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"It's Hard to Believe You Can't Improve"

Backgrounds and Understandings of a Strategy for the Development of Professional Teaching Skills. Case: University Teacher Training for Assistant Professors at Aalborg University, Denmark

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Presentation by
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**"It's Hard to Believe You Can't Improve"
Backgrounds and Understandings of a Strategy for the
Development of Professional Teaching Skills**

**Case: University Teacher Training for Assistant
Professors at Aalborg University, Denmark**

The article takes its basis in the terms and conditions of the development and organisation of the Danish pedagogical supplementary education at a university level. It will discuss current trends in society and educational policy as central conditions for universities and teachers. These are terms and conditions influencing the approach of numerous teachers to a pedagogical supplementary education. The article describes the University Teacher Training for Assistant Professors at Aalborg University as an example of one way of integrating the development and conditions faced by teachers in organising and structuring the University Pedagogy for Assistant Professors combined with more recent knowledge of teaching and learning theories.

The article outlines a range of issues impacting the day-to-day activities at the Danish universities. The article is normative and discussing and hence not directly critic in its approach to societal developing trends and their implications to conditions of teaching, even though many a good reason to blow a whistle could be mentioned. Its objective is to expose the complexity of the development and to offer proposals for handling the demands for a more professional approach in teaching via a course of qualification where the complex context is taken in consideration as a basic condition.

You'll have a hard time believing you cannot improve

"When I started the PUC course I had the feeling that the teachers couldn't teach me anything useful since I had already been a (good, if you ask me :-) teacher within the university for 7-8 years. Furthermore I was myself a student not too long ago - so how difficult could it be....One might even say I was a bit arrogant towards this course.

And I was right. They couldn't teach me anything!!

Why? Because (as I learned on the course) teachers cannot teach a student anything. They can only create a situation where the student has the possibility to learn IF he/she is capable and motivated. In other words, the only one who can teach me anything is me!

Therefore I would probably have ended up learning nothing new if it hadn't been for the study-group.

At first we were all a bit defensive in the group. But as time passed and we read some literature we all started to realize that our own teaching style could easily be improved. This led to vivid discussions on our past experiences, - why we did as we did and what we have learned. In other words we started REFLECTING. For me this was excellent. I became aware of why I was teaching the way I did, what was good about it and what could/should be improved. I think those of us in the group who put a "piece of our self" into the discussions all learned a great deal and are better teachers today (and know why!). Those who didn't might as well have stayed at home or done something else...

My conclusions and recommendations:

- 1) The course is good if you're motivated*
- 2) the study-group is excellent for discussions and reflections if and only if you are motivated and willing to open up and recognize pros and cons of your own teaching style*
- 3) for the first time you have all the knowledge, support (from literature, peers, supervisors) and time needed to prepare a lecture like you always dreamt about....*
- 4) try to capture one of your lectures on video and see all of it (2x45min). You'll then have a hard time believing you cannot improve “.*

The above statement was made by an associate professor of natural science who completed the university teacher training course a few years ago. He is now a supervisor for English-speaking assistant professors. His statement was made in connection with the launch of a new university teacher training course attended by e.g. assistant professors from Europe and Central America. The statement illustrates feelings of many assistant professors in the outset by having to attend a pedagogical postgraduate education at university level. *First*, why attend a course to learn how to teach, when you already consider yourself quite a seasoned teacher with both experience and a host of previous educational and teaching courses behind you? This attitude is characteristic of the approach to attending supplementary training expressed by many well-educated persons (Argyris, 1991). *Secondly*, if motivation is lacking, well, then the benefit will be questionable. To some people motivation will never turn up. In the case above the crucial factors causing that teacher to experience a gain from the course were theoretical studies and discussions in the study group, time and opportunity to work with teaching, and supervision and video recordings of his teaching. Thus the statement also illustrates the positive story. At the end of the article I will discuss both the contents and the pedagogical principles of the university teacher training course at Aalborg University, which aim to address some of the problematic conditions experienced by the assistant professors in relation to the university teacher training course. Also I will identify potentials in the course to motivate quite a number of assistant professors for the continued work with teaching and supervision once the university teacher training course has been completed.

The challenge in handling the university teacher training courses are multifarious. In the first place, at Danish universities teachers are above all appointed on their research merits. So they will primarily focus on qualifying within their respective fields of research. Secondly these are extremely well educated persons who have participated in a wide range of educational situations via their own educations. Some have already gained a wealth of experience from their own work as teachers when embarking on the university teacher training course. On top of this some are even quite skilled and experienced teachers already, – at least in the light of more traditional understandings of education and teaching, in particular from lecturing and teaching on courses. This means that from a purely technical point, some often perform OK in teaching while other have got used to putting up with the more or less frequent frustration of finding that their teaching does not always work as intended. Thirdly many experience their years as an assistant professor as a period

pressed with time, exactly because they need to qualify in so many fields within a period of 3 – 4 years in order to promote in the university system.

Over the last decades, however, we have seen society putting an increasing focus on eg. *learning effects* from the teaching at the universities. This focus is supported by national and international evaluations by eg. the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) and from the OECD. Some of the recommendations in the OECD evaluation of 2004 relate directly to teaching, that is, 1) Project oriented learning should be enhanced, 2) Newly appointed researchers and teachers should be educated to teach. 3) The universities should develop more engaging and motivating ways of teaching. 4) Universities should establish units in order to facilitate a high quality in teaching, introduce new teaching methods, and enhance new methods of teaching and the pedagogical skills of the teachers.

At Aalborg University we have worked with a dedicated strategy since 1994 for a pedagogical and didactic qualification of the teachers appointed with the university. One major initiative was establishing the Centre for University Teaching and Learning (PUC). One of the core fields being the University teacher training course. Since 1995 around 330 assistant professors have completed this course. Adding to this a large number of other university employees have been attending basic courses, workshops as well as developing and evaluation projects. This means that many of the teachers at the university possess a certain theoretic basis to define and organise educations based on a subject matter didactic and pedagogical understanding.

My approach to the subject of the article is derived from my job as a developer, teacher and organiser of courses at the Centre for University Teaching and Learning where the mission has been defined quite clearly as to render visible the educations and teaching at the university and to perform quality assurance and develop them further. This means that I must take an open point of view to current educational developing trends that may be of significance to the future conditions and functions of education, and in cooperation with colleagues I must choose adequate strategies and ways of implementation in order to meet these developing trends. The development we are currently experiencing in Denmark can in many ways be compared with developing trends for several years in other countries where several universities have years of experience in preparing strategies for developing and improving educations and teaching. England is one of the countries where you can get inspiration with extensive research and documentation available. However, we must to a certain extent adapt this experience to Danish values and understandings of education. Still, the way I see it, we can to a wide extent be inspired by experience made abroad in our handling of the current challenges faced by the Danish university educations and teaching.

The article predominantly intends to point out the complicated conditions and subsequently outline a strategy for the specific handling of the qualification of teachers in a complex reality exemplified by the university teacher training course. This course has been developed based on the existing national and international knowledge within the field of university pedagogy and is organised to allow for the complex day to day practice of assistant professors at the university and render them an awareness of these conditions as a basis for their teaching.

Defining a Professional Strategy for University Teaching

"A professional strategy for teaching should be regarded in the same light as a professional approach to law, medicine or engineering" (Ramsden, 2004, p. 11)

In this statement Ramsden compares the concept of working professionally as a legal

professional, doctor or engineer to that of working professionally with education and teaching in the sense that professional conduct builds on relevant theoretical knowledge in the field and a systematic development of subject and vocationally relevant skills.

Engeström, the Finnish researcher of education is close to sharing these considerations when characterising teaching as a “serious matter”.

“The quality of instruction cannot be raised by odd tricks or by technical means alone. What is needed is theoretical insight into learning and teaching”.
(Engeström 1994, p. 1)

According to Engeström an aware and professional strategy for teaching includes a theoretical knowledge and understanding of both teaching and learning practices.

However, according to some university employees, speaking of a professional strategy for teaching at the universities, is taking it too far. Their attitude can be nurtured by many causes. One such is that some university teachers share the assumption that having reached the level of university, students need no particular pedagogical support. Nevertheless experiences from abroad, as documented in eg. Bowden and Marton (1998), Biggs (2003), Cowan (1998), Ramsden (1999) and Hult (2001), prove that a professional strategy for qualifying the tasks related to education and teaching often has meant a potential improvement of teaching – and in turn an improvement of the learning result obtained by the students. This also applies to student groups characterised by vast social and cultural diversity. As previously mentioned another reason is that many university teachers find it hard to take out time to focus on teaching and developing teaching skills simply because they are facing so many other complex requirements.

However, a professional strategy for teaching here indicates that the teaching *practice* is placed in a knowledge based context, meaning that executives and teachers will be in the possession of theoretical knowledge of teaching and learning processes and the capability of making the required and relevant subject didactic decisions and choices for the specific teaching situation, based in a reflected theoretical knowledge.

According to Ramsden, one characteristic shared by professionals is that they possess a theoretic knowledge of relevance to their profession – representing a range of techniques, rules and methods, and an organised structure of thoughts and material. The professional will use these as an outset in making decisions concerning adequate procedures for practice, based in a variety of methodological options. This is the base of action to many academics in their professional lives. A wealth of teaching and learning practices are found within the field of teaching. The usage of each can be argued in aware subject didactic analyses, for example analyses of the objectives of teaching, the nature and relevance of the subject and the qualifications and resources of the students. To many professionals, however, there is often no significant awareness of relations between theory and practice. For teachers this goes for relations between theories of teaching and types of teaching practices. For example Schön (1987) refers to the concept of tacit knowledge, characterising an often too weak correlation between *theory* (knowing that) and *action* (*knowing how*). According to Schön, practitioners are capable of expressing their theory to a varying extent. Still, at the same time he argues that *knowing how* (practical action) will often not be derived from *knowing that* (theory). So the way professionals act in practice is difficult to derive immediately from theory. Consequently it may be convenient for professionals to acquire “tools” for analysing and reflecting on the correlations of theory and practice. Schön refers to the actual practical action as action theory. An increased awareness of the correlations of theory and practice can be obtained in qualificational courses designed with a major aim of both enabling teachers to acquire knowledge of teaching and learning to acquire an increased awareness of the implications of the theory

and practice correlation. For example didactic (the theory of teaching) offers a tool and a framework for the analysis of contextual and relational conditions in the theory and practice of teaching.

A *professional strategy for teaching* has in particular its reasons in the fact that in the future it will not be enough for teachers to excel in their fields of subject and research alone. The subjects are influenced by the developments of society and science. This spells renewal and readjustment, of which teaching is compelled to make students aware, if they are to meet the expectations and demands from society and jobs as newly graduated candidates from the universities. To make this happen teachers must keep themselves continuously updated within their field of subject and qualify in pedagogic to be capable of designing teaching and learning situations that will give students with various backgrounds and resources the opportunity to acquire the most updated knowledge and skills within a given field of education. All the while teachers must also be capable of managing the various tasks related to the "teaching", ie. development and planning of educations and teaching, the actual teaching of classes, supervision and evaluation, both individually and in collaboration with colleagues and students - and often across subjects and institutional borders.

The professional authority of a researcher at the university relies on a large amount of knowledge within one or several fields of research. In best cases the professional authority of the researcher as a teacher and supervisor relies on a *base of didactically reflected knowledge and experience*, meaning knowledge of and experience in the best way of teaching and conveying a subject to students and in turn make sure that they will acquire other relevant skills for the subject and the education. In other words being well founded in your subject and research is not enough. Also the skills of interpreting objectives of the education and teaching and using a didactic analysis to transform these into relevant and purposeful teaching of a given group of students, characterised by diversity and variety are required for future university teachers to handle the various tasks.

In discussing the professionalizing of 'the teaching job' we can get inspired for example by Dale the Norwegian researcher of education (1999) and by Stenhouse (1975). According to the two researchers, having a teacher's performance evaluated by others is not enough. The teacher also needs to study his/her own way of thinking and acting in relation to teaching. The two researchers link the professionalism of the teacher with a true commitment and proficiency in studying ones own teaching practice cf. Ramsden (2004). Stenhouse's approach to pedagogical professionalism is reflexivity ie. systematic and critical review of one's own actions related to tasks in teaching. Professionalism in tasks of teaching is the teacher acquiring structures and language (ie. concepts and theories) to describe, interpret, analyse and assess a given teaching plan (eg. a curriculum), teaching and the learning processes of students. Professionalism in the conduct of teaching is then developed by developing practical solutions concurrently with the teacher performing self-evaluations on a continuous basis. At the end of the article I will return to describing the attempts to embed these thoughts in the strategy for qualifying the teaching of assistant professors at Aalborg University. Before getting there, I will discuss some of the major political decisions that are already putting their mark on the conditions for eg. conducting teaching at the Danish universities.

Challenges to University Teaching in a Current Danish Context

The field of university pedagogics is wide and dynamic as it relates to practice in educational systems with tasks to meet a variety of interests from entities like research, the general societal education and the business community/labour market, and last, not least, by the students' needs for good education and teaching. The field is wide because the mission of the university is to educate candidates for both the research community and

society in general – and it is dynamic, because the educational system is in continuous need to revise and develop educational activities relating to the developing trends of society and the specific academic labour market. So educations are constantly exposed to various and changing demands and expectations from society and from the political system.

So in the field of university pedagogics we need to relate to education and teaching in interaction with a society and labour market in constant change. The students will need to develop academic, vocational and personal skills to act in a future society, the conditions of which we can only guess. (Bowden and Marton, 1998) word it as follows:

”The kind of learning we are interested in is learning which implies that the learners develop capabilities for seeing or experiencing situations or phenomena in certain ways.....Students can therefore be prepared for the unknown variation among situations in the future through experiencing variation in their education, which will enable them to discern critical aspects of novel situations” (Bowden og Marton, 1998, p. 24).

University pedagogics must be understood and explained from a specific period of history (Engestrøm, 1994), where general characteristics of society will mark the role and functions of the university. The globalisation process, which will of course also include the universities, will unquestionably be of crucial consequences to the handling of educations and teaching, cf. for example the statements from the Ministry of Science, Education and Innovation (2006), The Globalisation Council (2006) and the OECD (2004). These are statements that will be exposed to various encounters with points of view and attitudes among the university employed researchers/teachers concerning the role of the universities based on the structures and traditions that were prevailing in the university community for many years. Here reactions will assume a variety of expressions, - from dedicated resistance and rejection to the capability of spotting new potentials.

These developing trends are international in their nature. At a European level the future role of universities in society has been interpreted anew by a line of political decision-making processes in the late 90'ies. The Bologna Declaration of June 1999 signed by ministers of 40 European countries has thus made an important structural framework to the European collaboration on education. It commenced a process running until 2010, with goals like making European educational systems more transparent, giving high priority to quality assurance and procuring an increased mobility of students.

Two other European initiatives have been of significance to the universities. One is the Lisbon Convention (1998) on ”recognition of qualifications among the countries of the European Region”. The other initiative is the Barcelona-declaration, where the heads of states and governments of the European Union in 2002 agreed to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world. The Barcelona declaration emphasizes the role of the universities as institutions carrying the research (the Danish Conference of Rectors, 2004). It describes the increasing role assumed by the universities in the process of innovation, their contribution to an economic competitive edge and societal coherence, including their role in local communities and the life of the regions. In a follow-up message from the European Commission (2003) the universities are characterised as *”the heart of the Europe of knowledge”*. No doubt these political requirements and strategies will be of significance to the day-to-day activities of the university employees in its expectations to both the quantity and quality of teaching. In the light of this international political cross-field we must consider a strategy for the professionalizing of university teaching as well.

This tendency will continue for many years to come owing to an increasing number of

students and the need for continued and supplementary education in large parts of the population, cf. for example the strategy of lifelong learning, as expressed in the Bologna Declaration. Here neither the fields of research nor teaching must allow any trade-offs in quality,

”It is crucially important to maintain and strengthen the excellence of teaching and research, without compromising the level of quality offered, while still ensuring broad fair and democratic access” (Commission of the European Communities, 2003 p. 6)

It is beyond the scope of this article to make any proposals how to meet such expectations in full. Its aim is solely to outline the future context of the conditions faced by university teachers and to propose how young teachers can qualify to handle future challenges in the field of education.

Potentials for the Development of a Professional Strategy for Teaching at Aalborg University

The University teacher training course at Aalborg University was developed allowing for the particular context characterising this very university with its special pedagogical form, the problem based project work. Since the university was established in 1974, focus has in a way been set on teaching and learning aspects. This means that many teachers and supervisors at Aalborg University might have different qualifications for participating in teachers’ training compared to university employees at more traditional universities in Denmark. This is because the different types of teaching are being discussed all the time, and we decide whether the students should acquire specific knowledge using project work and when other types of teaching are called for. Thus the project work form is merely one of the ways we employ to organise teaching. At the university it must be considered a tremendous advantage to use that model as it offers the qualities emphasized in the international ‘peer learning’ strategy (Boud, 2001). Within the peer learning strategy we are also looking at organised ways of collaboration among students. The strength of the project work method is that it is *potentially* meeting the demands of vocational in-depth studies and the development of analytical and methodological qualifications and competences in students while offering an option for students to work with participant governed processes that can be either problem or subject based. The method of project work is positioning itself within the Problem Based Learning tradition (PBL). PBL is a principle indicating the use of many different ways of teaching, still with the common denominator that the active problem based and explorative approach of the students towards learning is the central driving factor. We can use learning activities that are more or less governed by the teacher, still the characteristic element of the project oriented working method at Aalborg University being that during the study, students are in a close dialogue with the supervisors of the university, which is obviously requiring special capabilities from the supervising teachers, enabling them to handle their role in the collaborative process throughout the course of project.

The working and learning process in the problem based method of teaching has a lot in common with the working and learning processes within certain types of work processes as performed in academic jobs with project management and developing work. Within the framework defined by the education, students are to a large extent putting in their efforts to define the tasks and problems they want to deal with, which in term motivates them in particular to work with their subjects. In this context the works of the student, in particular in the last years of study, can be compared to research within the principles of the so-called modus 2 research (Gibbons, 1994 and Wenneberg, 2000), where the main emphasis has

been put on for example knowledge *usage*. So there is a lot of resemblances in the learning processes experienced by the teachers and students. – and good opportunities to design teaching courses where learning and the benefit from the learning processes are in focus for both teachers and students, that is, an increase of the awareness and emphasis on the awareness of relations between knowledge of teaching, learning and practice.

Case: University teacher training course for Assistant Professors at Aalborg University

A central mission for the university teacher training course is for the participating assistant professors to understand both the various roles and demands they are facing as researchers and teachers at the university and their resources and potentials to solve these tasks in a professional way.

The formal basis for the university teacher training course in Denmark

"The institution must ensure that during the contracted employment term (the assistant professor) is given responsibility for teaching activities, and must provide teacher education supervision and advising to such an extent that a written evaluation of the qualifications can be provided upon completion of employment term."

(Circular on employment structure for higher education institutions under the Danish Ministry of Research and Technology, September 2000).

To do well in the career system of the Danish universities assistant professors must qualify within *both* research *and* teaching and supervision within a period of three – four years. This is why we have aimed to render a mindset and a structure to the university teacher training course that will enable the assistant professors in practice to combine the various requirements and conditions for their participation in the university teacher training course. The duration of the course is 14 months. It is flexible and linked to the individual teaching and supervising practice of each assistant professor.

So the Assistant professors' acquisition of knowledge of the teaching, learning and the qualifying process happens with a basis in their own vocational field of teaching and their previous experiences, which is in turn based on the specific field of subject didactics and teaching. The goal is for the participants to develop into *theoretically reflecting practitioners in teaching and supervision* who will gain experience in using differentiating methods of teaching and learning based on subject didactic analysis and reflection. This in turn will enable them to support students in their acquisition of relevant vocational and academic skills. We have defined the goals widely knowing that the a priori understandings and use of concepts in teaching and learning theory found in assistant professors is varying a lot. Consequently the participants will set out and complete the course at different levels. The general aim is for the individual participant to undergo a developing process to further develop and improve their teaching and supervisory skills at an aware vocational and reflecting level.

Objectives of the course

The objective of the course is to ensure that assistant professors achieves *further* knowledge of basic university pedagogy and education theory with focus on the ability to develop, plan, design, and analyse various types of educational programs and to apply theories and methods in ways that guide, support and stimulate the activities and the learning processes of the students.

From the course, the assistant professor should

- gain an insight into and an understanding of learning theories
- develop the ability to plan, carry out, and develop suitable teaching and learning activities, while applying the relevant learning theories
- learn to identify students' resources and to initiate learning processes among a variety of students, both individually and in groups
- become familiar with a variety of pedagogic tools and methods, including ICT supported teaching and learning, in order to apply the appropriate tools in relation to different target groups
- strengthen the insight into problem based project supervision and the role of the supervisor, in order to realize the potential of PBL in initiating and supporting the students' group processes
- gain knowledge and understanding of evaluation as a developmental and guiding tool in order to evaluate the teaching programmes, to assess the progress of the students, and consequently to be able to develop and improve teaching practises
- get experience in working systematically and analytically with the teaching portfolio and with self-evaluation
- be inspired to continuously working with development and improvement of teaching activities, with a view to different audiences, conditions and environments.

(The Course-programme, 2006)

In the 14 months duration of the course we aim to provide the participants with the opportunity to gain an increased awareness of the relation between *espoused theory* (theories of teaching and learning, which we know and can account for) and *knowing how* (practical action in teaching and supervision). This is inspired by the approach of Schön involving the reflective practitioner (Schön,1987). According to Schön practical action can often not be deducted immediately from theory. So the didactic system of concepts and the teaching portfolio methodology (Tenhula 1996, Seldin 1997, Dysthe, 1999 and Baume, 2002) are employed throughout the university teacher training course as tools in the support of analysis, reflection and documentation of relations between theory and practical action. The didactic set of concepts introduced to the assistant professors indicates a broad approach to didactics enabling us to analyse both contextual relations, eg. the current university policy, economics and organisation and other conditions brought about to influence the teaching and supervising situation, eg. goals (competencies/skills), the a priori qualifications of students and learning strategies as well as results of the teaching.

In organising the university teacher training course we aim to demonstrate that it is indeed feasible to design and complete an education in a complex context with a target group characterized by a vast diversity in vocational and cultural terms and where requirements to teaching are differing. Employing university pedagogical and didactic analysis we involve the changes that are continuously occurring when teaching is performed in practice.

Themes in focus are

- The field of university pedagogy
- The professional university teacher (expectations, roles and functions)
- Students' resources, learning and competence development
- Teaching and evaluation methods
- Problem based project work and supervision
- Supervision and reflection
- ICT supported teaching and learning
- Teaching portfolio (reflection and documentation)

(The Course-programme, 2006)

The assistant professors are from different main fields: natural science, engineering science, health science, humanities and social science (35 – 45 persons per year). So a general condition is the participants' vastly differing educational and subject history, practice experience, qualifications and traditions of dealing with university pedagogical problem complexes. Via their vocational and research backgrounds some assistant professors will be familiar with – or even possess a research based knowledge in the field of pedagogics and learning, while others may be more remote from having to deal with university pedagogical issues with an educational and learning theoretical approach. This is a fact that has been characteristic of the university teacher training course throughout the years and of course also the challenge in succeeding with the course. Then again, however, participants with differing backgrounds to the subject is a condition in the assistant professors' own teaching and supervision practice where cultural and social diversity among target groups is the rule of the day rather than the exception. It is our intention that the structure and pedagogy in the university teacher training course in an exemplary way offers the opportunity to work with development and enhancements at various levels and backgrounds.

Structure

The course spans 3 semesters and is composed of *four* modules. It comprises 7 ECTS-points with a workload of approximately 175 work hours for the assistant professors.

The pivotal point in the course is the insight that the assistant professor gets from his/her own teaching experiences while working through theories of teaching and learning. As a rule, this work allows for significant impact on reflection and subsequent qualification of the teaching and supervisor practice. Therefore, the interchange between theory and practice is the guiding principle throughout the course. The principle is supported by the structure and the teaching methods of the course.

(The Course-programme, 2006)

Module 1 - October, 2006 – January, 2007

Module 1 is predominantly a *theoretical module* consisting of a general introduction into university pedagogy, teaching and education theory. The assistant professor's contribution is estimated at 65 work hours, predominantly as self-study.

The intention of the module is twofold. On the basis of existing knowledge and experiences the assistant professors should

- acquire knowledge of elements which can inspire reflection of pedagogic and course didactic frames of references in relation to their personal teaching practices and.
- be able to formulate expectations, pedagogic problem proposals, and goals for their participation in the course

Participants are attending workshops and read theoretical texts with focus on their own teaching experience. The establishment of the teaching portfolio is commenced during module 1. A guide for the portfolio is presented at the initial seminar, and the issue is expanded on a workshop in December. Study groups are established.

Module 2 - February, 2007 – July, 2007

Module 2 is predominantly a *practical module*, which takes place in the assistant professor's own teaching professional environment. The assistant professor is assigned *two supervisors*, a supervisor by his/her own department and a pedagogic supervisor. During this module, the assistant professor goes through basic elements influencing his/her teaching, with guidance from the two supervisors. Their teaching and supervision are supervised. The assistant professor's contribution is estimated at 30 work hours.

They are offered participation in 4-5 workshops

Module 3 - August 2007 – September 2007

Module 3 is a *combined theory and practice module*, estimated at 50 work hours. Based on own teaching experiences and feedback from colleagues and supervisors, the assistant professor analyses the activities documented in the teaching portfolio. Module 4 is prepared during this module.

They participate in one big workshop where they work systematically with reflections on teaching and learning.

Module 4 - October, 2007 – January, 2008

Module 4 is the concluding *practical period*, following the same pattern as module 2, estimated at 30 work hours. They discuss their teaching and supervision with their two supervisors and the teaching and supervision are supervised. Further more they finish the work with the teaching portfolio.

Evaluation-statement from the supervisors are written in January 2008 and the assistant professors receive a course certificate

The pedagogic of the course

Common to all the assistant professors on the course is that they teach and supervise in educational environments where the problem based project work form is predominant. So they do share a certain practice background.

In organising the course the conditions of significance to assistant professors attending a

university teacher training course is also taken into consideration, ie. their different backgrounds, their experience of pressure, resistance and lack of time. So the assistant professors will meet a variety of teaching and organisational methods, including presentations, workshops, teaching portfolio methodology, selfstudy, study groups, supervision and a wide extent of managing and communication via the Internet and detailed written guidance (University teacher training course 2006-2008).

The organisation of the pedagogical course has found theoretical inspiration from the tradition of apprenticeship (Wenger, 1999), the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1987), from the theory of the zone of nearest or proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) and of expansive learning (Engeström, 1987). Further more the theoretical inspiration are in learning and supervisory experiences, which the three educational researchers Lycke, Lauvås and Handal (1996, 1997, 2001) have gained and documented in their research at the University of Oslo. Adding to this, inspiration was found in experience made abroad, Gibbs, (2002), Biggs, (2003), Cowan, (1998), Boud, (2001) and Ramsden (2004).

In the following I will discuss some of the elements in the university teacher training course.

Teaching Portfolio

As mentioned, focus throughout the university teacher training course is the assistant professor's basis in terms of knowledge and experience to work with theories *about* and *from* teaching and learning practice. In using the portfolio-methodology the assistant professors will work systematically throughout the course to describe their own qualifications and attitudes (philosophies) for teaching and for students as well as for their own understanding of teaching and learning. So the teaching portfolio works as a tool for the individual assistant professor for the systematic documentation and reflection of the efforts to become a more theoretically reflecting practitioner in teaching and project supervision. Based in previous experience and a priori understanding they will be including more recent and updated theories and practice experience in their reflections throughout the course. Theories of teaching and learning processes are included when the participant finds them relevant, and they can inspire to new approaches in understanding teaching and supervisory practice.

“A teaching portfolio is a collection of materials documenting your strengths and accomplishments as a teacher [...]” *“The portfolio is to teaching what lists of publications, grants and honors are to research and scholarship”* *As such a teaching portfolio is an important asset while you are on the job market. But more importantly, the teaching portfolio is an invaluable tool for on-going professional self-development”*.

(Peter Seldin in materials from Stanford University, Stanford CA, Center for Teaching and Learning)

Study Groups

A large part of the knowledge acquired by the assistant professors is facilitated by the shared reading of selected theoretical material in study groups and in discussions of the personal interests and goals of each assistant professor as formulated in their teaching portfolios and pedagogical plans of action. The theory studied makes up the background for reflections of practice and potentials in developing the teaching.

Supervision and guidance

Supervision and guidance of the assistant professors are elements of great significance. Each assistant professor is assigned 2 supervisors: one from the assistant professor's vocational environment and one representing the university pedagogical approach. Also to

a certain extent peer-to-peer supervision is performed in the practice modules among the assistant professors. This enables learning and development to happen in an actual teaching, supervision or project guidance practice and in interaction with supervisors and assistant professor colleagues (peer-learning).

Seminars and Workshops

During the course a range of seminars and workshops (about 10) are supplied with focus on central themes and concepts within the theory and practice of university pedagogy and with the general goal of inspiring and contributing further to the assistant professors' own effort to improve insight in their ways of teaching, guiding and supervision.

Evaluation and Conclusions

For the most recent courses the participants are expressing their finding that working with teaching portfolios, supervision and guidance and to a certain extent the study groups were the most profitable and satisfactory activities. The great challenge is one of getting workshops to match the different interests and needs of the assistant professors at the right point of time.

One basic prerequisite for the entire course are the possibilities and wish of each assistant professor to take his or her teaching and project guiding practice further in development. This will offer unique opportunities to deal with your greatest concerns in your teaching and guiding practice. And over the years, in appraisals and in their documentation in teaching portfolios, many assistant professors have indeed voiced their feeling of having gained knowledge and experience, from which they expect to benefit in their future practice. Some have even grown such an interest in the field that they have wanted to work more in depth with teaching issues. Others have found they gained less from the theoretic part of the course, and that their primary wish was to acquire more tools for the practical part of their teaching. In general experiences indicate that if the assistant professors are to find great benefit and satisfaction in the course, they will first of all need a certain extent of motivation and the ambition to work with their teaching, and secondly they must find support and help to focus on the teaching in their vocational environment. In the outset almost every participant has the wish to improve their opportunities to perform good teaching. Now and then, however, it can be hard to keep up the motivation and ambition if the time required for qualification is not allocated – and if the process of qualifying as a teacher has to contend too hard with the efforts of qualifying as a researcher. The challenge to us as providers of courses is the constant development of our courses based on the feedback we get, and reorganising it to both meet, challenge and support the wishes, requirements and opportunities of the assistant professors under varying conditions.

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About the author

Lone Krogh is associate professor and director of the inter-faculty Centre for University Teaching and Learning at Aalborg University, Dept. of Education, Learning and Philosophy.

Over the last 10 years she has devoted her time to activities aimed at the development of educations and the university teacher training course at Aalborg University and has done research in university pedagogy.

Selected international publications:

- A. Kolmos, F. Fink & L. Krogh (eds.) *The Aalborg PBL model. Progress – Diversity and Challenges*. Aalborg University Press 2004.
- L. Krogh and J. Gulddahl Rasmussen, 'Employability and problem-based learning in project-organized settings at universities' in: *The Aalborg PBL model. Progress – Diversity and Challenges*. Aalborg University Press 2004.
- L. Krogh & B. Lund, *Upper secondary school teachers undergo practical business training – why and how?* Paper on the Nordic conference in Island, Nordisk forening for pædagogisk forskning (NFPPF), March 2004
- L. Krogh and J. Gulddahl Rasmussen *The contemporary and future criteria for employability for Masters and the university respons. An analysis built on data from two Danish Universities*. (Paper for The Joint and EAIR seminar, June 2003 on Workforce Development and Higher Education.).

University Pedagogy for Assistant Professors 2006-2008

Centre for University Teaching and Learning – PUC – offers a course in University Pedagogy for Assistant Professors (*Adjunktpædagogikum*). The duration is October 2006 – January 2008, starting on October 26, 2006.

The course is conducted according to *Cirkulære om stillingsstruktur*, (*Circular on employment structure for scientific personnel with research and teaching assignments at Danish universities*), Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, which states that assistant professors should receive pedagogic supervision and guidance to an extent that allows for a written assessment of teaching abilities at the end of the employment period.

The course aims to integrate theory and practise within the fields of university pedagogy, didactics and learning theory in order to enable assistant professors to assess and improve their teaching and counselling competencies so that teaching at Aalborg University is kept at a high level, pedagogically as well as professionally.

The primary language of the course is Danish. Participants, whose mother tongue is not Danish, will be offered an introduction in English. Workshops will be in Danish or English. Part of the required reading will be in English.

Objectives

The objective of the course is to ensure that assistant professors achieves further knowledge of basic university pedagogy and education theory with focus the ability to develop, plan, design, and analyse various types of educational programs and to apply theories and methods in ways that guide, support and stimulate the activities and the learning processes of the students.

From the course, the assistant professor should

- gain an insight into and an understanding of learning theories
- develop the ability to plan, carry out, and develop suitable teaching and learning activities, while applying the relevant learning theories
- learn to identify students' resources and to initiate learning processes among a variety of students, both individually and in groups
- become familiar with a variety of pedagogic tools and methods, including ICT supported teaching and learning, in order to apply the appropriate tools in relation to different target groups
- strengthen the insight into problem based project supervision and the role of the supervisor, in order to realize the potential of PBL in initiating and supporting the students' group processes
- gain knowledge and understanding of evaluation as a developmental and guiding tool, in order to evaluate the teaching programmes, to assess the progress of the students, and consequently to be able to develop and improve teaching practises
- get experience in working systematically and analytically with the teaching portfolio and with self-evaluation
- be inspired to continuously working with development and improvement of teaching activities, with a view to different audiences, conditions and environments.

Themes in focus are

- The field of university pedagogy

- The professional university teacher
- Students' resources, learning and competence development
- Teaching and evaluation methods
- Problem based project work and supervision
- Supervision and reflection
- ICT supported teaching and learning

Contents and Teaching Methods

The course spans 3 semesters and is composed of four modules. It comprises 7 ECTS-points with a workload of approximately 175 work hours.

The pivotal point in the course is the insight that the assistant professor gets from his/her own teaching experiences while working through theories of teaching and learning. As a rule, this work allows for significant impact on reflection and subsequent qualification of the teaching and supervisor practice. Therefore, the interchange between theory and practice is the guiding principle throughout the course. The principle is supported by the structure of the course.

Teaching Portfolio

The cohesive factor in the development of individual teaching and supervising competencies is the participant's work with a teaching portfolio that documents activities, developments and reflections on teaching and learning theories and practice.

Supervision

Each participant will have two supervisors: One is appointed by PUC, for the entire period, the other is appointed by the department by the beginning of Module 2. The supervisors will be responsible for the written statement at the conclusion of the course.

Other Activities

Other forms of organising teaching activities, such as class-room lectures, workshops, self-study, study groups, peer supervision, etc. will be introduced, in theory as well as practice. The participants are expected as a minimum to attend half of the workshops offered during the course .

The Four Modules

Module 1 - October, 2006 – January, 2007

Module 1 is predominantly a theoretical module consisting of a general introduction into university pedagogy, teaching and education theory. The assistant professor's contribution is estimated at 65 work hours, predominantly as self-study.

Participant read theoretical texts with focus on their own teaching experience. The establishment of the teaching portfolio is commenced during module 1. A guide for the portfolio will be presented at the initial seminar, and the issue will be expanded on a workshop in December.

Module 2 - February, 2007 – July, 2007

Module 2 is a practical module which takes place in the assistant professor's own professional environment. The assistant professor is assigned a supervisor by his/her own department. During this module, the assistant professor goes through basic elements influencing his/her teaching, with guidance from the supervisor. The assistant professor's contribution is estimated at 30 work hours.

Central elements of influence on teaching and supervision within each assistant professor's field is in focus, such as

- Didactic analysis and planning of teaching
- Teacher professionalism
- The role of teachers in different teaching forms
- Learning processes of students
- Conducting and evaluating education programmes
- The use of pedagogic tools in education, including ICT

Workshops on the following topics will be arranged:

- Planning, conducting and evaluation education
- Teaching, evaluations and exams
- Communication and feedback in education
- Students resources and learning processes
- ICT based teaching

Module 3 - August 2007 – September 2007

Module 3 is a combined theory and practice module, estimated at 50 work hours. Based on own teaching experiences and feedback from collages and supervisors, the assistant professor analyses the activities documented in the teaching portfolio. Module 4 is prepared during this module.

There will be a workshop on Learning theory and reflection as foundation for development of teaching

Module 4 - October, 2007 – January, 2008

Module 4 is the concluding practical period, following the same pattern as module 2, estimated at 30 work hours.

The following elements are in focus and workshop will be offered accordingly,

- Project work and supervision
- Group processes and project exams
- Evaluation of students and of teaching activities
- Self-evaluation and evaluation of the course

Practical Information

Course director	Lone Krogh, PUC, together with Danish and international experts.
Duration	175 work hours ~ 7 ECTS point. October 2006-January 2008
Certificate	A diploma will be issued together with a written pedagogical statement at the conclusion of the course
Fee	kr. 14.000 (to be paid by the Department or the Faculty – please refer to your Department)
Registration	By 22 September 2006 on www.puc.aau.dk
Further inquiries	Ulla Burskov, secretary Centre for University Teaching and Learning Phone 9635 9095 - e-mail: ub@learning.aau.dk

