11th European Quality Assurance Forum

17–19 November 2016

Quality in context – embedding improvement

Paper proposal form

Deadline 25 July 2016

Please note that all fields are obligatory. For a detailed description of the submission requirements and Frequently Asked Questions please consult the Call for Contributions.

Author(s)

Name: Gudrun Salmhofer (presenting)

Position: Head of the Department for Educational and Student Services

Organisation: University of Graz, Department for Educational and Student Services

Country: Austria

E-mail address: gudrun.salmhofer@uni-graz.at

Short bio (150 words max): Dr. Gudrun Salmhofer has been working at Austrian and international universities since 1996. She studied German Philology and Art History at the University of Graz. For several years she worked as a university teacher in the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine. From 2001 to 2004 she was head of the "Department for Affirmative Action for Women" at the Johannes Kepler University in Linz. Since 2005 she is head of the "Department of Educational and Student Services" at the University of Graz and since 2010 she is also vice-director of the "Center of Teaching Competences". From 2011 until 2013 she was nominated by Universities Austria as National Bologna Expert for the European Commission.

Name: Lisa Scheer (presenting)

Position: Employee of the Department for Educational and Student Services

Organisation: University of Graz, Department for Educational and Student Services

Country: Austria

E-mail address: lisa.scheer@uni-graz.at

Short bio (150 words max): Dr. Lisa Scheer is currently concerned with questions of quality assurance and development in teaching at the University of Graz, working at the "Department of Educational and Student Services". In 2012 she received a doctoral degree in sociology at the University of Graz after conducting research in the thematic intersection of sociology of gender, sports, and the body. She teaches at various Austrian universities on research methods/methodology, gender & media, technology, and bodies, (queer) STS and Doing Gender.

After the Forum, the full text of all papers presented at the Forum will be published on the Forum website. If you do not wish your paper to be published, please indicate so here. This has no consequences on the selection of the papers.

Proposal

Title: Development of teaching quality and teaching competences through a teaching portfolio – findings from a pilot project at the University of Graz

Abstract (150 words max): In 2015, a teaching portfolio pilot project was conducted at the University of Graz. This paper aims at sharing insights and lessons learned from that project and also points at encountered challenges. Even though parameters may vary strongly at European HEIs, it is possible to draw general conclusions from this case study to be used as the basis of a thorough discussion. Through the reflection of the experiences of this quality assurance practice the authors try to indicate the usefulness of teaching portfolios as an instrument to support the development of academics and to contribute to the quality development at European HEIs.

The paper is based on: practice

Has this paper previously been published/presented elsewhere? If yes, give details.

Parts of this paper have been submitted and accepted by the Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung (Journal for Higher Education Development) for issue 11/5 on "Development and Socialization of Academics" (to be published in late 2016), submitted by Lisa Scheer, Gudrun Salmhofer and Eva Seidl under the title "Initiating academic development - insights from a teaching portfolio pilot project at the University of Graz".

Text of paper (3000 words max):

This paper sets out to present insights and lessons learned from a teaching portfolio project conducted at the University of Graz in 2015. Facilitating reflections on teaching concepts and habits in the classroom is one main objective of a teaching portfolio. In line with this intention, reflections deliberately make up an important part of this contribution. The contemplations and evaluation findings are contextualized by a broader discussion of higher education development in Europe, political and strategic thoughts on the teaching portfolio, and teaching development measures at the University of Graz. The aim of the paper is to highlight what needs to be considered and anticipated, and which obstacles need to be overcome on the way to implementing teaching portfolios. How workshop participation and teaching portfolio writing support the development of academic identity and teaching as it is discussed in the literature (e. g. MacLaren, 2005; Szczyrba, 2009; Szczyrba & van Treeck, 2015; Tigelaar et al., 2006; Trautwein & Merkt, 2012) will also be elaborated.

Recent changes of teaching and learning in Europe

"Changing landscapes in teaching and learning" was the title of the 2014 annual conference of the European University Association (EUA). It focused on ongoing processes of change in higher education as well as on recent innovative teaching approaches and considerations of future implications on learning and teaching processes. Also, in 2014 the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) took up the topic in the conference "Changing education – QA and the shift from teaching to learning" addressing student-centered learning (SCL), the diversified student population and new teaching methodologies. These conferences, among many others, made the changes concerning university teaching comprehensible and facilitated discussions on ways of dealing with them. The Trends Report (Sursock, 2015), a survey with 451 participating HEIs from 46 countries, made these proclaimed changes in the European HE landscape and related institutional strategies visible. The survey results indicate that teaching in general is

commonly seen as responsibility of academic staff who is in charge of developing curricula, working with students, etc. Hence strategic staff recruitment became an important priority for institutions alongside evaluation of academic staff and development of teaching skills. In comparison with the Trends Report from 2010, Andrée Sursock (2015, 82-83) noticed a strong progression towards an introduction of new ways of teaching.

Recent developments in HE systems all over Europe are embedded within a wider context of changes regarding organizational structures as well as personnel structures or new approaches of decision making and quality management (e.g. Schneider et al., 2009). Expectations for individual academics to react to changes regarding teaching and learning – within the context of massification of education – are high. There is a strong demand for accomplishing the *shift from teaching to learning* including competence-oriented teaching and learning, innovative methodologies, and appropriate quality assessments. Especially novice academics perceive the growing demands as a huge challenge and are occasionally confronted with conflicting goals (Esdar et al., 2011). Careers are based on high quality research output that comes along with requirements in teaching, administrative work and – in times of financial cuts – third-party funding. Besides, further obligations to apply university strategies such as internationalization, transfer of technology, etc. put pressure on teachers. To meet all these expectations and to handle current diversification among the student body, regarding changing ways of communication, learning, and working (Schulmeister et al., 2012), varying competence levels (Heublein et al., 2010) or motivation (Unger et al., 2009), are not only duties of the academic teachers. It is also very much the responsibility of organizations to provide a productive environment and to support the ambitious efforts of its staff.

One possibility for a HEI to support its teaching staff is to provide didactical workshops such as the teaching portfolio workshop. Writing a teaching portfolio enables teachers to reflect not only on their teaching values, beliefs and practices, on disciplinary and institutional (teaching) cultures, and to develop new approaches for the classroom (e.g. Futter, 2012; Trautwein & Merkt, 2012; Szczyrba, 2009), but also to the above described changes on a national and international level. The process of reflecting and writing „provides teachers with more insight into, and confidence in, their own decisions, making them more resilient when it comes to weathering the storms of change that assault higher education (Trevitt u. Stocks 2012, S. 249).

The pilot project framework: teaching (support) at the University of Graz

The University of Graz is one of the HEIs that responded to the Trends questionnaire. Its mission statement proclaims that teaching has the same relevance as research and that one focus lies on research-based but also on innovative and interdisciplinary teaching. According to the mission statement, the approx. 31.000 students are seen as responsible for their own learning processes. At the same time the university supports their active participation in the development of teaching (https://www.uni-graz.at/en/university/information/about-the-university/mission-statement/).

Since the mid-2000s, several projects have been developed to improve academic teaching, including the 'Teaching Portfolio'. There are numerous reasons why the University of Graz is setting up such projects. Among others, there is a strong political will by the rectorate to provide quality teaching, to systematically support the development of academic teachers, and to find appropriate or new approaches to do so because the international reputation of HEIs depends to a certain extent on the quality of their study programs.

Concerning the aspect of quality assurance, instruments have been put in place to allow course feedback and enhancement, e.g. a competence-oriented course evaluation (Paechter et al., 2007). Nevertheless, in the past years a certain insufficiency was articulated by students and teachers regarding the course evaluation's practicability. This perspective was supported by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) which audited the University of Graz in 2013. To further facilitate the development of teaching quality, FINHEEC (2013) recommended that "the students' perception of the quality of teaching [...] ought to be supplemented by other information sources and perspectives, for instance more systematic responses and analyses by the teaching staff" (42). The suggestion to provide "more regular »spots« for discussion and analysis" to establish a system that is "more oriented towards enhancement" (73) can be effectuated manifold. The teaching portfolio was selected because of positive experiences at various HEIs. Further, it adds another perspective on teaching and learning to the current system at the University of Graz. A teaching portfolio represents one of three possible views on teaching – next to students' and external views (e.g. through peer observation).

Outline of the pilot project "Teaching Portfolio" at the University of Graz

The pilot project "Teaching Portfolio" consisted of two two-day workshops held in 2015 by didactics expert Birgit Szczyrba from the TH Köln – University of Applied Sciences, one concentrating on the elements/chapters of a teaching portfolio, the second introducing the scholarship of teaching and learning (Szczyrba & van Treek, 2015). Participation was open to the entire academic staff of the university. Fortunately, academics from all six faculties (Catholic Theology, Law, Business, Economics and Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Natural Sciences, Environmental, Regional and Educational Sciences) and of all possible employment statuses (from doctoral candidates to professors) attended. In total, there were 13 participants and around the same number of interested individuals who were not able to attend. The process of reading and evaluating teaching portfolios was simulated by inviting a member of each of the six faculties to read available portfolios. Four of these six volunteers were interviewed after reading two portfolios. The findings gained through the evaluation which consisted of written and oral interviews as well as non-participant observation revolve around the following questions: What interests and motivations led lecturers to write a teaching portfolio? What did participants experience during the workshop and writing process? How can the teaching portfolio be implemented by a university and what parameters have to be considered?

Selected findings and lessons learned

On the following pages selected findings, reflections, and thoughts on introducing and implementing teaching portfolios as a measure to develop teaching quality at a HEI are presented. Due to varying general conditions at European HEIs, one may find some findings to be valid for the own HEI, others not so. Our understanding is that suggestions based on insights from a pilot project can never be applicable to every HEI, but instead they offer a good basis for further discussions on the topic as well as they represent basic deliberations for similar projects.

Participants' interests and motivation vs. portfolio functions

Despite the fact that most participants did not know anything about the teaching portfolio before receiving the workshop invitation, their interests and motives to write one stand in line with the goals that it is accredited with: presentation, reflection, and development.

Participants expect to use the teaching portfolio in future applications, even though their main interests lie in documenting and making visible teaching accomplishments as well as reflecting on and furthermore improving teaching methods and practices. The use of a teaching portfolio to publicly present not only teaching accomplishments, but also (self) reflection and personal development goals in the area of teaching is indeed criticized for being a neoliberal technology of self (Häcker, 2011). It is problematic when the teaching portfolio only stands for continuous, purposeful, and permanent work on the self because subsequently then control is translocated inwardly and becomes voluntary self-control (Häcker, 2011, 173). This function of representation – when it leads to the constraint to illustrate and prove – is somewhat contrary to the teaching portfolio's functions to stimulate reflection and inspire development.

Suggestion 1: Reflecting on motives and the portfolio's functions is central

Teachers at HEIs have various motives to write a teaching portfolio. These motives are not independent of a disciplinary culture or a HEI's quality culture. Therefore, a personal reflection on the motives followed by a group exchange and a comparison with the inherent functions of a portfolio mark an important workshop starting point. As is the case with every QA instrument such as student course evaluation or peer observation, the structure around the instrument – how and by whom is it used for what purpose on the basis of which political decisions – is an important topic for discussion because it influences the writing process. In the case of a pilot project introducing an instrument to voluntary participants this might be less important because there might not be a framework yet. In that case the setting could also be used though to develop this framework including the participants' input and ideas.

Suggestion 2: Professional workshop coaches raise motivation

During the first workshop, the teachers realized the potential of the teaching portfolio to even up the value imbalance between teaching and research. Reflecting on the teaching job and its high demands gave the participants a feeling of empowerment, pride and motivation – also in respect to representing their teaching commitment. Hence, initial extrinsic motives to participate were soon complemented by intrinsic ones. This, of course, can only be achieved by professional workshop coaches who are enthusiastic about the topic and know how to stimulate participants.

Group composition

A teaching portfolio may prove helpful for new and experienced lecturers alike (examples in Szczyrba & Gotzen, 2012). New teachers may use the portfolio to support the start, more experienced ones to reflect their teaching habits. Therefore, the pilot project set out to offer a teaching portfolio introduction to anyone interested, regardless of discipline and position.

Suggestion 3: Heterogeneous workshop groups (discipline, position)

Interdisciplinarity in terms of the group composition was a positive side effect of the goal to get the broadest possible feedback by creating a diverse participant group. During the workshops, it soon became apparent that the participants profited strongly from the experiences and accounts of academics from other faculties and employment statuses. To be confronted with a different academic culture, different methods, expectations, teaching settings as well as different perspectives and levels of experience helps to reflect the working environment at the own faculty/department and its effect on the own (hierarchical) position. Thereby, it provides an opportunity to reflect on one's academic

identity by comparing it with the dominant habitus and characteristics of the disciplinary culture. It makes visible the many factors that have an impact on teaching, some of which teachers cannot control. Also, this process helps in finding the right style of writing – the style that is accepted in one's discipline.

Suggestion 4: Trained evaluators with disciplinary relatedness

Another important result with respect to interdisciplinarity was gained concerning the process of reading portfolios. The fictive evaluators came to an understanding that it is not a problem for someone from another faculty to assess (1) the common theme and structure, especially the relationship between teaching philosophy and teaching methods, and (2) the relationship between text and references (e. g. syllabus, evaluation results). However, for a deeper evaluation, knowledge about the academic culture, the discipline, contexts, and the general framework of teaching at the department is required. "Teaching portfolios are a piece of discipline culture", one evaluator said. This needs to be considered when setting up teaching portfolios as an instrument to assess teaching quality/development among teaching staff.

Sparking and the flame and keeping the fire alive

The six weeks in between the two workshops where meant for writing (parts of) the teaching portfolio chapters to which all participants were introduced in the first workshop. When the participating teachers left the first workshop they were all very inspired and thus very motivated to start respectively continue writing. But back in the office the everyday work chores came in their way and left them only few possibilities. Additionally, the writing process turned out to be more demanding and challenging than expected.

Suggestion 5: Offering support for the writing process

Workshop participants need opportunities to contact the workshop facilitator and/or their colleagues with questions or problems. Regular contact and exchange also motivates the participants to continue the writing process – this could, for example, be achieved through an online platform, informal meetings or a jour fixe.

Suggestion 6: Supportive and motivating communication

In addition, respectful and motivating communication throughout the project, organizational support, and an appreciative setting are always important for conducting a successful project in the area of quality assurance and development in teaching. If lecturers are asked to foster teaching quality in their free time without any reward – as was the case in the pilot project –, then the same interest and attitude should be expected from staff supporting those teachers and offering didactics workshops.

Résumé: potentials and obstacles

"The commitment and time invested in this pilot project was really worth it. I feel a much more developed sense of professional self, academic identity and perception of self-agency. The many opportunities for reflection brought to mind my resources and competences and made me take up reflections more often in class, encouraging students to reflect on their learning goals, styles, and outcomes." (One participant's perspective)

In literature, the teaching portfolio is defined as an instrument that supports the representation, reflection, and development of academics as teachers at any stage of their career. It positively impacts professional growth through the reflection of daily habits and teaching concepts. The experiences from the pilot project stand in line with

these previous findings. One should not be too optimistic though – it is still scientific activities (publications and presentations) and third-party funded projects that establish the reputation of an academic. The teaching portfolio could easily be confronted with opposition from teachers who fear just another obligation as well as from portfolio-critical decision makers. To write a teaching portfolio and to keep it updated unquestionably demands a certain amount of time and energy. Therefore, all concerned parties and stakeholders need to be informed about the portfolio's capacity for its successful implementation. Additionally, a strong and transparent communication concept is needed, also drawing on positive experiences of those who have been writing a portfolio.

In regard of recent changes, e.g. the composition of the student body or university funding dependent on graduation rates, it should be a priority to examine and reflect everyday teaching practices and analyse teaching methods with the guidance of didactics experts. Instruments such as the teaching portfolio are a key for a future-oriented change of teaching culture and represent an opportunity to launch developments from the individual up to the institutional level.

References:

Esdar, W., Gorges, J., Kloke, K., Krücken, G., & Wild, E. (2011). Lehre unter den Forschungshut bringen… – Empirische Befunde zu multipler Zielverfolgung und Zielkonflikten aus Sicht von Hochschulleitungen und Nachwuchswissenschaftler(inne)n. In S. Nickel (Ed.), Der Bologna-Prozess aus Sicht der Hochschulforschung. Analysen und Impulse für die Praxis (pp. 192-204). CHE Arbeitspapier 148.

FINHEEC (2013). Audit of the University of Graz 2013. Retrieved March 10, 2016, from http://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2014/09/KKA_0613.pdf.

Futter, K. (2012). Reflexion im Leistungsnachweis Lehrportfolio: Eine Herausforderung mit Potential. In B. Szczyrba & S. Gotzen (Eds.), Das Lehrportfolio – Entwicklung, Dokumentation und Nachweis von Lehrkompetenz an Hochschulen (pp. 167–184). Berlin: LIT.

Häcker, T. (2011): Portfolio revisited – über Grenzen und Möglichkeiten eines viel versprechenden Konzepts. In: Mayer, T., Mayrberger, K., Münte-Goussar, S. u. Schwalbe, C. (Hrsg.): Kontrolle und Selbstkontrolle: Zur Ambivalenz von E-Portfolios in Bildungsprozessen. Wiesbaden, S. 161–183.

Heublein, U., Hutzsch, C., Schreiber, J., Sommer, D., & Besuch, G. (2010). Ursachen des Studienabbruchs in Bachelor- und in herkömmlichen Studiengängen. HIS: Forum Hochschule. Retrieved March 10, 2016, from www.his-hf.de/pdf/pub_fh/fh-201002.pdf.

MacLaren, I. (2005). New trends in academic staff development: reflective journals, teaching portfolios, accreditation and professional development. In G. O'Neill, S. Moore, B. McMullin (Eds.), Emerging issues in the practice of university learning and teaching (pp. 111-117). Dublin: AISHE.

Paechter, M., Maier, B., Dorfer, A., Salmhofer, G., & Sindler, A. (2007): Kompetenzen als Qualitätskriterien für universitäre Lehre: Das Grazer Evaluationsmodell des Kompetenzerwerbs (GEKo). In: A. Kluge & K. Schüler (Eds.), Qualitätssicherung und -entwicklung an Hochschulen: Methoden und Ergebnisse (p. 83-94). Lengerich: Pabst Science Publishers.

Schneider, R., Szczyrba, B., Welbers, U., & Wildt, J. (Eds.) (2009). Wandel der Lehr- und Lernkulturen. Bielefeld: Bertelsmann (= dghd. 120).

Schulmeister, R., Metzger, C., & Martens, T. (2012). Heterogenität und Studien-erfolg. Lehrmethoden für Lerner mit unterschiedlichem Lernverhalten. Paderborner Universitätsreden 2012/123. Retrieved December 1, 2015, from http://rolf.schulmeister.com/pdfs/zeitlast_pur.pdf.

Sursock, A. (2015). Trends 2015. Learning and Teaching in European Universities. Brussels: EUA.

Szczyrba, B. (2009). ‚Das Auge kann sich selbst nicht sehen.' – Selbstevaluation mit dem Lehrportfolio'. In A. von Richthofen & M. Lent (Eds.), Qualitätsentwicklung in Studium und Lehre (pp. 158-169). Bielefeld: Bertelsmann.

Szczyrba, B., & Gotzen, S. (Eds.) (2012). Das Lehrportfolio – Entwicklung, Doku-mentation und Nachweis von Lehrkompetenz an Hochschulen. Berlin: LIT.

Szczyrba, B., & van Treeck, T. (2015). Von der Theorieferne zur wissenschaftlichen Befassung mit der eigenen Lehrpraxis – mit Lehrportfolios und Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. In E. Augustin, M. Hohenwarter, G. Salmhofer, & L. Scheer (Eds.), Theorie, die ankommt. Wege der Theorievermittlung in der Hoch-schullehre (pp. 91-101). Graz: Leykam.

Tigelaar, D., Dolmans, D., De Grave, W., Wolfhagen, I., & Van der Vleuten, C. (2006). Portfolio as a tool to stimulate teachers' reflections. Medical Teacher 28/3, 277-282.

Trautwein, C., & Merkt, M. (2012). Zur Lehre befähigt? Akademische Lehrkompetenz darstellen und einschätzen. In R. Egger & M. Merkt (Eds.), Lernwelt Universität. Entwicklung von Lehrkompetenz in der Hochschullehre (pp. 83-100). Wiesbaden: Springer.

Trevitt, C. u. Stocks, C. (2012): Signifying authenticity in academic practice: a framework for better understanding and harnessing portfolio assessment. In: Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 37/2, S. 245–257.

Unger, M., Wroblewski, A., Latcheva, R., Zaussinger, S., Hofmann, J. u. Musik, J. (2009): Frühe Studienabbrüche an Universitäten in Österreich. In: IHS/equi, http://www.equi.at/dateien/Frueher_Studienabbruch_an_Un.pdf [21.12.2015].

Discussion questions:

What are your experiences with teaching portfolios in terms of possible use (which groups of teachers, voluntary vs. obligatory, etc.) and communication strategy?

In your opinion or experience, what would be/are/were obstacles at your HEI on the way to implement teaching portfolios and how would you/did you face these obstacles?

Please submit your proposal by sending this form, in Word format, by 25 July 2016 to QAForum@eua.be. The file should be named using the last names of the authors, e.g. Smith_Jones.doc. Please do not send a hard copy or a PDF file.