich description of their characteristics, among others:

- Those teachers know their subjects extremely well, as well as broader issues, such as epistemology; they know how to simplify and clarify complex subjects, can think about their thinking and help their students to do so;
- They create a natural critical learning environment, which is safe and simultaneously challenging, in which authentic, fascinating, intriguing, complex questions and tasks are embedded; their methods frequently used the challenge

4 NETTLE (Network of Tertiary Level Educators) is an academic European network (2006-2008) of staff developers from 30 countries and 51 universities with the aim of fostering a common understanding of what it means to be an educator within higher education and to encourage the development of educator skills to ensure a high quality experience for all students in higher education (Baume, 2008). The University of Ljubljana is member of this network (national coordinator: B. Marentič Požarnik).

of provocative questions, which students also see as important, including those that stir imagination, wonder and higher-order intellectual activity;

- The best teachers can capture and keep students' attention; they start a new theme with students' mental model and experiences, not with the content of their respective discipline (student-centred teaching). They care about students as people and as learners, have high expectations and trust them; they are enthusiastic about their discipline and invite students into the "community of learners".

The UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education, issued in 2011 by Higher Education Academy in England, present an example of an official, country-wide approach that recognizes scholarly nature of knowledge creation at universities and a scholarly approach to pedagogy. The standards are elaborated at three levels (new staff, experienced, senior staff) and list competencies in their recognized threefold function: core knowledge, areas of activity and professional values; here are some examples in each category (see heacademy.ac.uk):

- *Core knowledge* - what university teachers should know (about students, theory and practice of teaching and learning) about methods for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching, etc.
- *Areas of activity*: being able to design and plan good programmes of study, to develop effective environments for learning, to ensure good feedback to students, to integrate scholarship and research with teaching and supporting learning, to develop learning communities, to evaluate practice and engage in continuing professional development, etc.
- *Professional values*, principles, code of practice: to have respect for individual learners, commitment to scholarship in the discipline and in teaching, to foster confidentiality, inclusivity, equality of opportunity, proper use of power, etc.

In Germany, a group of universities developed a list of key competencies of teachers in higher education that was presented by Webler at the NETTLE conference (2006). Those encompass, in addition to subject knowledge and the competence to teach and organize learning processes, the competence to support young scholars in their development and categories of self-competence and social competence. Some typical examples:

- *Self-competence*: ability to reflect and learn from experience; curiosity and doubt, ability for holistic thinking in contexts, for thinking positively, for keeping integrity, patience with oneself and others;

- *Social competence*: ability to communicate, to stay behind (to observe and listen instead of speaking), to open space for students, to cooperate with "difficult" people;
- *Subject knowledge*: also historical knowledge, knowledge about borders and "neighbourhood" of one's discipline.

Also included are the abilities to connect research and teaching, to assess professionally, to organize links to practice and to master a wide repertoire of methods. Moreover, it is important also to provoke curiosity, to be careful in giving feedback to students, to keep open "spaces" for independent learning, to create intellectual doubt, to support problem based learning and problem solving. However, above all else, good teachers in higher educating have the ability to apply a system of teaching and learning that supports students in becoming independent and responsible citizens. (Webler, 2006)

Models of structuring competencies in teaching and learning in higher education are varied, but they also share some common basic features. The question remains: How to support teachers in higher educating in developing competencies of "teaching excellence"?

As those competencies are not "in the genes" of teachers in higher education, they have to be developed during their career. How? One way is informal: by self-study, learning from experience, or by imitating one's best teachers. More important is intentional learning that has to be officially supported: -by offering workshops and seminars, counselling and supervision, by encouraging research into one's own teaching and publishing the results, by organizing conferences on teaching and learning, by including it in promotion procedures, by systematically evaluating quality of teaching and using results to improve it; in short, by trying to create an academic approach to teaching, similar to the approach that is usual in research into different disciplines (Trigwell et al., 2000).

What is the situation in different countries? A comparative study within the framework of NETTLE determined that in contrast to the trend towards a greater comparability of study programmes, the area of initial and continuous (pedagogical) training of teachers in higher education in Europe is characterized by extreme variability. Some findings (van de Ven et al., 2008):

- In general, there is no national legislation to state an obligation for teachers in higher education to have an initial entry training certificate;
- nevertheless, in a large majority of universities (93%), there are at least some initiatives of pedagogical formation of higher education teachers;
- In 52% of cases, there are courses for initial training, in 31% other types of courses;

- In the majority of cases, those courses are not mandatory; in 38% of cases, they are mandatory for new staff or staff in applied institutions, e.g. polytechnics in (the Netherlands, Ireland, Norway, Latvia, Cyprus, Finland; for applied sciences, Sweden);
- Courses vary greatly in their scope, from 16 to 1600 hours;
- 71% of institutions have centres that organize courses, consultations, innovative projects. Some centres are attached to the university, some to teacher education institutions; some are specialized (for medical, technical staff in Sweden). In UK and the Netherlands, every university has such a centre.

An overview of international initiatives is also given in the work of Aškerc (2013) and Cvetek (2015). The European situation is described in the Report to the European Commission (2014): There are "a lot of worthy aspirations across EU Member States in relation to quality teaching in higher education, but an actual base line of concern […] is worryingly low." (Report, 2014, p. 22). Some examples of good practice are listed, and the importance of an incentivized national policy framework is emphasized as a prerequisite for the development of university teacher training programmes. The reputation gap between research and teaching should also become smaller by using other criteria for ranking universities in addition to the Shanghai scheme, such as the U-Multirank initiative (see footnote 3). The report concludes with 16 recommendations, one of them being that "all staff teaching in higher education institutions in 2020 should have received a certified pedagogical training" (Report, 2014, p. 31).

Let us conclude this overview with an example of probably the most extensive pedagogical training of teachers in higher education, conceived and carried out by the Teaching Development Unit at the University of Oulu (Karjalainen & Nissilä, 2008). The programme was allocated 60 ECTS, which are associated with 1600 hours of study that can be finished in three years or in one year full time. The starting point of planning was a competence analysis; eight core competencies were identified, and the programme was tailored to develop them:

- Commitment to scholarship of teaching,
- Research-based and reflective practice,
- Creative approach towards challenges,
- Active participation in national and international networks,
- Use of modern learner-centred teaching and assessment methods,
- Capacity for pedagogical leadership,
- Being agent of change in the academic community
- Connections to (working) life outside the community.

In the first round, 50 participants joined the course (chosen from 100 applicants).

What is the situation in Slovenia?

After early pioneer efforts of Prof. Vlado Schmidt (Schmidt, 1972), different training programmes (courses, seminars and summer schools) in the area of improving teaching and learning for teachers in higher education have been offered since late 1970s, mainly by the Centre for Educational Development at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. A series of textbooks was developed for the participants, starting with one by Marentič Požarnik (1978).[5] Some short courses were modular, monothematic (on group work, assessment, communication, mentoring, etc.), also carried out by invitation of individual institutions. One longer, 48-hour course on the Foundations of University Teaching was finally officially accredited by the Council of University of Ljubljana in 1999. Later, it was renewed according to Bologna propositions and accredited in 2013 (after a long waiting time). Recently, similar programmes, proposed by the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, as elective subjects of master and doctoral studies, were accredited and they are chosen every year by some students.[6]

Participants (over 1200 in the past four decades) came from different institutions. In most of the courses, we had heterogeneous groups, which was regarded as an asset. The trainers (Barica Marentič Požarnik, Cirila Peklaj, Barbara Šteh, Jana Kalin, Melita Puklek Levpušček, Andreja Lavrič, and Ana Tomić) usually worked in pairs, supporting each other and jointly evaluating the process in order to improve it.

Furthermore, annual summer schools, twelve in all, were organized from 1992 onward by the Centre of Educational Development at the Faculty of Arts. They boasted prominent foreign guests, including Lewis Elton, Roy Cox, David Jaques, Brigitte Berendt, Oliva Peeters, and Marija Bratanić. This fruitful cooperation was made possible by wide international contacts of B. Marentič Požarnik,[7] who also "imported" the philosophy and ethos of

5 For details about early beginnings, see the doctoral thesis of Marentič Požarnik (1994) and Marentič Požarnik (1998).

6 At the Faculty of Education in Ljubljana, ilena Valenčič Zuljan is responsible for carrying out elective doctoral course in university teaching; at Faculty of Arts, Jana Kalin and Cirila Peklaj.

7 B. Marentič Požarnik was a member of the UNESCO CEPES European Network for Staff Development in Higher Education (1985–1991), Maidstone expert group (1979–1997, for details see Marentič Požarnik, 2012); the European Association for Research and Development in Higher Education (EARDHE) (1979–1986), ISSAT – International Study Association for Teachers and Teaching (1999-), the Network of Tertiary Level Educators NETTLE (2006–2008) and the European Forum on Academic Development (EFAD), King's College London 2011.

cognitive-humanistic and constructivist ideas of professional development and promoted approaches, based on experiential, collegial learning – "teach as you preach".

Although these courses were voluntary and did not formally contribute to career advancement, they were always fully booked (in some cases, the number of participants had to be limited as there was more interest than places). Evaluations by participants were highly favourable.

For an overview of other pedagogical courses in Slovenia and participants' opinions about them, see also Aškerc (2013, 2014), Cvetek (2015, in print). To date, none of those initiatives has been recognized or supported by policy makers in Slovenian higher education. In spite of numerous proposals to include them in the criteria for promotion, research achievements, mainly in the form of publishing in internationally recognized journals with a high citation index still dominate (Aškerc, 2013, 2014).

In promotion criteria of the University of Ljubljana (Merila…, 2011), "pedagogical qualification" has the weight of approximately 25% and consists mainly of the authorship of textbooks and other materials for students and the mentoring of master's and doctoral theses (which does not guarantee the "pedagogical" quality of texts or mentorship). In contrast, the candidate can obtain only one point (!) for attending certified in-service courses to improve teaching and no points at all for presenting evidence of actual improvements or innovations in fostering active learning. The main characteristic of pedagogical ability is stated in terms of a teacher who is a "clear and systematic" presenter in lectures, laboratory exercises and seminars (Merila…, 2011, par. 58), the "probation lecture" still being the only evidence of teaching competency required from new teachers (docents), and even this is not always performed (Aškerc, 2014). Several times, improvements of those criteria were proposed, also by the Slovenian Association for Teaching in Higher Education (SATHE),[8] for example by introducing a teaching portfolio that is usual in many countries. However, all those proposals have been ignored up to now, revealing a persisting "immunity toward pedagogical viruses" (Marentič Požarnik, 2013).

Only the University of Primorska recently included the obligation to submit a certificate of participation at an approved pedagogical-andragogical course for all the candidates among the criteria of selection and promotion (Merila…, 2014). At present, an 18-hour course, developed jointly by Sonja Rutar and Tatjana Vonta, is being offered, which covers topics including the mission of university studies, process and strategies of learning and teaching in

8 The Slovenian Association for Teaching in Higher Education was founded in 1996 (see Mihevc & Marentič Požarnik, 1998), but after 10 years it has been dissolved.

higher education, and students with special needs. Participants have to prepare a teaching unit, carry it out and reflect on the process; they also get feedback from the trainer (Rutar, 2012).

In 2013, an accredited 40-hour course on the foundations of university teaching, organized by the Centre for Educational Development at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana, was offered as one of the activities within the KUL project (Quality - University of Ljubljana). Five iterations in 2013–2015 have been co-financed by the European Social Fund. The KUL project also includes some shorter courses, offered by different providers, such as the use of ICT in university teaching or rhetoric.

At the moment, there is no official support, recognition, coordination or control of quality of those activities, in spite of the fact that excellence in teaching was stressed as one of the important aims in the Slovene National Higher Education Programme 2011–2020: "To achieve excellence, the programme requires higher education institutions to develop activities of continuing pedagogical training and to provide support for their teaching staff. Mechanisms for promoting excellence in teaching shall include the development of centres for teaching competences". This sounds promising and has even been included as an example of good practice in the Report to the European Commission (Report, 2014, p. 24). At present, at the beginning of 2015, there are still no signs of putting into practice those mechanisms that were intended to start in 2012. At least, these ideas have begun to be a matter of discussion; for example they were a topic of an invited presentation (McMahon, 2014) at the "Bolonja po Bolonji" Rectors' Conference in April 2014

The most important measure in recent years has been to introduce student evaluation questionnaires on teaching and student reports as a part of promotion documents. This has to a certain extent focused attention on the quality of the pedagogical process. However, increasing pressure to publish leaves teachers and assistants less and less time and energy to invest in the work with students "[…] who are often regarded as a nuisance to a busy tutor" (EU Report, 2014, p. 29). A consistent Slovenian policy to support excellence in teaching remains to be implemented.

Case study: The impact of the course Foundations of University Teaching/ University Didactics[9] at the University of Ljubljana on the development of teaching competencies

Description of the course

The course was part of the "Quality - University of Ljubljana" project (the so-called KUL project) and co-financed by the European Social Fund. It consists of 40 contact hours during four weekend sessions in one semester; additionally, the homework tasks take about half of this time. Thus, it is a shorter course in comparison to similar courses in different European countries (see Van de Ven et al., 2008). It was carried out four times in 2013 and 2014 by two cooperating trainers (authors of this paper); the last course is planned for spring 2015.

The number of participants was limited to 16, in order to enable active work, intense interaction and individual attention; however, interest has widely surpassed this capacity. Participants came from different fields (18 from social sciences and humanities, 24 from science and technology and 20 from life sciences (medicine, biology)), which was regarded as an asset, not an obstacle.

The main *goals* of the course were to support participants:

- To master basic procedures in planning and delivering courses, assessing students and to optimally "align" those procedures (Biggs, 1999).
- To become familiar with a variety of teaching methods and approaches and criteria of their choice according to teaching goals and student characteristics.
- To become aware of the importance of student motivation and its relation to the learning environment.
- To acquire a reflective and researching stance/attitude to their teaching practice and a readiness for gathering evidence of its effectivity as a basis for improvement.
- To deepen awareness of one's own conceptions of teaching and learning and of students' perspectives in order to make the transition "from teaching to learning" and to see students as active and independent partners (Kugel, 1993; Marentič Požarnik, 2005).

Included were *topics* on (verbal and nonverbal) communication,

9 The title "Osnove visokošolske didaktike" cannot be translated literally, as there is a semantic problem with the term "didactic" in English. Therefore, we use the term "Foundations of University Teaching".

(interactive) lecturing, models of group work, different uses of ICT, student assessment (in connection with taxonomy of learning objectives), strategies for independent study and changes in conceptions of teachers' and students' role (student-centred teaching).

The prevailing *methods* were based on experiential and peer learning; the participants were put in the role of students in order to experience methods they could later use in their teaching. There were minimal amounts of lecturing and some required reading ("homework"), followed by group discussion ("learning through discussion"- the LTD model, by Rowe). Participants had ample opportunity to present and discuss their expectations and experiences and to receive different kinds of feedback. Every participant had to perform a mini-lecture, which was evaluated by peers and trainers, including video feedback in private by the mentor. They also had to present a written reflection on this experience, a reflective report on one peer observation of real teaching and finally a seminar work based on applied research study into their own teaching, which was shared with other participants during the final meeting.

In the frame of the work with the four groups in 2013 and 2014, we performed a research study with the following *research questions:*

- How did the participants rate the importance of different competencies of teachers in HE after completing the course?
- To what extent did the course help them to develop those competencies?
- Which activities and methods used contributed most to this development?

Methods and instruments

1. A list of competencies that have been developed in the frame of the European thematic network NETTLE mainly on the basis of the list by the TUNING Educational Sciences working group. It has been used in different countries and also in evaluating courses at the University of Ljubljana in 2008 and 2009 (Marentič Požarnik, 2009).
2. The questionnaire on the role of different activities and methods in developing competencies that has been developed by the trainers of the course.
3. The questionnaire on general evaluation of the course that was developed centrally to be used in all KUL training activities.

The questionnaires were presented to participants during the last group meeting.

Results

Table 1. *The importance attached to different competencies by participants of courses in university teaching at the University of Ljubljana (4 groups in 2013–2014)*

	Groups / Numerus	1 / 13	2 / 14	3 / 10	4 / 15
	Competency	**Mean ratings**			
1	Ability to analyse educational concepts, theories and issues of policy (in a systematic way)	2.6	2.6	2.7	3.0
2	Ability to identify potential connections between aspects of subject knowledge and their application in wider policies and contexts	3.4	3.3	3.4	**3.7**
3	Ability to reflect on one's value system	3.4	3.4	3.4	**3.5**
4	Ability to recognize, and respond to the diversity of learners and the complexities of the learning process	3.2	3.4	**3.7**	**3.7**
5	Ability to adjust the curriculum to a specific educational context	3.0	2.9	3.1	**3.5**
6	Awareness of the different roles of participants in the learning process	3.4	3.1	3.3	**3.5**
7	Understanding of the structures and purposes of educational systems	3.1	2.9	3.1	3.1
8	Ability to do educational research in different contexts	2.9	2.7	2.5	3.0
9	Competence in counselling	**3.7**	3.4	3.4	**3.9**
10	Ability to manage projects for improvement of the school / institution learning and teaching environment	2.9	2.3	2.6	2.9
11	Ability to manage educational programmes	2.6	2.3	2.9	3.0
12	Ability to evaluate educational programmes/materials	3.1	2.8	3.4	3.4
13	Ability to foresee new educational needs and demands	3.4	3.2	3.4	3.3
14	Ability to lead or coordinate educational teams across subject groups	2.6	2.9	2.8	2.9
15	Commitment to learners' progress and achievement	**3.7**	3.3	**3.8**	**3.7**
16	Competence in a number of teaching/learning strategies	**3.8**	**3.6**	**3.6**	**3.5**
17	Competence in collaborative problem solving	**3.6**	3.1	**3.7**	3.2
18	Knowledge of the subject to be taught	3.2	**3.5**	4.0	**3.9**
19	Ability to assess the outcomes of learning and learners' achievements	**3.7**	3.4	**3.5**	**3.7**
20	Ability to communicate effectively with groups and individuals	**3.7**	**3.5**	**3.6**	**3.7**
21	Ability to create a climate conducive to learning	**3.8**	**3.5**	**3.8**	**3.8**
22	Ability to make use of e-learning and to integrate it into the learning environments	2.5	2.4	2.8	3.1
23	Ability to manage time effectively	2.9	3.1	3.5	**3.5**
24	Ability to reflect upon and evaluate one's own performance	**3.7**	**3.6**	**3.9**	**3.8**
25	Awareness of the need for continuous professional development	**3.7**	**3.7**	**3.7**	**3.8**

Comments:
- The level of importance of each competence was rated on a 4-point scale: 1-None, 2-Weak, 3-Considerable, 4-Strong
- The competence with a mean of 3.5 or higher (bold) was arbitrarily classified as "very important".

The competencies that the majority of participants rated as very important were those more directly linked to the teaching-learning process and less to the theoretical, analytical, research and management aspects of the teaching role; these are perhaps more relevant for senior staff, administrators and researchers of this field. In addition to more "technical" aspects of delivering and assessing teaching (the "action" side of competencies), participants also emphasized the importance of the "reflective" side, such as the "ability to reflect upon and evaluate one's own performance" and also those based on values and attitudes, such as "creating a good group climate" and "being committed to student progress".

Table 2. *To what extent have the courses helped to develop competencies in participants? (summary of frequencies, indicated by participants in 4 groups in 2013–2014)*

	Competency	Numerus – 46	
		fr	%
1	Ability to analyse educational concepts, theories and issues of policy (in a systematic way)	10	22
2	Ability to identify potential connections between aspects of subject knowledge and their application in wider policies and contexts	9	20
3	Ability to reflect on one's value system	**24**	**52**
4	Ability to recognize, and respond to the diversity of learners and the complexities of the learning process	19	41
5	Ability to adjust the curriculum to a specific educational context	15	33
6	Awareness of the different roles of participants in the learning process	**30**	**65**
7	Understanding of the structures and purposes of educational systems	11	24
8	Ability to do educational research in different contexts	9	20
9	Competence in counselling	11	24
10	Ability to manage projects for improvement of the school / institution learning and teaching environment	6	13
11	Ability to manage educational programmes	4	9
12	Ability to evaluate educational programmes/materials	14	30
13	Ability to foresee new educational needs and demands	9	20
14	Ability to lead or coordinate educational teams across subject groups	3	6
15	Commitment to learners' progress and achievement	18	39
16	Competence in a number of teaching/learning strategies	**38**	**83**
17	Competence in collaborative problem solving	19	41
18	Knowledge of the subject to be taught	3	6
19	Ability to assess the outcomes of learning and learners' achievements	17	37

20	Ability to communicate effectively with groups and individuals	21	46
21	Ability to create a climate conducive to learning	**30**	**65**
22	Ability to make use of e-learning and to integrate it into the learning environments	**26**	**57**
23	Ability to manage time effectively	7	15
24	Ability to reflect upon and evaluate one's performance	**34**	**74**
25	Awareness of the need for continuous professional development	**23**	**50**

Comment: the participants had to indicate which competencies the course had helped them to develop. Those indicated by a half or more participants are shown in bold.

Participants' answers show that they perceived the largest gain from the course in mastering various teaching techniques, including the use of e-learning. It is important and in line with the philosophy of the course that they did not mention only "technical" aspects, but also the gain in cognitive aspects, such as obtaining deeper awareness of different roles of teachers and students in the study process and the increased ability to reflect on one's own value system. Aspects that had to do with counselling and management, research, curricular and policy issues were mentioned less frequently; this would require special courses, more tailored to those special topics and to special audience (senior staff in leading positions).

Table 3. *Participants' perceived gain from different course activities*

	Group	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
	Numerus	**13**	**13**	**11**	**15**
Course activity		**% of gain**			
1.	lectures with discussion	13.8	9.6	13.5	11.7
2.	exercises, group work	14.2	16.9	12.0	12.7
3.	mini-lectures with (video) feedback	17.9	19.2	23.0	19.3
4.	assignments, homework	9.6	5.8	4.5	7.0
5.	reading literature	10.0	6.2	4.0	7.6
6.	peer observation with reflection	---*	12.7	14.5	13.3
7.	seminar paper (writing, presenting	15.8	13.1	14.5	13.7
8.	informal discussions	17.3	18.4	15.5	14.0

* In this group, there were no peer observations included
Participants had to distribute 10 points among activities regarding how much they gained from each of them.

What contributed most to their learning? Participants clearly favoured experiential methods and approaches, especially mini-lectures with feedback, as well as peer observations and seminar work. As can be seen also from answers to open questions, they highly valued group discussions, wanted even more of them, and considered even informal discussions to be more relevant for their learning than, for example, reading professional literature. This may seem surprising, but it corresponds to Korthagen's "realistic" model of teacher learning that comes about to a great extent by the help of guided reflection on varied teaching experiences and not by application of previously learned theory, i.e. the "deductive" model (Korthagen, 2005). Nevertheless, the challenge of bringing more relevant "theory" and "reading" into future courses remains.

Discussion

Participants were generally very satisfied with the course; ratings in the official and internal questionnaires were extremely high, especially as regards motivating role of the course to improve their skills and competencies and to foster cooperation and discussions during sessions. The course succeeded in developing some competencies in all three aspects: acting, reflecting and valuing, especially those competencies they regarded as important, such as mastering a number of teaching/learning strategies, but they also reported having improved their ability to make better use of e-learning, which was not so high on their list of priorities. Their improvements in assessment techniques could be larger, so apparently some adjustments in future courses should be made. As regards competence in counselling, specific courses are to be offered, as this area is not being included in this basic course. The same applies to more managerial aspects, such as the ability to manage educational programmes, to foresee new educational needs and to coordinate educational teams; these are competencies needed more by senior staff and staff in leading positions.

We can regard as very encouraging the answers indicating gains in awareness of different roles of participants in the learning process and in creating a climate conducive to learning, as well as in the ability to reflect upon and evaluate one's own performance and being aware of the need for continuous professional development. These belong to the broader cognitive and value dimensions of competencies.

In their answers to open questions, participants appreciated the relaxing, friendly atmosphere, good group climate, many possibilities for formal and informal exchanges of information, competent, motivated and "well-aligned" trainers, innovative and varied methods, active work, experiencing

new approaches that they can later use with students. Thus, the immediate reactions of participants, gathered by official and internal questionnaires, were very favourable. Nearly everyone would recommend the course to their colleagues; some would like to see it as mandatory for every new teacher as well as following other more specialized courses (on assessment, use of ICT in teaching, counselling, etc.).

Of course, their satisfaction does not tell us whether the experiences during the training will lead to sustainable improvements or changes in their teaching and thinking. Our earlier follow-up study showed that the former participants of such courses did introduce some changes into their teaching, mostly in student assessment. They also reported more changes in thinking about teaching and learning than changes in their everyday practice. (Marentič Požarnik & Puklek Levpušček, 2002)

Gibbs and Coffey suggest the following questions for evaluation: has the course led to the improvement of teaching skills, to the development of teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning and to changes in students' learning (Gibbs & Coffey, 2004, p. 88). We may also add changes in the quality of study results that would show students' deeper understanding and a better transfer of knowledge to new situations. Research by Gibbs and Coffey has shown that courses did have impact not only on teaching skills but also on the approach to learning of students: specifically, a change from surface to deep learning which is one of the most important goals.

We need further research to get answers to those broader questions. We can some indications from the participants' answers to the open questions "What have you learned?" and "What is going to influence you in the future?" About half of the answers in all four groups mentioned changes in methods and teaching approaches (more interactivity, methods that activate and motivate students, especially more group work, also problem-based teaching, etc.), another half indicated changes in thinking, feeling and conceptions that can have more long-term effects on their teaching ("I learned to reflect on goals, on my approaches"; "I got more self-confidence, commitment to better teaching").

Offering high-quality training in improving teaching and learning by experts from different disciplines that have this training as their primary responsibility[10] is very important, especially for teachers at the beginning of their careers. As already mentioned, most European universities already have established learning and teaching centres that organize longer or shorter cour-

10 In this regard, the Centre for Educational Development at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana with its longstanding tradition and experts experienced in staff development deserves to be supported.

ses, debates, summer schools, annual conferences, publications: in short, fostering "a scholarly approach" to teaching (see Cvetek, 2015) as is usual in research. Innovations and improvements in teaching can also be encouraged by building them into the system of quality evaluation and accreditation of institutions and into the criteria for the hiring and promotion of university staff (possibly by including a "teaching portfolio") (see also Van de Ven et al., 2008; McMahon, 2014; Marentič Požarnik, 2013). Significant learning of university staff can happen in "learning communities" of whole departments or faculties that need to nominate persons responsible especially for this area.

The positive effects of such courses depend to a large extent on the support of a wider academic community and of policy measures that underline the importance of good university teaching. This support is at the moment still sporadic, declarative or non-existent, but it seems that recently it has been obtaining greater prominence in various debates on quality, which will hopefully affect also legislation (the new Slovenian Law on higher education, in preparation).

We can expect significant changes in the direction of excellence in teaching when the whole climate and policy in our system of higher education will value and support it, not only in words but in deeds.

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