



## HELSINKI SUMMER SCHOOL

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Dear Helsinki Summer School teachers and coordinators,

This year we launched a project to develop the pedagogical practices of the Helsinki Summer School courses. Helsinki Summer School is a tool for trying out new courses and experimenting with pedagogical methods in Master's and PhD level teaching in English. The study gives interesting practical knowledge on various pedagogical practices and their success factors in a multicultural international classroom.

This project is part of a larger process that aims to strengthen English-medium instruction and university pedagogics in the University of Helsinki. We want to thank you all for your interest in the future development of international summer education.

Helsinki Summer School will arrange a meeting in the spring for all of those who participated in the study and for people involved in the summer school's pedagogical development. The research has already been applied to the Helsinki Summer School's instructions for coordinators ([wiki.helsinki.fi](http://wiki.helsinki.fi)) and to our marketing strategy.

The research continues in the summer school of 2015 and the final results will be available at the end of 2015.

We wish you a Happy and Relaxing Holiday Season,

Anna Mauranen



Chair of Academic Steering Committee of Helsinki Summer School and  
Vice-Rector of University of Helsinki



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# **Research-based development of the pedagogical practices of Helsinki Summer School: Past, present and future**

## Evaluation report 1: First results and suggestions based on the investigation of the pedagogical practices in HSS 2014 courses

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### 1. Introduction

In the spring 2014, the Helsinki Summer School initiated a project for investigating the existing practices of the Summer School in order to get suggestions for improvements. The project started in June 2014 and ends in November 2015. The present document reports the first results of the research activities focusing on the pedagogical practices of the year 2014 courses.

Studying abroad has become more popular during last ten years. It provides university students with possibilities to develop both their academic expertise and intercultural competencies (Anderson et al., 2006; Kehl & Morris, 2007). Especially short-term study abroad (STSA) programs have gained increasing popularity among students because they require less commitment and resources than longer programs and can more easily

be integrated with studying at home university (Donnelly-Smith, 2008). Previous studies indicate that participating in a STSA program could be a worthwhile educational endeavour, e.g., in terms of intercultural sensitivity (Anderson et al., 2006), increased interest in interdisciplinary studies and perceptions regarding globalization (Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005), communication and language skills, functional knowledge and multifaceted learning experiences (Chieffo & Griffith, 2014). However, international short programs that aim at high-level academic outcomes is a relatively new phenomenon, and their best practices, benefits or effectiveness have not yet been investigated widely (Donnelly-Smith, 2008; Chieffo & Griffith, 2014). In addition, previous studies have focused on STSA programs that were organized by the home department for its own degree students, though in collaboration with the local university of the visited country. Even though many universities (e.g., Utrecht <http://www.utrechtsummerschool.nl/>, Oslo <http://www.uio.no/english/studies/summerschool/> and Fubis <http://www.fubis.org/>) have established *international summer schools* in which individual students may enroll, we did not find previous studies where the benefits, best practices or student experiences of such programs had been investigated.

The high quality of international summer school courses is a critical factor in maintaining the good reputation of the summer school program and to recruit new students in forthcoming years. The scientific quality of the course content is a central factor for university-level courses, but equally important is the overall experience of studying; based, e.g., on working methods, pedagogical practices, social atmosphere and free time activities. Deloach et al. (2008) emphasize that STSA courses are not only individual endeavours, but they are by their very nature a group experience, which should be taken into account in the design of the course.

For evaluating the pedagogical practices of the Helsinki Summer School courses, we used *The Metaphors of learning* introduced by Sfard (1998) and Paavola & Hakkarainen (2005) as a starting point for the analyses. The metaphors provide a useful framework in defining pedagogical criteria that attractive, international university courses should comply: In addition to *individual knowledge acquisition*, learning should be seen as *social participation* and *knowledge creation*. Educational practices that follow these lines include, among others, social discourse, co-creational activities, authentic expert practices, work life contacts, and rich use of technology (e.g., Brooks and Everett 2009; Muukkonen & Lakkala, 2009; Mills-Dick and Hull, 2011).

## Aims

The aim of the present development and research project is to investigate the quality of teaching in Helsinki Summer School, to identify the current best practices and strengths, and to find out methods for developing it to be the most desired academic summer school in the Europe.

The concrete aims for the work are the following:

1. To evaluate the Helsinki Summer School courses from the pedagogical point of view;
2. To evaluate the course variety, to support the development of the course variety and to increase the amount of courses offered;
3. To make suggestions for the pedagogical improvements and for teacher support;

4. To give tools for decision making policy to inspire and make the departments more committed to organize summer school courses.

## Methods

The study represents a multiple case study in which each course forms a case. For investigating the cases, various types of data were collected following the mixed methods approach (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This approach helps getting a rich overview of each case because the data describes the case from various perspectives.

For all the HSS courses in August 2014 the following data was collected:

- Course schedules and teaching materials from the HSS extranet;
- Observation notes from one observed course session (2-3 hours). Time of observation was agreed together with the course coordinator or the principal teacher (something else than lecturing was preferred, if possible). The focuses of the observations were agreed beforehand, based on the researchers' previous experience;
- A short interview of the teacher, usually conducted after the observation (for this study, questions concerning ideas for improving the course and Helsinki Summer School support are analyzed separately, the other questions are used for describing the course);
- Students' answers to eight statements of the HSS online feedback form. The statements used Likert-scale (1-5) about the quality of the course (e.g., content, organization, level of teaching, materials), and two open questions (What has been positive or impressive? What has been negative or challenging?).

In addition, some key actors of HSS were interviewed; these are, e.g., teachers with much experience about HSS courses and responsible persons at the University of Helsinki. So far, the long interviews has been used as background information in designing and organizing the research on pedagogical practices, but the data has not been analyzed in detail or used for this report. The aim is write another report in the spring 2015 which concentrates on the broader ideas for developing the practices of Helsinki Summer School.

## 2. Pedagogical overview of the courses in HSS 2014

### Pedagogical approach of the courses

All 16 courses from year 2014 were included in the study. Exploratory methods were used to evaluate the pedagogical approach of the courses. The unit of analysis covered all data collected from the courses besides student feedback. Data-informed categories were constructed and the categorization of courses was conducted through discussions between the researchers. Three categories were identified to represent the pedagogical approaches of course practices:

- *Conventional academic studying*, 4 courses: Typically the courses had only a few hours of contact teaching daily (mainly lecturing with discussions) focusing on theoretical and academic content and independent individual and group tasks (article reviews, field studies) after them.
- *Student-centered practices*, 5 courses: This type of courses included a rich collection of learning tasks and activities: lectures, discussions, article reviews, presentations by students, learning-diary, group work, field studies, excursions etc., but the focus was still mainly on individual learning of the course content.
- *Features of expert community*, 7 courses: These courses were shaped by activities that resembled authentic expert practices, such as intensive discussions or group assignments that made use of the expertise and multicultural background of students and visiting experts, field trips, project-type group assignments (e.g., a poster) and introduction of professional cases and practices.

It was typical that the courses offered high-level academic perspectives on the topic, and almost all courses had several high-level experts as lecturers. On some courses, one of the lecturers took responsibility of several lectures, but there were also courses which were organized as a series of lectures, and each lecturer had only a few lessons about a topic. For almost all courses, a list of (scientific) pre-readings or readings during the course were offered or even required; such kind of assignments emphasized the aim for a high academic level of the course.

Based on the observations, some lecturers were excellent in creating interaction with the students during lecturing. They provoked, asked directly from some student, and used comparisons, metaphors and other language skills. Other lecturers used small tasks which activated students to discuss or to collaborate with their peers; e.g., texts to be discussed with a pair, or practice-related problems to be solved in groups. There were, however, also lectures which could have been more interactive; there were e.g., no discussion or only a few participants were involved in a teacher-centered discussion.

All courses included other activities besides lectures, but in some courses their role was more central than in others. According to the teacher interviews, there was a slight difference in the emphasis of teaching in different courses: some teachers considered the learning and understanding of academic and scientific content as most important, others emphasized the application of knowledge and practice-related activities.

## **Examples of pedagogical practices from the courses**

In the following list, we have collected some examples of good pedagogical practices. These examples are based on lesson observations and related interviews that the researchers conducted on all courses. (We plan to mention also the courses and teachers related to the examples but we have to ask their permission first.)

1. *Using students' cultural diversity as means to enrich understanding of the topics:* The topic of the course offered plenty of possibilities to use students' cultural background for giving authentic expertise on ethical issues. This created not only a richer content but also offered natural collaboration and sharing of expertise as well as gave an expert role to students.
2. *Inspiring discussions:* On a course, the lecturer used short texts and pictures to inspire the discussion. On another course, the lecturer had a provocative way of

getting the participants into discussions; there was a feeling of a research community during the observed lesson, and the discussion continued also during a coffee break. The lecturer also used students' expertise well by asking them to tell about some details of the topic.

3. *Inquiry-based assignments*: In one course, an observed session includes a real innovation and inquiry challenge for students - to create, in groups, good questions for development topics that are unclear and open also for current researchers of the field. The students choose a topic that they were interested in and formed groups with students with similar interests. The groups collected questions (and possible suggestions for solutions) in movable white boards and presented their group result to others.
4. *Authentic cultural practices*: A central assignment in one course was writing real blog postings. The task fitted well with the course theme, and supported the idea of cultural participation. Each student had a task was to write three blog posts (one per week) on the course blog, and give constructive feedback on another students' blog post three times. The blog posts had to contain a case and/or puzzle, and theoretically informed viewpoints about it. Blog posts could be done in any medium (videos, texts) as long as they included narrativity and explicit theoretical reflections.
5. *Collaborative knowledge creation in multinational groups*: In one course, the whole afternoon was organized as group work with group presentations in the classroom. Each group received a practical problem to solve related to the course theme. Students were divided into multinational groups, and they had to take into account and compare the situation in each member's home country in constructing solutions to the problem. The teacher encouraged to use drawings in addition to text in preparing the poster. Each group presented their results in a flip board paper, and one criterion for presentations was that each group member say something.

In addition, several teachers mentioned that it is important that, besides additional social program organized by HSS, they themselves organize some social program, in which the teachers of the course participate with the students. During some of the courses this was consciously organized and included in the schedule. There was, e.g., daily lunches or coffee breaks with students, organized overnight excursions with a sauna-evening, or a joint evening program. Also excursions as such offer important possibilities for informal social interaction.

### 3. Students' perspectives on Helsinki Summer School courses

Students' answers to eight statements concerning the courses and to two open-ended questions in the online feedback questionnaire were used as data to evaluate the success of the courses from the students' point of view. Figure 1 presents the mean sum points given by all students ( $n=255$ ) to each statement. (The statements measure somewhat different issues so this is not exactly the correct way of using the mean but this is in line how HSS has used the means previously and it obviously gives a possibility for comparisons and shows differences between courses.) The statements were the following (student answered by Likert scale 1-5):

- Correspondence of the content of the course to the title
- Correspondence of the academic content to my expectations
- Structure and organization of the course and its content
- Overall level of teaching
- Quality of English spoken by teachers
- Course literature and other material
- Course assignments
- Facilities provided by the universities.

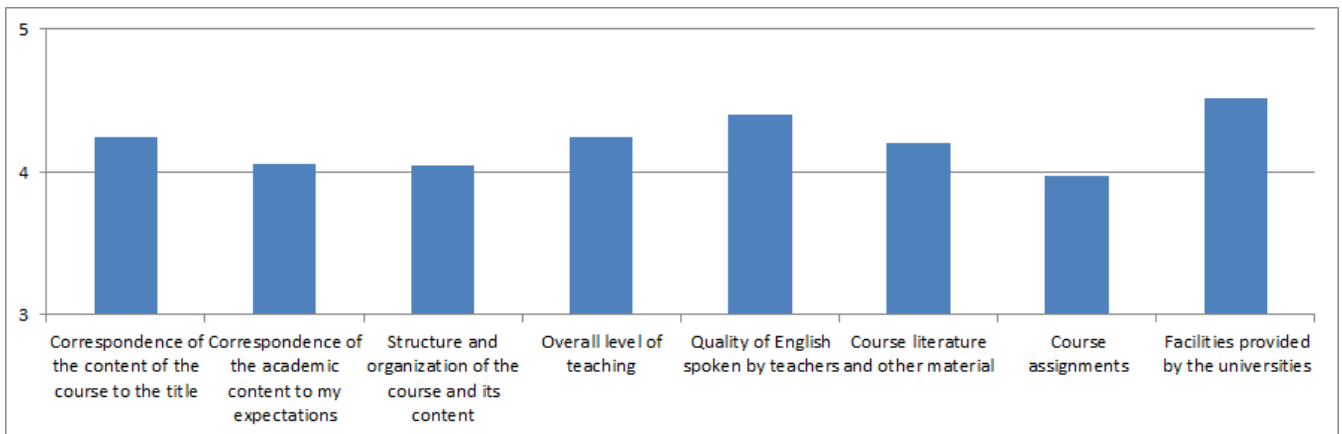


Figure 1. The mean of students' evaluation of each statement.

The mean points given by students to the feedback statements were compared between the three pedagogical course types (see Figure 2).

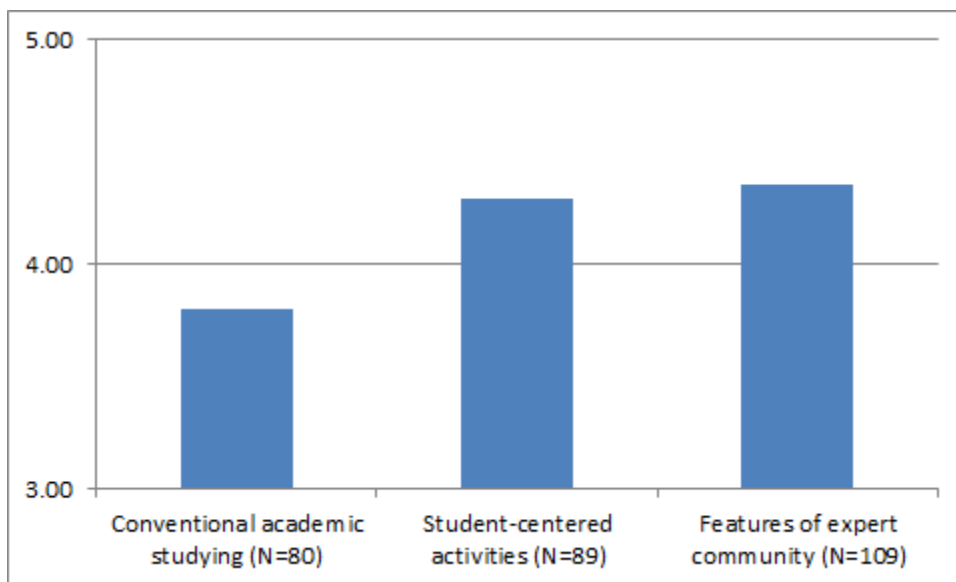


Figure 2. Students' evaluation of the course quality in different course types (mean of the sum of 8 statements).

There is a statistically significant difference between the means of the first group of courses and of the other two groups. The weakest student evaluation points received those courses which had only a small amount of common meetings (mainly morning

lectures), a lot of independent working alone or in groups, and not many social activities or field trips.

We also compared the points given by students for each statement separately. The difference between the courses was quite similar than with the sum points (Figure 1) in most statements. The first type of courses (Conventional academic studying) received lowest points in all statements. In the statement “Correspondence of the academic content to my expectations“, the second type of courses (Student-centered activities) received higher points than the third type of courses (Features of expert community). There was practically no difference between the courses in the statement “Facilities provided by the universities”.

Some open-ended questions were included in the students’ feedback form, focusing on the factors related to the students’ experience of the course. The students’ answers to the questions “What has been positive or impressive in the course?” and “What has been challenging or disturbing in the course?” were categorized by topic according to an iterative process of qualitative content analysis. In all, 255 students answered to the feedback form but they did not all answer to all the open questions.

The following list presents the main categories and subcategories that were constructed based on the data-driven analysis to describe the positive or impressive issues mentioned by the students (in parenthesis is the number of occurrences of the issue in the students’ answers):

- *High-quality teaching arrangements (125)*: Good teachers and lecturers (31), High-level teaching (24), Teachers’ attitude and commitment (21), Well-organized course (15), Quality of facilities (9), Good materials and references (8), Good atmosphere (8), Combination of methods (6), Informing students (2), Good structure (2).
- *Expert lecturers and practices (99)*: Excursions and field trips (21), Variety of contents and viewpoints (18), Practical content (11), Content expertise of lecturers (10), Authentic practices and assignments (8), Research-based content (6), Academic contacts (4), International and multicultural approach to topic (3), Integration of theory and practice (3).
- *Intercultural social interaction (87)*: Interaction between participants (39), International and multicultural backgrounds (21), Nice participants (12), Group work (8), Social program (7).
- *Learning interesting content (44)*: Interesting and useful content (19), Learnt the content (14), Effective coverage of content (5), Individual learning tasks and reflection (3), Own academic studies and skills (3).

The challenging and disturbing issues mentioned by students were divided into the following categories and subcategories (in parenthesis is the number of occurrences of the issue in the students’ answers):

- *Traditional and unprofessional contents and activities (60)*: Narrow expertise of lecturers (8), Narrow content focus (8), Low academic level (7), Too much traditional lecturing (7), Irrelevant tasks (6), No discussion and sharing between participants (6), No practical enough (4), No field tasks (4), Not challenging enough (4), Too short days (2), Not interesting topics (2), Fragmented view to topic (2).
- *Heavy workload and time constraints (50)*: Not enough time for tasks (29), Heavy workload (12), Balancing studying and free time (7), Too long days (3).



- *Low-quality teaching arrangements (47)*: Unclear assignments (11), Poor quality of teaching (10), Poor access of course materials (6), Not well-organized (5), No guidance (4), Overlap between lectures (3), Poor course structure (2), Noisy room (2), Contribution of assistants (2), Informing students (1), Large group (1).
- *Challenges in content learning (36)*: Challenging content (17), Difficult readings (7), Own background knowledge (7), Individual writing tasks (5).
- *Challenges with intercultural social interaction (36)*: English skills of students/teachers (12), English language (11), Group work (8), Passive participants (4), Diverse backgrounds (1).

The qualitative content analysis of positive and impressive or challenging and disturbing factors mentioned by students revealed different profiles for the three types of courses (Figure 3 and Figure 4).

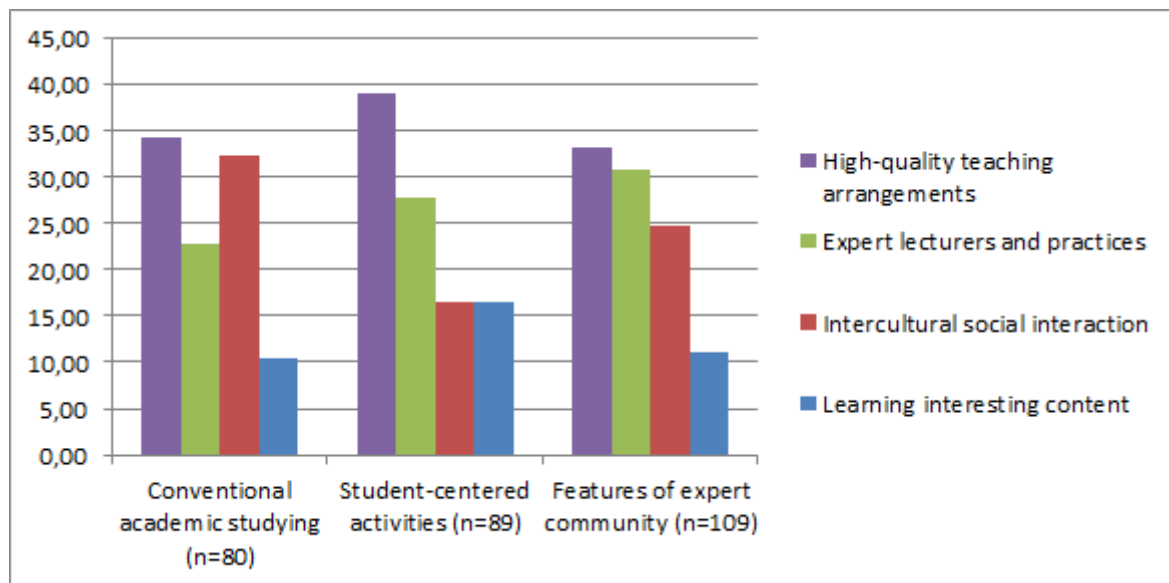


Figure 3. Positive and impressive aspects mentioned by students in the free-text feedback in different course types.

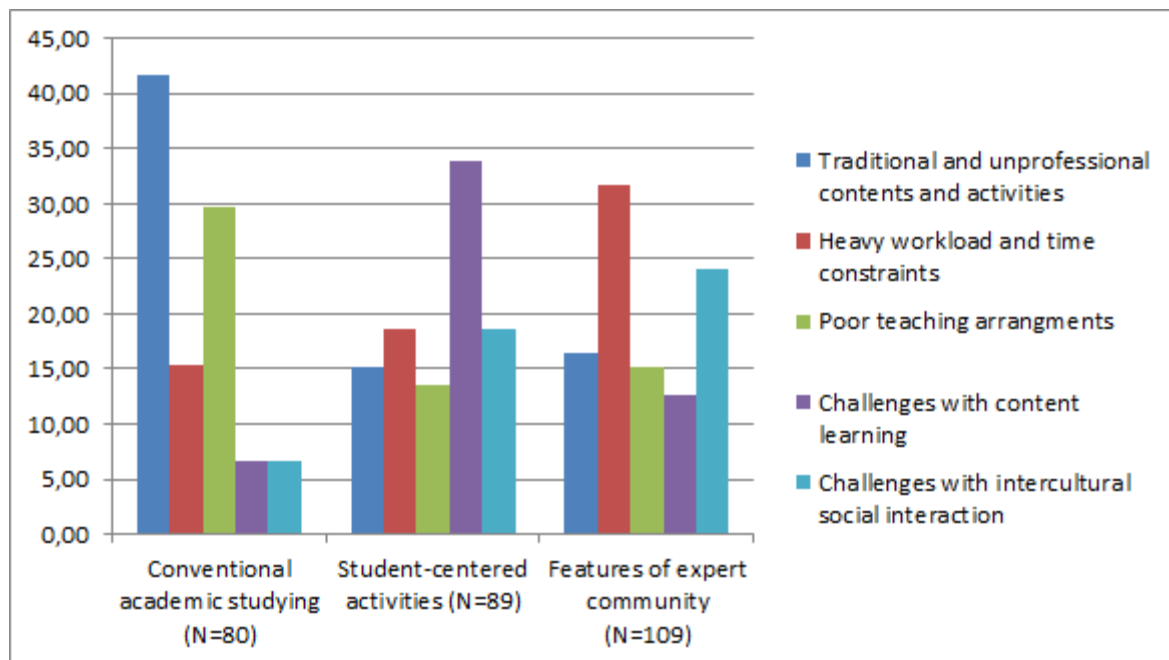


Figure 4. Negative and challenging aspects mentioned by students in the free-text feedback in different course types.

The results of the factors that students appreciated or complained about are in line with the analysis of the pedagogical approach of the courses.

## 4. Teachers' perspectives on their courses and Helsinki Summer School

In this chapter we have collected issues that the teachers' mentioned in the short interviews concerning the questions about how they would like to improve their courses and what kind of support they wish to get from the Helsinki Summer School organizers.

### Ideas and views of the teachers for improving their own course

The following list is based on 14 teacher interviews, which were conducted after an observed course session. In the interview, the teachers answered the question: "How would you like to develop the course?"

#### Connections to the regular curriculum of university

- The course should be integrated more tightly into regular university teaching, and it could feed the existing virtual course about the topic (1)
- Less content. It is now demanding for some students (but diminishing the content is not possible because this is also an obligatory university course) (1)

#### Course structures

- Considering and defining the target group better (2)
- The course have a bit tight schedule (1)
- More focussed content (1)
- Important to keep in mind the coherence of the course, because there are several lecturers and also study visits (1)
- More collaborative planning between the teachers. (1)
- Better design of the logic of the course and the order of the topics. (1)
- Ideas for developing the course if there were more resources available: bring students from more far away countries, rent a bus to go to excursions, tailored design the course taking into account the background of participants, invite more (international) lecturers, collaborate with some international organisations (3)

#### Pedagogical improvements

- Constantly collect new ideas and contacts for practical and concrete examples. (1)
- Experiment more with pedagogical methods (e.g. reverse classroom). (1)
- Have some social program (e.g. a joint dinner) as part of the course also to foster students' mutual interaction. (1)
- Pedagogical methods to better take into account the challenging heterogeneous target group. (1)
- Have some students' group work and discussions to enliven lectures. (1)
- Computers and Internet-connection will be added to course. (1)
- Improve the content. (1)

## Teachers' expectations to HSS

The following lists are based on 14 teacher interviews, which were conducted after an observed course session. In the interview, the teachers answered the question: "What kind of support do you wish to have from the Helsinki Summer School organizers?"

#### *Acknowledgements*

- Expressed thanks to Helsinki Summer School about general arrangements and services (7). In addition, one participant mentioned that HSS in general is brilliant and has established itself.
- The change of students' application process from previous years was an improvement (the applicants with somehow wrong motivation are screened out beforehand) (2)
- The financial support was good for improving the course (1)
- Thanks for the opening ceremony (1). There was, however, also some unawareness if teachers were expected to participate in it.

#### *Wishes and suggestions*

##### Better understanding about HSS

- Interested to know what HSS expects from the lecturers, e.g., in which events teachers are expected to participate, are teachers allowed to participate also in social events? (1)
- Does not know into which larger entity the teacher's own part and the course belong to - on the other hand, does not have time to participate in common issues. (1)

#### Practical and financial help

- Practical secretary-type help. (1)
- Financial support from the university (not from HSS). (1)
- Too much and too general information; suggests to have a separate newsletter only for the co-ordinators and teachers. (1)
- The portal could have better functionalities, although extranet was already improved. Now it serves mainly for sharing the materials. (1)
- More effort in advertising the course. (1)
- The student selection should be different: it should be possible to compare the applicants and not decide immediately “yes or no” (on this course, teachers choose the applicants); selection of students earlier, e.g., in May, because students have pre-assignments. (1)
- It should be easier to print all students’ applications at one time from the e-reports; the information concerning the application process should be in better format, now it is difficult to check, e.g., the background information of individual student. (1)

#### Pedagogical support

- Hints about what works, what are good practices, also socially. (1)
- Guidelines for (beginning) teachers about how to plan and organize the course (a lot of work to start from scratch; would be useful to know how others conduct the courses). 1
- Help in networking and finding synergies between disciplines. (1)

#### *No comments or no need for any more support*

- No comments (5)
- Support from Open university (logins, introduction to the use of the library etc.), therefore, no need for any other support from HSS. (1)

## 5. Recommendations

Based on the analysis results of pedagogical practices (lesson observations, post-lesson interviews and course materials as data) and teachers’ experiences (post-lesson interviews as data), we have made some recommendations for the Helsinki Summer School organizers.

#### University level

- There should be the same policy in all departments concerning the participation of teachers and researchers in HSS courses. Now the practices differ between faculties and departments (financial support, compulsory teaching etc.). It is worth noticing that several teachers mentioned these different kind of practices for organizing the courses.
- In some interviews the teacher raised a question about whether the university should have a clear vision of the role and the future development of Helsinki Summer School.
- The use of modern web-applications for sharing materials and for student collaboration could be one of the development focuses already for the next Summer School. The use of digital technology for developing pedagogical

practices could be one of the competitive factors. It is worth mentioning that during the observations we only seldom saw any deliberate and organized use of digital technology as part of the working methods, although several students had their own computers (laptops or tablet computers) with them.

- Teachers from more faculties should be encouraged to offer courses. Now course offering is somewhat limited because the courses concentrate on a few faculties.

#### Support for organising a course

- The role of the course co-ordinator is crucial; he or she should know well the contents of all lectures and other activities, and should take responsibility for making the course an integrated entity. This could be emphasized especially for new course organizers.
- The responsibilities for organizing the course should be clarified: e.g., what are the responsibilities of a course co-ordinator.
- For the co-ordinator and the lecturers, it should be emphasized that the group experience and the social interaction, even informal, should be thought and planned.

#### Pedagogical support and recommendations for teachers

- We suggest that HSS provides some common criteria, recommendations or guidelines for teachers about the implementation of courses (at least of the most important issues): how to organize and structure a course, and about pedagogical practices, social activities and assessment methods. The guidelines could focus, for instance, on the following issues: proper workload for students, relative amount of lecturing vs. student-centered activities, proper amount of f2f sessions, length of days, time allocated for social activities and free time, usage of digital technology, promotion of social interaction and community building by and engaging group assignment at the start of the course, and good assessment methods.
- Based on the interviews, it is obvious that teachers and lecturers cannot use extra time for developing the courses, e.g., training or consulting sessions might not attract participants, and some teachers live abroad. Perhaps descriptions about some example courses and good practices or research results about what kinds of courses have been successful could be useful. The material could be virtually available.
- Course lecturers and teachers could benefit from hints and ideas about how to motivate students for discussing and thinking during lectures. Similarly, also other pedagogical practices could be recommended, such as the use the expertise and multicultural background of the students to bring different perspectives into discussions and group work.
- For new lecturers as well as others willing to improve their course, some face-to-face consultation or training could be organized, mainly for sharing the pedagogical principles that Helsinki Summer School courses should emphasize (e.g., students' collaboration and active participation), and good examples about implementing them.

#### Practical organisational arrangements

- The premises reserved for courses should be considered from the pedagogical viewpoint. Classroom arrangements should encourage discussions and group work; traditional auditoriums and fixed furnishing do not do that. A suitable classroom arrangement is an easy way to promote discussions and interaction. In

some observed lessons, the tables and chairs were organized in U-shape which helped to activate the discussion, in other courses the tables and chairs were organized in groups.

- It should be considered, whether it is possible to offer a web-based platform (and support for using it) centrally to be used by teachers and students in the courses. The Extranet in its present form does not, e.g., provide students with possibilities to share material or co-author documents. If technology is not with students in the courses, it probably gives an impression of “old-fashioned” practices and pedagogues.
- The feedback survey for students could be improved. The present statements do not fully take into account some essential factors mentioned by students in the free-text answers (authentic expert contents and practices, international community and social interaction). The results of the present study could be used to develop new feedback statements.

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