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Quality Work in Higher Education

Organisational and Pedagogical Dimensions

Springer

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Volume 54

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Foreword

The researchers who contributed to this book have been part of a large project called "Quality of Norwegian Higher Education: Pathways, Practices and Performances." The project was funded by the Research Council of Norway (grant number 237960), and it was carried out in 2014–2018. The editorial team includes leaders for the two main empirical work packages in the project. Peter Maassen and Agnete Vabø lead the sub-project examining the organizational dimensions of quality work, while Monika Nerland and Tine S. Prøitz lead the work on the pedagogical dimensions of quality work. They have been involved in planning the contributions from the work packages to this book. Mari Elken acted as the overall project leader during the completion of the project and has together with Bjørn Stensaker been involved in writing the introductory and concluding chapters for this book. All of the editors have been involved in the two internal review processes of the chapters in this book.

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Contents

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Chapter 1
Researching 'Quality Work' in Higher Education

Mari Elken and Bjørn Stensaker

Introduction

Given the multifaceted operationalisation of quality as a means to discuss effectiveness, efficiency, excellence, or relevance, in many ways, quality enhancement can become a catch-all phrase for a range of discussions in modern higher education systems. While it is difficult to refute the necessity to enhance quality, the multifaceted definition entails that discussions of quality in higher education can refer to virtually anything.

In this book, the focus is narrowed by switching from a broader macro-level analysis of international and national quality assurance and quality enhancement systems to researching *quality work*. The book examines specific practices within institutions that address quality, as well as the institutional embeddedness of such practices. By emphasising quality *work*, the multifaceted character of the quality concept is reflected, acknowledging that working to improve quality incorporates academics, administration, leadership at different levels, and how these various actors collaborate and coordinate their activities. Hence, the different chapters in this book emphasise different forms of 'quality work', aiming to shift the focus of studies of quality in higher education (Elken and Stensaker 2018).

This book enters a rather crowded area of research on quality in higher education, with a wide range of concepts and studies, different disciplinary perspectives, and different units of analysis on various levels. Overall, the language and conceptualisations regarding quality also remain scattered and unsystematic to some extent

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(see, e.g. Harvey 2004–2017 for a glossary). This multiplicity of perspectives can be seen as an indication that some aspects of quality in higher education have, thus far, not been systematically captured. This introductory chapter builds on and expands the conceptualisation of quality work (Elken and Stensaker 2018). This emphasis reflects a recent shift in organisational studies towards emphasising 'work' in creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions. In line with this emphasis, quality work is defined as '*activities and practices within higher education institutions that address the quality of its educational provision'* (Elken and Stensaker 2018, p. 190), implying that this kind of emphasis includes a focus on both *formal organisational structures* and the more *informal and routine work* that is not always explicitly associated with quality enhancement within the institutions. Quality thus not only concerns assurance and enhancement, but also maintenance and routine practice. At a time where debates about quality are sometimes dominated by discussions of how to achieve teaching excellence, this emphasis deliberately shifts emphasis on the local routine practices which, as is argued in this book, also constitute an important aspect of quality in higher education. The emphasis thus also follows earlier studies that would warn against simplified judgments of teaching quality based on institutional status and prestige (see, e.g. McLean et al. 2018). Focus on quality work emphasises the necessity to analyse practices and actors within higher education institutions while maintaining that these practices need to be analysed in their organisational context. Thus, quality work represents a concept that could link the organisational and pedagogical dimensions of quality.

We argue that coupling organisational and pedagogical perspectives has several important implications. First, it takes attention away from defining quality through various outcomes (e.g., relevance, efficiency, and standards) to analysing processes and practices associated with the enhancement of quality, which is a more process-oriented view. While attempts to define quality have been important in attempting to establish a conceptual basis for studies of quality in higher education (Harvey and Green 1993), we need to move on from acknowledging the complexity of the concept to a better understanding of the conditions creating and affecting quality. Through this perspective, the goal is to develop a more thorough understanding of the transformative potential of quality (Harvey and Green 1993).

Second, we also need to build a more inclusive empirical basis where the unfortunate tendency of either seeing quality as something dealt with by management or a cultural artefact would be overcome (Elken and Stensaker 2018). While quality work can, indeed, have managerial and cultural characteristics, there is a danger of analytical fragmentation. As such, the quality work concept has the potential to connect research traditions that have previously been disconnected. The current book is novel in that it brings together studies of governance and organisation in higher education and the analysis of teaching and learning processes in higher education. Empirically, we explore the notion of quality work through a wide range of different settings in several higher education institutions utilising a variety of different data sets.

The Rationale for a 'Quality Work' Perspective

The Drivers of the Complex Quality Agenda in Higher Education

Identifying the main drivers of complexity associated with the quality agenda in higher education is a relatively easy task. As national governments are still in charge of designing and regulating higher education systems around the world, the sector has been exposed to the same reform attempts as other public sectors (Dill and Beerkens 2010). Hence, it is possible to explain the increasing emphasis on quality as a result of the evolving public governance of higher education and the need to provide improved efficiency and effectiveness. How such governance changes have played out in national contexts differs between countries where higher education and 'quality' have been more tightly regulated and countries where the public steering of higher education has been more deregulated and exposed to market-like contexts (Stensaker and Harvey 2011).

Another driver of complexity in the area of quality stems from the idea that higher education is expected to contribute to advancing a knowledge economy (Slaughter and Leslie 1997). While it is by no means a new expectation and is even an expectation closely intertwined with public reform attempts, studies have been reporting how universities have been slowly and steadily modernised to be more coherent and complete organisations that interact with their environment in a purposeful manner (Krücken and Meier 2006). In the European context, the inspiration for this call to modernise universities can be traced to the perceived success of American universities (Olsen and Maassen 2007), where the view of universities as market actors has been much more predominant. This view of academic activity as a form of 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter and Leslie 1997) implies universities' knowledge production is an aspect of their competitive position in the marketplace, as well as the relevance of the outcomes produced. Such a view of the university as an economic actor also impacts how quality is conceptualised and the most relevant means to assess quality.

The third driver of complexity is related to the inherent characteristics of higher education institutions, as organisations that are a target of reform attempts and exposed to market forces. The argument made by Clark (1983) that universities are still characterised by strong sets of values and norms has been found to be valid despite the many reform attempts directed at the sector (Douglass 2016; Olsen and Maassen 2007; Stensaker et al. 2012). While universities have, indeed, been increasingly turned into agencies (Christensen et al. 2019), it is by no means certain that formal changes affect the underlying logic of these institutions (Stensaker 2019). Universities have proved to possess a great adaptive capacity and an ability to translate societal demands in ways that fit their institutional norms and values. As such, the current excellence agenda, which is often associated with the economic role of higher education and the need for more entrepreneurial agency (Deem et al. 2008), can also be considered closely intertwined with more traditional academic norms

and values (Ramirez and Tiplic 2014) where discovery, originality, and more elitist functions of higher education comes to the fore.

In terms of quality, the changes outlined above suggest higher education performs an increasing multiplicity of functions in society, where the emphasis varies between efficiency and effectiveness, employability and relevance, and more traditional forms of academic excellence. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that these drivers have also impacted university life, and the 'living' autonomy of universities cannot be understood by simply examining formal organisational charts and prescribed governance schemes (de Boer and Enders 2017; Enders et al. 2013; Maassen et al. 2017). This does not mean that formal structures do not matter; it is merely stressing that the regulative, financial, and organisational constraints and conditions are interpreted and balanced by individuals working inside universities, and understanding these constraints and conditions are of utmost importance for improving quality.

Fragmented Studies of Quality in Higher Education

How has research contributed to informing us about the constraints and conditions affecting educational quality? A key observation is that there is certainly no shortage of studies using the label 'quality'. A review of the studies making use of this label reveals that the existing literature is extremely broad, but it is quite path-dependent and fragmented. As such, it is a paradox that the 'quality' construct, which often collapses the boundaries between distinctively different dimensions of higher education research, has resulted in a research field consisting of different tribes and territories (cf. Becher and Trowler 2001).

Although conducting a review of the quality literature is not our objective as such, some illustrations of the current fragmentation in the research conducted in this field are required. One strand in the literature on quality related to explorations concerns the introduction, functioning, and impact of quality assurance schemes in the sector (see, e.g. Brennan and Shah 2000; Frederiks et al. 1994; Kis 2005; Leiber et al. 2015; Stensaker 2008; Westerheijden 2007) and attempts to identify productive means for quality enhancement (Bollaert 2014; Massaro 2010; Massy 1999; Newton 2000). This subset of the literature can be tightly linked to changes in the governance of higher education and how new, intermediate quality assurance agencies have affected the way in which universities are accountable to their environment. However, a weakness within this literature is that it is rarely linked to the specific activities directly affecting teaching and learning (Mårtensson et al. 2014; Newton 2000). As such, we know fairly little about how external quality assurance schemes impact the ways in which teaching is conducted or how students learn.

Another strand of the literature addresses how 'quality' is managed within universities. This literature tends to focus on the establishment of formal governance within universities and is sometimes linked to changing external conditions surrounding higher education institutions, including external quality assurance (Pratasavitskaya and Stensaker 2010), and how 'quality' concerns are infusing a

range of administrative and organisational tasks and responsibilities (Manatos et al. 2017). Generally, it is a tendency for this strand of the literature to be concerned about how universities are being transformed as institutions and how modernising universities plays out at different levels of university governance (Frølich et al. 2013; Krücken and Meier 2006). Often, such studies find some form of mismatch or tension between various governance levels within universities (Stensaker and Fumasoli 2017), or between, or even within, various administrative functions where new professionals are found (Whitchurch 2012). A countermovement in parts of this literature is to put emphasis on quality enhancement rather than management, with an aim to bring the quality debate closer to the core values in academic culture (see, e.g. Land and Gordon 2016)

The third relevant strand of the literature, which also has a clear link to quality, is focused on exploring how student learning can be facilitated, organised, and assessed most effectively. While this strand of the literature dates back to decades before the current quality agenda entered higher education, it has been increasingly associated with the latter agenda by the questions raised concerning the relevance of education to working life and whether the skills and knowledge provided to students are suitable for the knowledge economy (Damşa et al. 2015). Key insights stemming from this literature include the need to establish more coherence between teaching activities, expected outcomes, and assessment (Biggs and Tang 2011; Hattie 2015) and that students' engagement with their own learning is strongly dependent on the teaching approaches utilised by educators (Baeten et al. 2010; Trigwell et al. 1999). Over time, this strand of the literature has increasingly emphasised how learning is conditioned by specific social settings and the role students play in the knowledge construction process. A key message from such studies is that deep learning can be enhanced by different forms of student-centred approaches, while such learning processes also present potential dilemmas (Damşa et al. 2015, p. 59; Nerland and Prøitz 2018). However, while this literature has generally identified a range of aspects that matter for student learning, teaching and learning studies are rarely framed as organisationally embedded activities.

It is also possible to identify additional subsets in the literature that have strong links to the quality agenda, including research in the areas of digital technology, internationalisation, employability and so forth, illustrating the quite fragmented state in which 'quality' is studied. However, when acknowledging that the university is the organisational setting in which education is delivered, it can be argued that what we talk about are different sets of practices that create a complex web of 'work' where we have a limited understanding of how all this activity plays out.

Specifically, we need to connect existing studies of quality to the multiple strands in the literature on this topic, as well as shift our empirical focus towards routine activities and practices: what actors really *do* to enhance and maintain quality, and how do they operate within taken-for-granted institutionalised norms and under formal external demands. These practices need to be examined in ways that view them as interrelated. Thus, whereas studies of teaching and learning focus on the learning process itself, and studies of organisational dimensions focus on the organisational conditions, the 'quality work' perspective invites an examination of the

interrelations and contingencies between practices. This practice-oriented perspective implies that such practices are viewed as situated and embedded. Moreover, although a number of higher education institutions have established quality management systems and new ways to govern and organise educational delivery, these systems and structures do not imply the existence of a tight coupling between governance and specific practices at 'shop floor'. De-coupling and the potential of practice to change formal structures also creates room for a more dynamic and transformative approach, where not only practices but also universities are re-shaped.

Researching 'Quality Work'

If we contextualise 'quality work' as located within routines and taken-for-granted activities in higher education, it could be argued that the theoretical foundation for studying 'work' is closely related to an institutional perspective, which emphasises focus on 'relatively enduring set of rules and organised practices, embedded in structures of meaning and resources' (Olsen 2007, p. 27). Within the institutional perspective, an institution possesses regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive dimensions that provide stability and meaning (Scott 2001). In terms of regulative aspects, educational provision in higher education is embedded in a range of formalised external rules (e.g., quality assessment [QA] criteria, national laws, and regulations) that structure provision, control access, and stipulate how education is to be funded in broad terms. Educational provision is also embedded in a range of broader societal norms, for example, that study programmes should be offered in an ethical and non-discriminatory manner, and some of these rules may also be formalised in broader laws. This institutionalised form of education implies that there is a relatively established division of labour, for instance, between academic and administrative tasks, and that there is a division between the teacher and the learner. There is also a range of informal rules for educational provision and what it means to offer education in higher education institutions. This also includes also specific disciplinary norms, which imply specific structural expectations and codified practices, such as the notion of obtaining a degree or certification after a specified time period (see also, Elken and Stensaker 2018). As Olsen (2007, p. 27) argues, such practices and rules are *relatively* invariant and resistant to idiosyncratic preferences and turnover among individuals. However, this does not imply that change does not happen or that actors who engage in educational practices do not have a space to manoeuvre. This makes education a rather complex task. This complexity frames education as a primary process in higher education as it concerns delivery where a range of organisational actors and activities that are associated with quality work meet and need to coordinate (Elken and Stensaker 2018).

Studies of Institutional Work

In the conceptualisation of 'quality work', research on institutional work was a key source of inspiration (see also Elken and Stensaker 2018). The link between interest in 'work' and institutional theory can be traced back to some of the classics of institutional theory, while explicit emphasis on *institutional work* is a more recent phenomenon. The main source of inspiration for this perspective is how work can add to the further theoretical development of organisational institutionalism. Specifically, institutional work concerns 'the purposive action of individuals and organisations aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions' (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006, p. 215). The aim is to shift discussions of organisational institutionalism towards a better understanding of continuous change processes. This emphasis represents a reorientation of organisational institutionalism from explaining broad macro-level changes in the field towards understanding how actors within institutions operate, and in this manner, re-examine the enduring debate on agency and institutions (Lawrence et al. 2009, 2011).

In one of the early conceptualisations, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) outlined two main sources of inspiration for the concept of institutional work, tracing it back to some of the foundational works in institutional theory. The first source of inspiration is a set of articles that address the issue of agency in institutional studies more explicitly. In particular, they emphasise work by DiMaggio (1988), who introduced the notion of institutional entrepreneurship, which emphasises actors and agency in the construction of institutions. While DiMaggio (1988) emphasises the role of institutional entrepreneurs in creating institutions, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, p. 217) argue that institutional work concerns not only the inception and construction of institutions but also the more routine work of actors who have neither the capacity nor the resources to be considered institutional entrepreneurs. The other core author they emphasise in terms of early work on agency is Oliver (1991), who emphasised the strategic element of organisational responses to institutional processes. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, p. 217) acknowledge that a variety of responses to institutional processes was a theme in early work by Selznick (1957) regarding the transformative role of those in leadership positions. However, they argue that the work of Oliver (1991, 1992) provides a much more systematic and comprehensive take of the range of responses, especially related to the processes of deinstitutionalisation, and suggest that Oliver (1992) shed light on the types of action ('work') necessary to maintain institutions. They argue that 'the reproduction and continuation of institutions cannot be taken for granted', requiring active involvement by individuals and organisations. However, according to Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, p. 217), this emphasis on work received relatively limited attention from institutional scholars at the time. While they also note other relevant studies, they argue that three theoretical articles (i.e., DiMaggio 1988; Oliver 1991, 1992) 'represent a significant shift in the attention of institutional researchers toward the impact of individual and collective actors on the institutions that regulate the fields in which they operate' (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006, p. 218).

The other source of inspiration, according to Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), is the sociology of practice tradition. Here, practice would be defined as 'embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organised around shared practical understanding' (Schatzki 2001, p. 11). Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) refer to a much broader interest in practices in organisational research. Following the view of practices as something situated, Lawrence and Suddaby thus conceptualise their view of institutional work as an 'intelligent, situated institutional action' that is less concerned with the process of what happens to an institution than the internal life of the process: 'the work of actors as they attempt to shape those processes, as they work to create, maintain and disrupt institutions' (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006, p. 219). This kind of view on action implies that behaviour is characterised by intentionality and effort with links between goals and action (Lawrence et al. 2011). In other words, this implies that institutional work is purposeful. However, this purposefulness does not need to be explicitly stated in all instances, nor does this imply that institutions' role in the behaviour of actors is discarded and that actors behave as free agents. The concept of 'embedded actors' (Greenwood and Suddaby 2006) is not discarded. However, their actorhood becomes a construction, a result of coordination and interaction. Institutional work is, thus, rarely the result of the work of a single actor; instead, it is the actions of multiple actors within institutions. This also implies a view of agency as distributed, a result of the 'coordinated and uncoordinated efforts of a potentially large number of actors' (Lawrence et al. 2011, p. 55). Thus, purposefulness thus does not necessarily imply purposefulness and explicit intention on behalf of each individual actor for each action.

The notion of embedded actors implies that actors are shaped by institutional forces, but they also have an important role in creating, maintaining, and disrupting these institutional forces (Hwang and Colyvas 2011). Following the inspiration from the sociology of practice, the emphasis is on actors' reflexive engagement with their institutional context (Lawrence et al. 2009, 2011). Thus, not only is change linked to the work of individual and collective actors, so is the maintenance of current institutions. Contrasted to most newer work on institutional entrepreneurship that focuses on the work undertaken to change institutions (Garud et al. 2007), often with a tendency to focus on successes (Hwang and Colyvas 2011), institutional work also emphasises maintenance and unintended consequences. As a perspective, institutional work thus aims to examine a broader range of processes, what Scott (2008) refers to as the 'life cycle' of institutions: development, maintenance, and disruption. In their review, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) identified a range of concepts employed for institutional work that concerns each of these stages, which, in broad terms, addresses the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive dimensions of institutions. An emphasis on the institutional work dimension, however, is not the existence of a regulative dimension in itself, but how actors engage with developing rules, practices, or identities.

In the study of institutional work, three core tenets can be identified: the view of individual and collective actors as aware, skilful and reflective, that institutions can be conceptualised as a relatively conscious action of individual and collective actors,

and that even an action taken to change an institution is still embedded within the same institutional norms (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006, p. 220).

Characteristics of Quality Work

With this broader view of institutional work in mind, how can 'quality work' be understood, and how is it positioned vis-a-vis the perspectives that have, thus far, been employed in studies of quality in higher education? In our earlier conceptualisation, we emphasised six key dimensions (Elken and Stensaker 2018). In our understanding, individual and collective actors within organisations engage in institutional work to maintain education as an institution. To be termed *quality work,* there also needs to be some form of intentionality to engage with the issues of quality. However, this perspective focuses not only on specific quality enhancement processes but also processes through which practices undertaken to provide high-quality education are reproduced and maintained. Actors within higher education are shaped by existing institutional norms and socialised into an understanding of what it means to be an academic, an administrative staff member, or a student. These actors also have agency to shape the institution through their practices. It follows from this that (1) *quality work is negotiated and dynamic,* where specific practices must be tested and weighed against the established values and norms associated with educational delivery, and seeks to find a (2) *balance between multiple expectations*, including those derived from the environment.

Contrary to the more distinct role of particular individuals, such as leaders (Selznick 1957), a quality work perspective does not assume that those occupying a managerial position are necessarily more important than other actors with respect to quality improvement. Conversely, a focus on quality work is an acknowledgement of how (3) *individuals may function as local problem-solvers and innovators* within their own area and that problem-solving does not always have to be dramatic and/or radical. Quality work also recognises the small routine changes and daily work within institutions (Elken and Stensaker 2018).

Furthermore, the number of small changes, the incremental accumulation of actions resulting from implemented practices and routines, may also lead to (4) *open-ended outcomes*, as a result of imperfect imitation processes or because problem-solving is driven by the need to find (5) *pragmatic solutions* to pressing issues. Linking back to the issue of local problem-solving, this may sometimes lead to surprising results and outcomes.

However, for quality work to be negotiated and individuals to function as problem-solvers, a quality work perspective also assumes that (6) *individuals need to possess some autonomy* in how tasks are performed to solve problems and the means used to exercise their responsibility. Such discretion is achieved due to inadequate or incomplete rules and regulations or because different administrative logics collide when specific tasks are to be performed or decisions made.

While one could interpret these six dimensions as activities disintegrating universities and educational delivery, as well as being in opposition to traditional organisational coordination mechanisms, such as quality management and quality culture, our argument is that quality work is also an integrative tool by virtue of being the invisible glue of organisational life. Methodologically, this implies that researchers need to look for areas where different organisational logics can be expected to collide, areas where tensions are found, actions taken where problems were solved, and not least, individuals having or taking autonomy to negotiate and find practical solutions. As such, a quality work perspective would explore 'interesting practices', where individuals and groups coordinate and balance different interests while delivering education, instead 'best practices'.

Aggregating and examining how different practices are coordinated and how this shapes the institutions in which actors are embedded are important in the analysis of quality work. By engaging in quality work, actors are not only shaped by existing notions of quality in their domain, they also continuously shape the conceptualisation of what quality means. As such, a quality work perspective complements traditional approaches used to analyse quality enhancement.

Dimensions and Dilemmas in Quality Work

The discussion has, so far, explained why quality work is more than just management or culture, how different expectations tend to create tensions and conflict in practice, and that outcomes are often the result of pragmatic, negotiated, and quite dynamic processes where both local practices and individual agency matter. While a quality work perspective acknowledges the importance of both quality management and quality culture, it recognises the specificity of how small groups and individuals may develop and adopt their own ideas, routines, and practices within this larger context. Hence, while a quality work perspective recognises the importance of differentiating between formal and informal dimensions (e.g., management and culture), it adds value by acknowledging the importance of local routines and practices, thus reflecting the diversity of disciplinary contexts and the specificity of the many different teaching and learning settings found in higher education. Figure 1.1 illustrates the key dimensions captured by the concept of quality work.

However, Fig. 1.1 also illustrates the many potential dilemmas involved in quality work as at least six areas of conflict and tensions can be identified. The first dilemma, which has been studied repeatedly in the literature, is the tension that might arise between establishing formal and institutional-wide systems of quality assurance (1), reflecting the values and norms that many institutions may have developed regarding the generic cultural properties of how teaching and learning should be conducted (2). Typical tensions that tend to arise in such an analysis are the intrusiveness of formal rules and regulations and how they may be perceived as limiting or even transforming historical and institutionalised perceptions of 'how things should be done'.

GENERIC

Quality systems, management
and technologies (1)

Quality culture (2)

FORMAL ———————————————— INFORMAL

Subarea and disciplinary-based
quality standards and routines
(3)

Local and individual teaching
and learning practices (4)

SPECIFIC
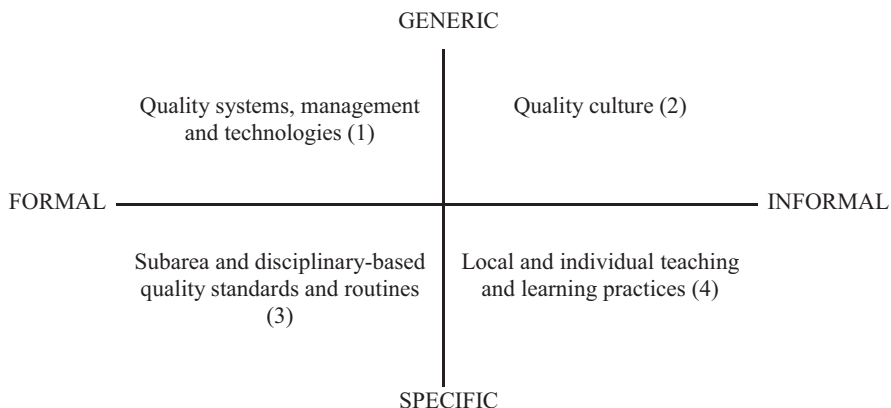
Fig. 1.1 Dimensions and dilemmas in quality work in higher education

The second dilemma is addressing the problems of how generic systems and management procedures (1) may pose challenges for organisational units and sub-structures at lower levels in the organisation (3). Here, tensions are associated with organisational delegation and the degree of formal autonomy given to faculties and departments, as well as how much discretion should be given to lower levels in developing their own standards and rules.

The third dilemma may occur when generic systems and management procedures and technologies (1) meet the specific teaching and learning settings and practices of a study programme or even at the course level (4). While some of these tensions can be seen as similar to those where generic systems and management procedures crash with quality culture, tensions may also arise as generic pedagogical or technological ideas, scripts, and templates are to be introduced or translated into existing programmes and courses.

The fourth dilemma can be identified when an established quality culture (2) associated with particular institutional identities are seen as hindering experimentation and innovation in teaching and learning practices (4). As student-centred learning and similar concepts are in the process of being introduced into higher education, conflict may arise when existing teacher and student roles may be challenged, and new pedagogical designs are to be introduced.

The fifth dilemma may be detected when an existing quality culture (2) is challenged by local quality standards, regulations, and routines (3). Here, attempts at creating coherent programmes and educational offerings may be seen as challenging the key characteristics of institutional cultures, especially in areas concerning individual autonomy.

Finally, the sixth dilemma may develop at the local level in a higher education institution when increased formalisation with respect to educational offerings (3) are seen as intrusive conditioning of individual autonomy regarding teaching and learning practices (4). Conversely, tensions may also arise as individual and local practices are perceived as limiting the possibilities for organised learning and more coherent programme development work.

While it should be noted that these dimensions and dilemmas are exploratory heuristics, the ambition is that they can still function as an integrative tool for understanding the dynamics of what quality work implies in practice. We will return to possible insights and implications derived from each of the empirical chapters in our concluding chapter.

Analysis of Quality Work in This Book

The book builds on a large project, 'Quality of Norwegian Higher Education: Pathways, Practices and Performances', funded by the Norwegian Research Council and conducted in 2014–2018 (grant number 237 960).[1] A range of different methods has been used in the research. The project combined quantitative methods in the form of system-wide mappings and surveys, as well as qualitative case-based approaches. For the latter, six prime case institutions in Norway were selected and examined at different levels (i.e., course, study programme, faculty, and institution), conducted through observations, interviews (i.e., group and individual), and document analysis. Additional case studies of institutional conditions were conducted through document analysis and interviews. In total, the project provides a rich basis for analysing quality processes and practices in higher education through a multi-faceted and diverse set of viewpoints.

The chapters in this book analyse practices of quality work in a range of rather different empirical settings, emphasising both the organisational and pedagogical dimensions of quality work. In this introductory chapter, we have outlined the concept of quality work and argued why it is necessary in an already crowded landscape of concepts of quality. In the next eight chapters, we provide a range of empirical illustrations of how quality work is conducted in higher education institutions, covering both the organisational and pedagogical dimensions.

In Chap. 2, Elken, Frølich, Maassen, and Stensaker discuss the rationales for an organisation of internal quality systems in higher education and examine how such systems have developed in four higher education institutions. The chapter explores how structures for quality management develop and how such systems are related to processes of strategic leadership or educational practices. The chapter outlines the broader structural frameworks in which quality work takes place in higher education institutions. Empirically, the chapter builds on four qualitative case studies and extensive interview data.

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[1] The project's two central partners were NIFU and the Department of Education at the University of Oslo (IPED/UiO), with NIFU as the formal project owner. The international partners included the Danish Centre for Studies in Research and Research Policy at Århus University, Denmark, and the Centre for Research and Development of Higher Education at the University of Helsinki, Finland. In addition, contributions were made to the project by researchers from University of Tromsø–Arctic University of Norway and Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences.

Similarly, in Chap. 3, Aamodt, Graversen, Hovdhaugen, Kalpazidou Schmidt, Maassen, and Stensaker further examine the role of managers in quality work. They compare data from Norway and Denmark and examine how external requirements condition the quality work conducted by study programme leaders. These two countries represent two rather different principles of external quality assurance, thus creating different spaces for quality work in these two cases. The data in this chapter are based on survey data collected from Norwegian and Danish study programme leaders. The interpretation of external demands is also a theme of Chap. 4, where Fossland and Tømte shift the focus to a more specific case of quality enhancement. In the chapter, they address the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in higher education and show how leaders and academic staff translate external strategic ambitions into their local practices. The chapter builds on a range of empirical material, including both interview data and document analysis.

In Chap. 5, Prøitz, Wittek and de Lange discuss the notion of consistency in study programmes, a concept that has been emphasised as central to quality enhancement in educational practices. The chapter provides an analytical discussion of consistency and coherence in study programmes and provides an empirical illustration of this by contrasting study programme planning intentions and student experiences. The empirical material in this chapter is based on two study programmes in Norway and includes interviews with study the programme coordinator and staff, as well as focus group interviews with students.

In subsequent chapters, a number of specific pedagogical approaches and their consequences are examined. In Chap. 6, Nerland shifts the focus to yet another concept that is often associated with the enhancement of student learning, namely student-centred learning. While student-centred learning is often encouraged as a pedagogical principle, Nerland also cautions that such approaches can lead to hesitancy among students. In the chapter, Nerland analyses secondary data concerning hesitancy in eight different cases.

In Chap. 7, Damşa and Wittek focus on group work as an important element of several student-centred approaches. Damsa and Wittek ask, what does 'good' collaborative learning entail, and how can it be facilitated? The chapter examines this question by analysing observations and interviews with teachers and students, course documents, and findings from case studies in two higher education courses.

In Chap. 8, de Lange, Wittek and Fossland turn their attention to plenary sessions as a distinct pedagogical approach, which remains prevalent in higher education. They examine what quality work would entail in such a context. Empirically, the chapter builds on two sets of observation data from two different disciplinary contexts, as well as interviews with teachers and students.

In Chap. 9, Esterhazy, Fossland, and Stalheim turn the focus to quality assessment. The chapter takes, as a starting point, the idea that the quality of feedback is also conditioned by the learning environment in which it is embedded. The chapter builds on interviews with students and teachers in three different courses.

While the empirical material was primarily collected in Norway, the dimensions we raise in the discussion are applicable for a broader audience, as the tensions and dilemmas outlined above are more generic and foundational for discussions on

quality in higher education (generic quality systems that meet local practices and autonomy, or the balance between existing identities and attempts at educational innovation). In the final chapter, we further reflect on some of these ideas and their generic value for broader discussions on quality.

The chapters present a range of elements typically associated with quality management and development in higher education. In this book, we address these as settings in which quality work takes place. We, therefore, emphasise that both the organisational and pedagogical dimension are important and should be seen as distinct but related dimensions of quality in higher education.

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Chapter 2
Quality Systems in Higher Education Institutions: Enabling and Constraining Quality Work

Mari Elken, Nicoline Frølich, Peter Maassen, and Bjørn Stensaker

Introduction

The concern for quality is not a new phenomenon, since achieving quality has always been at the core of the academic enterprise. The novelty of the quality debate in the last three decades lies in the explicit and direct policy interest in enhancing quality in higher education through new policy instruments and external accountability mechanisms (Brennan and Shah 2000; Westerheijden et al. 1994, 2007). While the expectation of accountability has been enhanced, there is also a continuous concern for quality assurance systems to maintain an effective balance between accountability and improvement (Danø and Stensaker 2007).

The expansion of external quality assurance and changing governance arrangements have created a demand for having internal capacity to produce relevant information. Formalised internal quality systems are a result of such demands. An important task for internal quality systems is to address external demands and expectations, and to hold higher education institutions accountable to public authorities and society. At the same time, the systems that are established become interlinked with the internal life of higher education institutions, by also having the potential to provide relevant information to internal stakeholders (Brennan and Shah 2000). The appropriate audience for such information is institutional and faculty leadership, study program leaders and educational practitioners, as well as students and other stakeholders. While all having a legitimate interest in the quality of the educational provision, these stakeholders have diverse needs. For example,

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external accountability demands would likely be most concerned with assuring minimum standards and following an externally defined threshold for quality management, institutional leadership would likely be interested in identifying ways for strategic organizational improvement, while study program leaders and educational practitioners would need detailed and rich data that is more directly related to individual practices. In this chapter, we explore how institutional quality systems manage these potentially contradictory tasks and expectations. Having this in mind, internal quality systems have an important role in setting the frame for various kinds of 'quality work' taking place in the institutions (see also Chap. 1). Consequently, core questions for this chapter are the following: How do universities and colleges structure their internal formalized quality related processes? To what extent do external standards increasingly shape how institutions conduct their internal quality systems, thereby making such systems increasingly focused on accountability and standardisation? To what extent do these systems cater to the needs of institutional leadership to govern their institutions more strategically? In addition, to what extent are these systems contributing to quality enhancement processes locally, within study programs? We end the chapter by discussing the possible implications of the systems' different tasks and expectations for the 'quality work' conducted within these systems.

The chapter builds on four institutional case studies conducted in the QNHE project.[1] The cases were selected from a larger set of qualitative case studies, to represent a variety of institutional practices and in this manner illustrate different contexts and means to structure internal quality processes. The empirical material includes interviews with various actors within the institutions (including e.g. representatives of institutional leadership, administrative staff involved in quality work at the central and local institutional level, academic staff representatives, student representatives, and staff working with university pedagogy) and various institutional documents (procedures and guidelines regarding the internal quality systems, reports and data produced, etc). Interviews were conducted in the institutions primarily during autumn 2016. The number of interviews varied among the case institutions and most of the interviews were transcribed in verbatim. The analysis was conducted thematically, following the core concepts introduced later in this chapter. While the case descriptions are based on a synthesis of all the interviews, if referring to specific information from individual interviews, we refer to the interviews as (Int-case), with individual numbering of interviews for each of the case institutions.

The chapter will first discuss the specific external demands for internal quality systems in Norway. After this, the chapter presents a review of international literature on internal quality management, followed by the analytical framework for

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[1] QNHE: Quality in Norwegian higher education project, see Chap. 1 for more information.

the chapter and the empirical analysis of the cases. The chapter concludes with a reflection on common patterns shared across the institutions.

A Few Words About the Context…

In Norway, both universities and university colleges are required to have an internal quality management system. While university colleges also need accreditation for study programs at master and PhD level, universities are self-accrediting. Nevertheless, NOKUT (The Norwegian QA agency) conducts audits (termed "periodic supervision") of internal quality management systems in both types of institutions. A negative decision in the audit process means that an institution is given a certain time to rectify deficiencies and then go through a new audit. If it fails to respond adequately, the Ministry of Education and Research can revoke its authorisation to establish new study programs, independent of its formal institutional status.

The requirement to have an internal quality assurance system is stipulated in the Law of Higher Education. The general HE law specifies that institutions need to have a "(§ 1–6) satisfactory internal system for quality assurance that would assure and develop quality of education. Council for educational matters should be part of this system." Additionally, under demands for learning environments it is noted that "(§ 4–3) institutions' work with learning environments should be a part of internal quality assurance systems." The criteria for how such internal system for quality assurance should look like are more specified in the regulation for the supervisory role of NOKUT (*Studietilsynsforskrift*). There are six criteria for internal quality systems (§ 4–1 in the regulation, NOKUT translation):

- *The institution's quality assurance practices must be integrated in a strategy and cover all areas of importance for the quality of the students' learning outcome.*
- *The quality assurance practices must be endorsed by the institution's board and all levels of management. Through their quality assurance practices, institutions shall promote a quality culture among staff and students.*
- *Institutions must have systems in place for systematically ensuring that all study programmes offered meet the requirements of the Regulations concerning the Quality Assurance and Quality Development of Higher Education and Tertiary Vocational Education Sections 3–1 to 3–4 and Chapter 2 of these Regulations, and any additional requirements that apply.*
- *The institution must systematically obtain information from relevant sources to be able to evaluate the quality of all study programmes offered.*
- *Knowledge derived from the quality assurance practices must be used to enhance the quality of the study programmes and identify any deficiencies in quality. Quality deficiencies shall be rectified within reasonable time.*
- *Results derived from quality assurance practices shall form part of the knowledge base used in the evaluation and strategic development of the institution's portfolio of study programmes.*

These six criteria represent a clear demand for a structured approach within institutions. Internal systems need to be integrated with institutional governance and leadership, they need to be comprehensive, systematic and continuous. They should address both possible issues, but also cater to improvement. Nevertheless, the criteria leave some room for interpretation how exactly such an internal system should look like. There is considerable room for interpretation concerning questions of how an internal quality system should be integrated with the strategic work of the leadership on the one hand, and to academic improvement of educational processes on the other. In this chapter, we will explore how a set of Norwegian institutions organize their internal quality systems, and the potential dilemmas and tensions that emerge in the quality work practices.

Institutional Responses to External Quality Assurance Demands

A starting point in this chapter is that formalized internal quality systems have largely been established because of new external demands. In the literature about quality in higher education, at least three arguments for how external quality assurance demands would contribute to internal quality systems can be identified: the first is emphasizing the tension between external demands and internal academic quality evaluation; the second emphasizes a variety of practices that emerge due to these tensions; and the third emphasizes how such competing demands from different stakeholders can be balanced.

The first argument focuses on potential conflicts between formal quality assurance and academic quality evaluation. For example, Hoecht (2006) explores the issues of trust, control, professional autonomy and accountability in quality assurance. He argues that there has been a shift from informal "light-touch" quality control systems based on local practices and a significant amount of trust and professional autonomy, to a highly prescribed process of audit-based quality control. Such one-way accountability provides"rituals of verification" instead of fostering trust, it has high opportunity costs, and may well be detrimental to innovative teaching and learning (Hoecht 2006). Yet, while being a source for tensions and seemingly contradictory, it has been argued that professionalism and accountability can also co-exist (Cheng 2012).

Building on this notion of tension, the second argument emphasizes that these tensions lead to a variety of quality practices. Beerkens (2015) argues that quality assurance systems often face different and even conflicting goals and expectations from different parts of society. She observes that the traditional goals of securing minimum standards and facilitating improvements within universities and colleges are augmented with such goals as providing information to the public, supporting

inter-institutional competition and positioning institutions or higher education sys-
tems in the global competition. Moreover, the relative priority of these goals is
changing constantly over time, the dynamics of QA systems should also be seen in
a context of increasingly complex higher education governance (Beerkens 2015:
245). In practice, multiple quality assurance instruments are in place at the same
time, creating a regulatory overlap which can contribute to ensuring quality in a
complex and multi-faceted sector. However, this overlap may also create additional
bureaucratic burdens to higher education institutions. Moreover, different instru-
ments may balance out each other when they pull in different directions contribut-
ing to higher education institutions not responding as intended. In a similar vein
Bendixen and Jacobsen (2017) argue that due to the increased influence of educa-
tional markets, quality of higher education has the character of an open signifier of
periodic manifestations. As a result, context dependent and local interpretations of
how to meet agreement regarding quality in everyday practices unfold (Bendixen
and Jacobsen 2017).

A third line of argument would focus on how quality assurance practices are bal-
anced in a number of ways. According to Bendixen and Jacobsen (2017: 26) higher
education institutions have to find ways of managing ambiguous political and orga-
nizational requirements that cannot immediately be reconciled. Goff (2017) finds
that rather than retrospective quality assurance and prospective quality assurance,
three main approaches to quality assurance can be identified: an approach aimed at
defending quality, an approach aimed at demonstrating quality, and an approach
aimed at enhancing quality. Lyytinen et al. (2017) argue that there is little research
on balancing the interest of higher education institutions and their external stake-
holders in the context of quality assurance, and such balancing of centralized coor-
dination and differentiated practices within disciplines can be rather complicated.
Achieving endorsement from various internal and external stakeholder groups thus
becomes a sign of a responsive culture in quality assurance (O'Sullivan 2017). This
responsiveness is arguably needed, given the complexity of education as a basic
function of universities.

These three sets of arguments are interrelated, but all illustrate that institutional
responses and structures to address the extended "quality agenda" can take multiple
forms. While one could question the claims made by Lyytinen et al. (2017) about
the lack of research on balancing external and internal interests in quality assurance
processes – this is an issue that has extensively been analysed and discussed under
headings such as 'balancing accountability and improvement' – it is nevertheless
true that a mismatch indeed can be found in many countries struggling to combine
external demands and internal academic quality improvement practices (Brennan
and Shah 2000; Beerkens 2015). However, it is also possible that such tasks can find
different ways to co-exist. To examine how the external demands and internal prac-
tices are related in our case institutions, the analytical framework builds on insights
from organizational behaviour when addressing various environmental demands.

Conceptualising Internal Quality Systems

The starting point for this analysis is the assumption that the characteristics of internal quality systems are both the result of external accountability demands found in the NOKUT criteria, as well as specific local organizational factors. The need to produce relevant data for quality assurance requires organizational infrastructure to produce and deliver relevant information. Being embedded in local organizational practices these systems likely obtain additional functions (Beerkens 2015). They can obtain relevance for strategic leadership tasks, where the data produced can contribute to organizational improvement; or, they can provide information for study program leaders and individual staff, who would need detailed and rich data that is relevant for local quality enhancement.[2] Overall, one can thus envisage three different functions for an internal quality system – adherence to standards, contribution to strategic institutional leadership, and enhancement of local quality processes, each representing a distinct system logic. There are different possible configurations for how the demands of the external QA system are linked to organizational processes. The question that remains concerns the conditions under which these different functions become integrated in a way that combines multiple functions; under which circumstances do such systems remain as multiple parallel systems that interact; and when would tensions between the different underlying functions lead to a dysfunctional system where meaningful organizational processes are challenged (building on the arguments of hybrid organizing, see Skelcher and Smith 2015)?

Responding to the expectations of external quality assurance demands represents a specific set of externally formalized expectations, and there is a clear sanction if the institutions fail to meet the minimum threshold set in the regulation. Having this in mind, institutions have strong incentives for compliance, where external rules are dealt with in a conscious manner in the organization (Oliver 1991, p. 153). Given that quality assurance demands represent an added layer of external demands to the institution, they would likely also lead to increased rationalisation and administrative burdens within the institutions (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Meyer et al. 1987). Thus, it is possible to expect that given the formalized expectations, if a university or college aims to comply with the demands, it would lead to expanded administrative procedures for internal quality systems. Processes of professionalization and specialisation within institutional administration (Gornitzka and Larsen 2004) contribute to how this task is managed. This would require a process of centralization of authority within the institutions and an emphasis on the role of central leadership (Brennan and Shah 2000, p. 38). From this perspective, it could be argued that there is a potential for linking such structures also to central leadership and to managerial agendas (Bollaert 2014). Given that such a quality system would focus on the standards as determined externally, the operationalisation of quality and the procedures for the quality management system within the organization would closely follow the

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[2] While one can expect that such systems could also provide data to society at large, the focus in this chapter is on the internal dynamics of such systems.

definitions of the quality assurance agency, to minimize the risk of non-compliance. While this would imply that the definitions adopted within the whole system would follow external standards, it is not given that such a system would address the needs of more local and practice-near quality work of study program leaders and academic staff.

Yet, arguments can also be made for the fact that such wholesale compliance with externally determined rules would likely not be feasible and somewhat naïve to expect, given the nature and complexity of higher education institutions. Universities have historically been described as fragmented, with considerable authority at the bottom of the organization (Clark 1983). Despite increased emphasis on organizational actorhood and becoming a more complete organization (Krücken and Meier 2006; Seeber et al. 2015), attempts of creating coherent streamlined organizations in higher education have also met some substantive barriers (Maassen 2017; Whitley 2008). At the same time, when such external demands would not be perceived as legitimate and internal complexity would challenge the demands, the costs of non-compliance would remain high. As a result, it can be expected that one means to tackle this would be to maintain a formal quality monitoring system in place that remains relatively decoupled from other organizational processes. Such decoupling suggests that structures and routines can remain separate from 'production' (Meyer and Rowan 1977), that is, the quality work taking place with respect to the educational processes on the 'shop floor'. When such external standards are incommensurable with existing structures, routines and practices, such systems can also function as buffers. Having in mind the three potential functions of the internal quality system, this would suggest that systems driven forward by external QA systems would remain disconnected from both leadership and educational practice. The external demands would still be addressed at face value as they have no practical consequence for the practices, and compliance would take place in the form of window-dressing.

Yet, it is also possible that the organization would not take external expectations at face value. While the incentives to comply with the basic requirements remain, there is also ambiguity within the criteria by the QA agency of how internal quality systems should look like. Consequently, institutions have some leeway in constructing and developing their internal quality systems and how they would be integrated into their own organization and coordination structures. In this version, external expectations are filtered through considerable translation processes within the organization, where idea adoption is not only about compliance by copying external demands, but also about change and innovation (Sahlin and Wedlin 2013). For internal quality systems, this implies that a range of possible constellations emerge, as external standards become one organizing principle among several, and can thus be coupled to existing quality processes within the organization in various ways.

Having the above in mind, how higher education institutions design their internal systems and how such systems function in practice can take multiple forms. In Table 2.1 we summarize the three perspectives and their implications for how the three functions are addressed.

Table 2.1 Three perspectives on institutional quality systems and their coupling to external demands and expectations

	Compliance	Decoupled	Translation
Compliance with the expectations and specific standards of QA agency	High	High, but surface	Low
Contributing to the needs of institutional leadership	High	Low	Moderate
Addressing the needs of local academic quality enhancement processes	Low	Low	High

Internal quality systems were introduced for accountability purposes, and over time, this has led to a considerable enhancement of the professionalization of the function in the institutions. However, the three different forms have implications for structures and coordination of the system. For instance, a system which is primarily expected to represent compliance would likely be more centralized and standardized, while a translation perspective implies that the internal quality system is less determined by external demands and instead is shaped by local concerns within the institution. Further, one can expect that given the emphasis on centralization, a compliance-oriented system would also more likely be tightly coupled to institutional leadership at the central level. Regarding the needs of local academic quality enhancement processes, we can thus expect that a translation dominated quality system would be better able to contribute to this than compliance and decoupling-oriented systems.

Case Analysis of Internal Quality Systems

Taking a starting point in the three functions of the internal quality systems, we now shift focus to the four cases selected for this analysis. We will first present basic information about each of the case institutions about the formalized internal quality system, the extent to which it is oriented towards external QA standards, and how it caters to institutional leadership as well as to educational quality enhancement processes. We present the cases according to the three main functions and then reflect on the interconnectedness between these functions.

Case A

Case A has been through multiple merger processes. Earlier, the institution was characterized as a comprehensive research university, after the mergers the institution now also has a range of professionally oriented study programs previously part of the university college sector, and a complex multi-campus system which spans across considerable geographical distance. The internal quality system had also

been through a range of changes and was under discussion during the data collection for the underlying research project.

At the time, the main aim of the internal quality system was to provide a description of the systematic and strategic work with educational quality at the institution. The overarching system described the purpose, division of labour, and general framework for the system, while the individual process and routine descriptions were developed locally. As a result, the system was rather decentralized. The two-fold purpose of the system was described as follows: to contribute to a culture where quality enhancement is in focus; and to identify good quality, quality issues and contribute with problem solving. The quality system identified seven different aspects of quality that it needed to address: steering, framework conditions, relevance, intake/input quality, study program quality, teaching quality, and outcome quality. As a consequence, most administrative units contributed in some manner to educational quality. Faculties and departments had considerable responsibility in this model.

In line with the decentral nature of the administrative structure of the internal quality assurance system, several respondents emphasized the need to keep quality work close to practice, while they also referred to the differences between faculties that required differentiated practices for the process on faculty level, as exemplified by this respondent:

> We have a quality assurance system that is developed and managed centrally. However, faculties have quite much freedom to organize the work in a way they find purposeful. This is because our faculties have so different size and focus. (…) the system includes considerable freedom to organize quality work towards study programs. There are some principles for when and how. I mean programs need to be evaluated within this and that period, there needs to be a system for external evaluations of study programs. So, there are some guiding principles which they need to follow. Then they can make their own procedural descriptions for how they want to do this. (Int A3)

There was also no single model for who is responsible for a study program council (*programstyret*), and the institution operated with three different options (head of department as leader of the study program council, head of department appoints a leader, or faculty employs a study leader based on the recommendation from head of department). This suggests that there was considerable diversity also regarding the authority structures and role descriptions.

Yet, a recent reorganization process also raised a question with respect to the effectiveness of this way of organizing the internal quality system, as vertical coordination was somewhat challenging. The same respondent who is quoted above later suggested that there was a need for a more centralized approach to the internal quality system, arguing for much more standardisation (IntA3). Similar opinions were also mentioned in the other interviews, including by student representatives (Int A4, A5). Thus, coordination and standardization of the internal quality system have increasingly become a concern, also because the merged institutions had different traditions and culture for working with quality.

A core delivery in the internal quality system was the annual 'education and research quality report', with a reporting format that was recently changed. The previous institutional system was described as '360 reporting' – meaning that faculties reported on all data annually. However, this was perceived as rather cumbersome and time-consuming (Int A2, A3). Consequently, the focus was shifted to reporting on selected strategic priorities which might change from year to year. In addition to this, '360 data' was also produced annually, also to identify possible issues of concern. However, not all of this data obtained a place in the printed version of the report. While there used to be separate education and research reports, more recently the education and research reports were combined, to identify possible synergies.

A recent external supervision process by NOKUT had reportedly been somewhat challenging for some of the internal units, which further stimulated the discussions of the internal quality system. One idea that was discussed in the institution is the establishment of a 'local NOKUT', that is an internal function that would mirror the external quality assurance agency and engage in independent supervision within the organization. This idea was mentioned in multiple interviews as a possible solution, while its exact mandate, structure and tasks were at the time still unresolved. One of the respondents described the idea as following:

> Much of the work now is on faculties, I think we need someone who does not control but also has responsibility. So, when NOKUT actually comes, we have it all sorted out. So, such a unit should have responsibility but also authority over the faculties. (…) We have a QA system where they follow whether programs satisfy the formal criteria. But this is very administrative. I wish we had a way to know more about the academic aspects, which at this point are more difficult to measure. But we should know more about these things. (Int A1)

From the quote, two things emerge – the establishment of a 'local NOKUT' was viewed as a means to counteract possible new external threats and avoid complicated situations. In that sense, the process was also driven by external demands by the QA agency. At the same time, there seemed to be a parallel rationale, which concerned again the wish to know more about educational quality. The paradox that remained in the suggestions is that while the aim appeared to be to get closer to academic conceptualisation of quality work, the proposed solution appeared to be quite administrative, adopting an external standardization logic. Yet, there was also active work by the leadership towards the QA agency and public authorities, for gaining leverage for their preferences regarding relevant topics for quality in higher education.

Educational quality has been high on the strategic agenda in the institution. Leadership was perceived as very engaged in issues of educational quality, and one of the slogans they used in the leadership election campaign was educational quality. As mentioned by one employee in an interview:

> We have probably never had a vice rector as active as the current one (…) Vice rector is also in the strategic educational council. (…) They have also some funding they distribute in the organization to projects that are important to focus on. So educational quality has definitely obtained more focus. (Int A3)

The establishment of a central strategic educational council was driven by the leadership and includes all vice deans, representatives from central leadership, administration, students and the university pedagogics unit. The council also obtained delegated authority to announce and distribute annual funding for projects to develop excellence in education, which created active responses within the organization (Int A6). Next to the money available, the body has limited formal authority. At the same time, the body obtained an important strategic function and has also taken up some difficult themes (e.g. closing of study programs). The council also seemed to have a rather definitional role in terms of how quality is discussed in the organization.

Leadership has been active in proposing new instruments and also evaluating their effects, and seemed to have an ambition to get somehow closer to the educational processes as there was a concern that the quality assurance system has been too instrumental and administrative.

> We think that focus in quality assurance has been more on education rather than teaching and learning processes. That it has to be on the right level, that you have a sufficient number of professors, and all that. But teaching quality has been treated somewhat 'with a cold shoulder'. (Int A1)

Given the decentralized structure, local quality enhancement processes varied substantially. In the empirical work at this institution, we conducted interviews in three faculties (Int A6–A13). The faculty level was responsible for following up the reports produced (Int A6) and study program boards retained substantial power as arenas to discuss and follow up quality processes. The administrative process of the internal QA management also brought together potential academic debates. However, given the rather decentralized structure otherwise, it was also clear that there was considerable variation in the ways in which quality processes were followed up. This concerns, for example, the extent and manner student evaluations were followed up, how the writing of the quality report was organized, how the faculties worked with external feedback and reference groups, but also the very operation of the study program councils.

The image that emerges is that quality work was rather fragmented in the organization. Yet, there also seemed to be consciousness about the fact, as considerable effort was put into developing visualisations how the different aspects of quality work were interrelated and how to achieve coherence in this system:

> If we want to take education and quality seriously there needs to be coherence and connection, and all the different parts have to work together. (…) And then we need resources to attach to this. (Int A3)

The overall view of the internal quality system was that there had been considerable strategic focus and strategic emphasis on quality had become more pronounced centrally. The interviews were also full of rather similar descriptions of what quality is, and what matters for quality, and one can find a somewhat unexpected agreement in this respect. At least to some extent, this also translated to the energy that was put

into trying to streamline the system. Yet, the solutions for the perceived issues in a structural level seemed to reflect more the external templates about quality management than that they were actually able to provide links towards the micro processes of educational quality management. Thus, vertical coordination in the organization remained an issue that was at the end of our study not yet resolved.

Case B

Case institution B was previously an independent university college, but merged with a larger university as part of the structural transformation of the Norwegian higher education landscape in recent years. In the 1990s, the college was established through a merger of engineering and nursing schools. As an independent university college, the institutional profile was closely associated with professional education programs in health and engineering. After the merger, the institution is currently one of several campuses of the larger university, enjoying some autonomy while also having to adjust to the rules and regulations of the 'new' university. As part of this process, the internal quality system has been through a range of changes.

Due to the merger process, the quality system went through quite drastic changes. Initially, the system was built up as an instrument for supporting the strategic ambitions of the college, having a strong focus on program quality and developing study programs where learning outcomes were tightly linked to teaching and learning activities, and assessment and evaluation. Hence, curriculum development was a key activity within the system, and involving both academic staff and students in this process was perceived as a vital factor for success. Administratively, the system was formally under the supervision of the pro-rector, with a very clear but simple structure for delegation and responsibility of tasks and duties.

After the merger, the internal quality assurance system changed radically, with much more emphasis on reporting and (student) evaluations (of teaching). The study program leader was required to write a report each year about how the study program was performing, but taking a more coherent perspective, there were few requirements as to the processes leading up to this report. Student involvement was emphasized in the system, although their formal role rather than their engagement seemed to be the key issue.

With respect to the administrative functioning of the internal administrative quality system – informants argued that the strategic ambitions of the quality assurance system had been the same for almost 20 years. Due to the merger in the 1990s, the focus was mainly to create and strengthen the ties between the different disciplinary and academic areas of the merged institution, and the objectives of the internal quality assurance system were closely linked to the strategic objectives of the institution. As one of the former institutional leaders of the college expressed it:

> For us the internal quality assurance system was an integration project – the aim was to create a joint identity and a common institutional culture. (Int B2)

While the system that was created earlier had a strong leadership involvement, the design of the system strongly emphasized creating what today is often described as a quality culture, with formal and informal meeting places, and opportunities for dialogue.

Somewhat paradoxically, informants admitted that while the quality assurance system had a strong strategic focus, this strategic focus did not address the specific quality challenges found within the college. As one of the key designers of the system acknowledged:

> It is unfortunate in retrospect that the system we designed, which was created after lengthy discussions, did not address the key challenge of our college – drop-out and completion of students. Initially, we saw the system as a way to integrate the institution while responding to the demands of the national quality assurance system. (Int B)

After the merger, now being part of a larger university, the reflection was that the administrative reporting had increased while the more dialogue-based arenas for informal reflection had been reduced in numbers and in significance.

Strategic quality improvement was previously perceived as a key driver behind the design of the system, where a process described as decentralized, dialogue-based and having a focus on the design and delivery of the study programs was implemented. According to the informants, the recent merger had contributed to changing the system and its characteristics. While dialogue was an important characteristic of the previous quality assurance system, it had become less important, and the informants noticed that the reporting requirements were much stronger and more detailed than before:

> Compared to what we used to do, the merger creates quite large challenges for us. Accountability and the reporting to feed into this process is much more prevalent, and these administrative processes that we managed to protect the staff from before are difficult to handle. We have much less administrative resources that the university, so the academic staff will notice the change. (Int B2)

In general, the change was described as a move away from an informal, dialogue-based, and problem-focused quality assurance system to a more formalized and accountability focused system. At the same time, the previous college had been pushing the institutional leadership at the newly merged university to clarify how local autonomy and institutional standards were to be balanced. The argument from the previous college was that considerable autonomy should be granted to both campuses and to the study programs – an argument that was seen as problematic by the central leadership of the new university.

However, according to the informants some continuity in the system is also noticeable. The emphasis on learning outcome descriptions as a key element in the quality assurance system was a key characteristic of the 'old' system, and over time this element has become even stronger in the new system, not least due to continuous national emphasis. Such formal learning outcomes were not seen as an element of bureaucratization, but rather a way to ease communication between teachers, administrators and those having leadership responsibilities at different levels:

> We have worked a lot to create a common vocabulary for discussing quality, and I would
> say we have succeeded in that (…due to the focus on learning outcomes). We did not want
> to have a 'commercial' quality assurance system, but a system with local ownership.
> Currently, we can talk about quality in similar ways across the whole campus. (Int B1)

Although the internal quality assurance system could be characterized as decentralized, local quality enhancement processes had several elements in common. One such element was the emphasis on engaging students in the quality enhancement processes. While those in charge of the quality assurance system acknowledged that it has been difficult to get the students interested and heavily involved in the processes initiative, student representatives were still quite positive as to the effect of these efforts:

> As a student representative, I do see big changes. Several of the initiatives that have been
> implemented has worked well, including how examination is conducted, and levelling out
> the work-load in the study programs. (Int B3)

One of the changes noticed as part of the recent merger was that drop-out and completion issues were stronger on the institutional agenda, and consequently, more important in the various quality initiatives taken. As one of the informants argued:

> We have recently initiated a large project on drop-out and completion where student support
> and supervision are a key element. This is an initiative that is a blueprint of actions and
> routines the university has had for years, and that is now adopted throughout the merged
> institution. This project seems to make a difference, not least related to completion

In general, the case illustrates how quality assurance systems may shift focus and characteristics as part of a merger process. A system that initially was designed as an identity-builder and tool for organizational integration emphasizing informal procedures, dialogue and with a high level of trust has – because of the merger - shifted into a more formal system with distinct accountability characteristics. However, the new system has also brought about a stronger problem-focus, with an emphasis on drop-out and completion, which seemed to produce results.

Case C

The third case is a relatively large institution that has been formed after a recent merger operation. At the time of the underlying study, this university college was preparing an application for becoming a university. After the merger process, it had four faculties, located on a bi-campus system that was relatively well-connected. The institution was professionally oriented in its study programs. Case C had an elaborated, detailed formal internal quality system, which could be interpreted as relatively centralized. At the same time, after the merger the faculties had become highly autonomous in the management and administration of their primary processes, and they did have a direct responsibility for developing a faculty quality management approach that should obviously fit within the overall institutional system.

An important characteristic of the quality system was its strong reporting orientation. The respondents described how data produced in the system led to many quality enhancement measures in the institution. The system was also described as rather complicated:

> we have this fantastically or awfully intricate system of details and boxes and arrows and lines and people who are supposed to deliver different kinds of reports to different deadlines. Some of these are related and overlapping, some of them ask similar things with somewhat different labels, it is almost a wild troll of a reporting system. We are now working with trying to streamline this system, to structure the internal processes a little more and perhaps assure that parts of the texts can be used in multiple reports. (Int C1)

Similar comments were made in all interviews, where another respondent called it a "mammoth" of a system that demanded a lot of energy. Yet, despite the complicated system and considerable reporting, according to the respondents, only few of these measures were ever implemented, with most being instead presented in the external accountability reports the institution produced. The same respondent continued:

> perhaps we also collect data too broadly, we do not have time to solve issues before we are already introducing new things, so we never get through the whole 'loop'. Perhaps we should focus on one thing at a time, our current system seems both too detailed and too broad at the same time. (Int C1)

Similar concerns over the unclear "quality loop" and reporting too many issues were also expressed in other interviews, where respondents emphasized that while there was continuous work with the internal reports, there was a need to structure the measures that were identified. At the same time, this dysfunctionality could also create frustration, as expressed by another respondent:

> When departments have to report and see that the same thing is still there, even if they have reported it earlier, and nothing has happened. They also cannot tell the students that the issue has been addressed, so this creates frustration and actually in itself becomes a barrier for an effective quality system. (Int C2)

The institutional quality system showed an imbalance between its external compliance and internal enhancement aims, as respondents described multiple external demands for information, including demands from the QA agency. The QA agency was not only viewed as an external partner or an agency expecting the production of specific data, but also as a barrier for internal development. Given that the QA agency was mostly in contact with the central administration, one of the respondents noted that the communication downwards could become the "game of whispers" with multiple interpretation processes.

One important circumstance was that the recent merger affected in practice the room for strategic development (in the area of quality enhancement) in the institution. In addition, also the ambition to apply on short notice after the merger for university status implied that the attention, and leadership capacity for strategic quality enhancement work inside the institution was relatively limited. Therefore, it can be argued that the institution was in the first place prioritizing the expectations of the external QA agency, and had not (yet) developed an internal translation

process that addressed in full the needs of the study program leaders and academic staff in their quality enhancement work.

In one of the four faculties a lack of coordination between the leadership and the administrative staff seemed to have been a problem regarding quality work. The role of the study committee (in Norwegian *studieutvalg*) remained rather unclear according to the respondents. A new initiative in the faculty was to hold meetings of faculty and departmental leadership and study administrations on a bi-monthly basis. However, these meetings emphasized administrative rather than strategic priorities. The respondent(s) indicated that they had arenas for collaboration with other administrative staff from other faculties (Int C2, C4), but working with faculty leadership seemed to be more dependent on individual relationships. At the same time, one of the respondents noted that there had been considerable shifts in leadership at the institution as well and the respondent interpreted this as a possible explanation for the lack of implementation of measures.

Overall, the system was much more accountability and reporting than enhancement oriented, as expressed as a common theme in the interviews. However, there also seemed to be a disconnection between administrative and academic logic in quality work:

> the way those two groups [administration and academic staff]… well there is a tradition here that administrative staff […] should keep their distance, but I believe there would be much gained if the two groups would collaborate more

There were no indications that the external accountability orientation had a negative effect per se on the quality of the study programs offered, but various respondents expressed their concerns about the relative weak links between the various governance levels of the institution with respect to the institutional management of quality work activities. The quality system seemed to work more bureaucratically than strategically because of this. At the same time, various new staff members had been appointed at central faculty level positions in the quality system, and these could be regarded as part of the efforts to strengthen the internal quality enhancement orientation of the quality system.

Case D

Case institution D is a university college with roots dating back long time ago as it was established as a teacher training college. At the time of the underlying research project the studies offered were varied and included, amongst other things, media and communication, teacher training education, social sciences, and social planning and governance.

The internal quality system was characterized by a set of clearly defined roles as well as responsibilities. Numerous bodies across the institution had a defined role in

quality assurance, such as the strategic study council, the council for learning environment, as well as councils for research quality, internationalization and employment conditions. In addition, each faculty had set up its own study quality council.

According to the internal quality assurance system, the central strategic study council had a key coordinating role, which included the responsibility for the annual educational quality reports. These reports were produced by the individual program councils, sent to the central strategic study council, which used these reports for preparing the discussions to the board of the university college. The strategic study council discussed both the quality of the educational programs at the university college as well as the educational provision of the institution, for example, which educational programs should be run. New suggestions for educational programs were discussed by the strategic study council, and it acted as an advisory body to the board.

At the faculty level, the university college had set up thematic groups for study programs as part of its internal quality system. In these thematic groups, students, the teacher responsible for the course and other teachers involved in the course met and discussed educational quality. At faculty level, the dean is responsible for the annual quality report that was sent to the rector and pro-rector and was discussed in the strategic study council. Discussions were also organized between the heads of departments and the dean. Moreover, this report was on the agenda of the faculty meeting.

Each spring and fall, evaluations of all of the courses were conducted. At this level, the study program leaders wrote reports as well on the courses and study programs. Course evaluation reports and study program reports were compiled into a quality report which was delivered to the study administration. These faculty quality reports were used as input to the quality report of the university college that the study administration presented to the strategic study council and then to the institutional board. Furthermore, each fall, as a preparation for the reporting of national statistics, completion statistics for the faculty level were prepared.

From the interviews, the impression emerges that the formal and administrative elements of the QA processes were well disseminated throughout the organization. The university college's internal quality assurance system specified roles and responsibilities in detail, as can be illustrated by the following examples:

- The director of the university college has the responsibility for the functioning of the quality assurance system and for the administrative support system related to educational quality.
- The study director has the overall responsibility for the student administrative support system at the university college.
- The study director initiates in cooperation with the faculties internal evaluations of the educational provision to ensure the educational quality. Moreover, the study director runs statistics that the faculties may use in their quality work.

Administrative routines were promoted as central to the system, but also with the aim of quality improvement. At the same time, there some tensions between this strong administrative logic and the underlining of quality work as a continuous process and dialogue. In one of the interviews this was expressed as follows:

> Well, I feel that the quality concept should be seen as a process in which one has dialogue between students, academic staff and leadership. Something which one continuously develops. I do not think one can clearly define quality. It is more about continuous work. (Int D3)

There was also an interesting acknowledgement on behalf of the administration that the quality system may seem overwhelming and too detailed, as commented in one of the interviews:

> My impression is that this is a bit too much, that maybe we have a quality system that is a bit too much. In this case, I refer to the quality reports, that they might be too detailed. On our side, we think this is important because it makes clear how the quality work should be conducted also at the level of courses. Not the least that the students are involved in the quality work because it is very important. They are the users. (Int D2)

The responsibilities and tasks related to strategic quality improvement resided with the top leadership of the university college. In this sense, there was a clear linkage to the leadership. Moreover, the linkages and the roles with leadership were anchored in the university college's central board, which had the overarching responsibility for the quality assurance system and for approving the annual report on educational quality. In addition, it was stated clearly that the rector is the main responsible person for the quality of the educational provision at the university college. The rectorate has the daily responsibility for following up the quality assurance system and for establishing and implementing measures to enhance the competence of the academic staff. There also seemed to be a strong feeling of ownership and commitment to quality work at the level of leadership. In one of the interviews it was stated that:

> We have put a lot of energy in implementing the new regulation, we put a lot of energy in the national student survey, I personally have been responsible for this. (...) This is something that is important for the leadership. (Int D3)

However, despite the formally clear linkages and descriptions of roles and responsibilities, much work seemed to be related to creating the links between the administrative procedures and leadership. As stated by the same respondent:

> Well, we have a couple of committees that seek to couple this (…) so there is a system of reporting from the students' groups to the strategic level (…) There is a kind of coupling though from the work of students to the board. But the way is long. So, we work with it all the time, and try to see what is the most efficient, how do we get valuable feedback regarding educational quality. (Int D3)

In addition, educational improvement locally and the linkages between the QA system and educational improvement processes were well ordered. The deans had the overall responsibility for the quality work and for enhancing a quality culture at

the faculties. This included the responsibility for organizing the quality work of the faculty, drafting and publishing the guidelines for the quality work and making these available to staff and students, implementing the evaluations and presenting the results to the study quality councils in faculties well as other relevant arenas. The heads of departments/study program leaders/head of studies were responsible for planning, coordination, evaluation and quality enhancement of educational programs including practice periods.

Study program leaders/head of studies prepared a short presentation of the quality work related to the program for which they were responsible to the students at the beginning of the semester. The person responsible for the course was responsible for the planning, coordination, evaluation and quality enhancement of the course. The person responsible for the course contributed to the evaluations of the programs of which the course was a part. The responsible teacher was responsible for providing research-based education, supervision and follow up, as well as contributing to the evaluation of the program and the courses. Yet in practice, the impression was that the quality work was not heartily approved by the academic staff, as expressed in one of the interviews:

> Well, we have these councils for educational quality in which teachers and students should meet in which educational quality is the theme. For these meeting there is, I do not know if I should call it an instruction, but, at least a guideline for which themes to discuss in these meetings. (Int D1)

According to the quality system, the students shared responsibility for the enhancement of educational quality at the university college. Hence, the students were represented in boards and decision making/advisory boards at the university college. They took part, for example, in student evaluations and student satisfaction surveys that the university college initiated. The role of the thematic councils was to be an arena for feedback and evaluations during study and it aimed at developing a critical attitude. From some of the interviews it might be concluded that there was a weaker understanding of how the students contributed to the strategic quality work, as noted by one student:

> I have not seen a strong priority from the leadership toward my study program. It might be accidentally, but from the university college centrally, I have not experienced anything of a strategy. It is understandable, we have other things that are more important. (Int D5)

In general, the case illustrated how quality assurance systems may become strongly routine based and formally interwoven with educational practices. This case seemed to be representative for those institutions that combine a strong compliance towards external expectations with a rather small community of academic leadership and administrative staff, which provide the basis for a strong implementation of rules and regulations. It seems as if quality assurance was an issue the leadership and the administration took care of. The impression from the interviews, although not with teachers, was that the academic side of the organization was not very substantially involved except for taking part in the formal procedures.

Concluding Remarks

Internal quality assurance can be said to have reached a stage of maturity in Norwegian higher education where the novelty and perhaps even the anxiety of establishing such systems have disappeared. In the outset of this chapter, we identified three functions/roles of internal quality assurance systems: adhering to standards, supporting strategic leadership, and local quality enhancement. We also underlined that internal quality assurance systems are established and `work` in institutions with different characteristics and history, opening for different possible ways of combining external standards and local institutional characteristics. The considerable variation between the internal quality systems in the four case institutions demonstrates structural variation, concerning whether the systems are centralized or decentralized, and how these systems cater to diverse functions. In all the institutions, independent of their formal legal status, there was consciousness of addressing external demands stemming from the national QA agency. Nevertheless, these external demands had in most instances been translated into the local context, although with varying linkages to strategic leadership and local practices. The question then becomes what kind of translations this adaptation has resulted in.

Recent mergers between institutions have stirred up the status quo, triggering substantial changes in the institutions that are going through merger processes and their aftermath. This is not surprising as new institutions need to develop new systems of quality assurance. However, since mergers result in larger and more complex institutions, internal quality systems can become an instrument for creating order and stability in this situation. Such systems can both emphasize the need to follow standards, or they can also remain decentralized, depending on the dynamics of the overall merger process. When institutions undergo more comprehensive integration processes, internal quality systems can both function as enablers and constraints in the overall merger process. Their enabling role is unique as a way to establish coherence and a systematic overview of activities, roles and responsibilities. For a newly merged organization, these functions are vital as a way to secure rapid organizational capability and functionality. However, there is a price to be paid in that the work that has been put into the internal quality assurance systems in the formerly independent institutions easily is 'nullified' (Bendixen and Jacobsen 2017), in the sense that these systems have to be re-built from scratch. By referring to the dimensions and dilemmas involved in quality work presented in Chap. 1, it is possible to argue that the quality systems examined indeed can be characterized as quite generic and formal.

However, in cases where the internal quality assurance systems had matured and become more distinct over time, it was also possible to see how such systems – and the rules and routines that follow suit – could become linked to educational practices, albeit to varying degrees and with varying strategies. In one of the institutions, this process seems to be conditioned by its small size, while other instances of linking internal quality systems to educational practices were dependent on active leaders who have kept an emphasis on strategic work with quality high on the agenda.

While a classic insight from the analysis of internal quality assurance system repeatedly underlines the role of leaders in creating these systems (Brennan and Shah 2000), our findings can be said to nuance this factor by pointing to the danger of engaged leaders emphasizing "systems" rather than local relevance.

A result of this can be a 'mammoth' of a system that becomes overcomplicated and bureaucratic, and where the quality work conducted is closely aligned with managerial agendas. Interestingly, while such systems perhaps on the outset represented a local translation of external quality assurance demands, they can nevertheless, and as a consequence of strong managerial influence, become decoupled within the organization where a formalized, hierarchical and standardized quality system obtains a life of its own. The distinction between adhering to external standards and the strategic role such systems may play within the organization are in these instances in danger of collapsing when the institutional leadership gets involved in the process. As institutional leaders ultimately are accountable for the institutional systems developed, their internal strategies often run the danger of merely reflecting national priorities and initiatives. This is not least seen when issues such as drop-out and completion become key indicators of the internal quality assurance systems. In this way, the political side of quality assurance (Beerkens 2015) ends up as dominating other functions internal quality assurance system are expected to have.

Our findings nuance the classical underlining that management involvement is key for developing well-functioning quality assurance systems (Bollaert 2014). While one could argue that managerial involvement is a necessity for such systems to be taken seriously, we also found that the quality work that is undertaken as part of the internal quality assurance systems displays the strong weight given to formal roles, routines and procedures to make the systems work, while the link to local quality enhancement of educational provision is often far less visible. The quality work conducted within these systems seems much less oriented towards discovery, the interesting practices, and the innovations that take place in the educational delivery.

From a historical perspective, and compared to other regions in Europe, Danø and Stensaker (2007) have argued that the Nordic countries have managed to uphold a relatively good balance between improvement and accountability. The design of the national quality assurance system does play an important role for how much autonomy institutions have when designing their own systems. As illustrated earlier, the criteria specified in Norway do provide institutions with considerable autonomy as to how they could design their own systems. Our study suggests that this autonomy is still captured by the national agenda through the involvement of institutional leaders. In other words, the institutional autonomy could be utilized far more that what currently is the case. This also poses a dilemma concerning redesign of internal quality systems. While changing the system (always) seems to be a tempting option, these systems also need time to mature. At the same time, this maturity also needs to be nurtured, so that these internal systems can function in a relevant manner for the specific organization. It is by no means a goal that all systems need to cater for all functions and demands, and that it would even be possible for a single

system to maximize its relevance concerning standards, leadership and local practices. Each institutional quality system needs to interact in a productive manner with other organizational structures, processes and practices – integrating the informal dimensions and specifics of quality work to the formal aspects of quality assurance. The institutional cases selected for this chapter can be seen as an indication that the capacity quality assurance systems have for paying attention to and absorbing local practices is limited, with the implication that relevant quality work taking place within the institution is not captured and utilized optimally.

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Chapter 3
The Relationship Between External Quality Assurance and the Work of Study Programme Leaders: A Comparative Study

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Introduction

The process of generating and securing quality in a study programme is often the responsibility of the leadership of the study programme, or the study programme leader. This is an important function – encompassing an integration of administrative and academic dimensions and issues within higher education institutions which often is overlooked. The function of the study programme leader is placed in the intersection of organizational and pedagogical tasks in the programme and can thus be seen as a mediator in much of the quality work going on in the programme. As quality in education is actually delivered at study programme level, there is a need for 'quality work' to be undertaken involving a range of activities at the local and departmental level: curriculum development, staff qualifications, and organizing teaching and learning as well as resources and infrastructure (Bollaert 2014). There has also been an increasing emphasis on educational leadership as key for quality development (Gibbs et al. 2009).

During the last decades, all European countries have developed national external quality assurance systems (EQA) (Dill and Beerkens 2010). The systems vary, both between the emphasis on quality control or development, in organisation of the

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systems and between how they operate. In addition, most universities have established their own internal quality assessment systems as a response to, or even demanded by, the national systems (Pratasavitskaya and Stensaker 2010; Manatos et al. 2017). Consequently, most EQA systems have been developed with the aim to have an effect on teaching and learning. While there is general evidence that EQA may indeed have impacts within higher education institutions (Dill and Beerkens 2010; Stensaker et al. 2011), we have still limited knowledge of the relationship between different forms of EQA and how teaching and learning is designed and organised at study programme level. This is an important issue as more knowledge on the impact of EQA could contribute to better designed EQA systems, and not least improved quality of teaching and learning. It is also important as there are repeated accusations that poorly designed, or overly accountability oriented EQA systems may have severe damaging effects on the 'quality work' conducted at institutional level (Brennan and Shah 2000; Burnes et al. 2014). Hence, in the current chapter we analyse the relationship between national quality assessment systems and the leadership and organisation of quality work within universities.

Evidently, to investigate this issue there is a need for more comparative research designs allowing us to control for national differences in EQA systems, while keeping a range of other national characteristics as similar as possible. In the current chapter we draw on data from a survey directed at study programme leaders (programme level) in Danish and Norwegian universities. Denmark and Norway are two countries that historically have had quite similar university systems with respect to their governance, internal organization and academic culture. However, in the last two decades, the two countries have developed quite different EQA systems (Kalpazidou Schmidt 2017), which create a quasi-experimental setting where our research interest can be explored.

The 'Quality Work' Conducted at Institutional Level and the Larger Environment

EQA is one of the most visible outcomes of the Bologna process, and a central tool in pursuing one of the key aims of the Bologna process, i.e. harmonization. However, the European Standards and Guidelines specifying how EQA are to be conducted, open for EQA systems designed in very different ways. Hence, as governmental tools, EQA may cater for different purposes and be instruments for solving various issues (Dill and Beerkens 2010). As such, EQA systems can for example be aiming at stimulating institutional autonomy by being designed at enhancing and assessing how higher education institutions take responsibility for developing their internal quality assurance systems (Pratasavitskaya and Stensaker 2010; Bollaert 2014). In this design, EQA is intended to have an indirect effect by developing the

institutional governance and management systems which again will have a positive impact on the educational delivery. But EQA systems can also be an instrument for more direct inspection of the quality of teaching and learning, for example by systematically scrutinizing and evaluating the educational delivery at programme level without paying much attention as to whether the higher education institutions have well-functioning internal quality management systems (Brennan and Shah 2000). Hence, it can be imagined that 'indirect' and 'direct' EQA plays out very differently at programme level within higher education institutions, and that EQA stimulate to different ways of working with quality.

Indirect EQA will most likely have focus on the institutional level and concentrate on the governance and management of whatever system institutions may have developed (Manatos et al. 2017). For institutions, what matters are effective ways in organizing this institutional responsibility, to collect and analyse data where educational delivery can be compared, and to have accountability systems where information can float seamlessly throughout the organization (Bryman 2007). An implication is that these systems contain several administrative elements emphasizing the existence of institutional systems, routines and reporting.

Direct EQA, on the other hand, can be expected to have a focus on the study programme level, and on how the educational delivery is a result of specified learning outcomes, and subsequent teaching and learning activities which are linked to adequate evaluation and examination. Direct EQA scrutinize study programmes and their internal coherence (Biggs and Tang 2011), and the leadership and routines associated with this activity. For institutions exposed to EQA design of this type, what matters are not quality management systems as such, but convincing delivery of teaching and learning (Mårtensson et al. 2014). A possible implication is that those having leadership responsibility at this level need to be practical problem solvers, balancing different expectations and interests (Stensaker et al. 2018). Furthermore, as direct EQA is concerned about the quality of the programme, one might expect that the 'quality work' conducted have consistent academic focus emphasizing programme content and cohesion.

As EQA have matured in numerous countries, there is also the possibility that the differences between different forms of EQA are blurring, not least as new elements are being included in the EQA portfolio. For example, recent research has suggested that mandatory introduction of learning outcomes in higher education may reduce the potential gap between indirect and more administratively oriented, and more direct and academically oriented EQA designs (Aamodt et al. 2017), having the potential of reinventing collegiality and collective responsibilities (Burnes et al. 2014). Governmental traditions and reforms may also affect the ways in which EQA is translated into higher education institutions – both with respect to enhancing and hindering their implementation (Møthe et al. 2015; Irving 2015).

Empirical Context, Data and Methods

Country Description and Case Selection

The current chapter is using data from a comparative survey directed at study programme leaders in the university sector in the two countries. As cases, Denmark and Norway are perfectly suited for investigating the potential relationship between 'quality work' and EQA conducted at study programme level.

Denmark and Norway are very similar countries with respect to their higher education systems, and the Norwegian system was historically developed as a direct result of the Danish-Norwegian Union in the early 1800s. As such, university traditions and internal organization of higher education institutions have many shared values and norms, which have been reinforced over the years by the Scandinavian welfare tradition focusing on tuition free higher education, and a relatively high level of public funding of the higher education sector. Hence, compared to most other countries the university sector in Norway and Denmark, and how higher education institutions in the two countries operate are quite alike.

Still, some differences do exist between Denmark and Norway, not least with respect to EQA (Kalpazidou Schmidt 2017). Denmark was one of the innovators of EQA in Europe and started up with a national system already in the early 1990s. At that time and for several decades afterwards, direct EQA was the dominating approach used where external assessments scrutinised all higher education programmes offered by Danish universities, and where a strong focus also was on how study programmes offered was relevant for the Danish labour market (Thune 1996). Norway started up with systematic EQA later than Denmark, and it was only in the early 2000s that a national accreditation system was in place. However, contrary to Denmark, the Norwegian approach to EQA was the indirect one where quality assurance were seen as an instrument for stimulating institutions to manage and take responsibility for their increasing autonomy (Haakstad 2001). As such, in Norwegian universities, no single study programmes had to be exposed to external assessment as the EQA system only focused on whether the institutional quality management systems were existing and well-functioning.

Since the initial start-up of EQA in Denmark and Norway, both the Danish and the Norwegian higher education system have undergone further reforms including attempts to further increase institutional autonomy, the build-up of a more dominant hierarchical governance model within universities, and quasi-voluntary mergers within the two higher education systems together with changes in the funding systems (Kalpazidou Schmidt 2012). In general, these reforms are quite similar to reforms in many other European countries. However, the reforms can be said to have been more radical in Denmark compared to Norway. While the Danish universities were established as self-owning institutions with a contract-based relationship with the government, the Norwegian universities continued as state-owned institutions although with special privileges. Norway has also kept more of the collegial steering system within institutions than what is the case for Denmark.

As indicated above, both the Danish and the Norwegian higher education system have in the last decade been exposed to several merger processes that have changed the institutional landscape fundamentally. In both countries, the main driver behind these mergers was to create larger, more robust institutions. These changes have so far affected the college sector in Denmark to a limited degree, while in Norway several former university colleges have been upgraded to university status. Hence, while the university sector is quite similar in the two countries, the college sector is not. Due to this fact, the current study has only selected universities as cases.

Data and Methodology

The data is based on two surveys among study programme leaders collected in Denmark and Norway, hereafter labels as study programme leaders. The Norwegian data was collected from December 2015 to March 2016, and the Danish data from September to October 2016. The questionnaires used in the two countries are practically identical, but with a few adaptations due to differences in the names of positions and internal organisation at institutions in the two countries. A major challenge in the data collection in both countries was to identify the population, since study programme leader is not a formal position in all institutions. We asked the study directors or equivalent administrative units to submit names and e-mail addresses, and in addition the study programme leaders were identified through universities' home pages.

In Norway, the target group consisted of 1010 people, of whom 551 or 54.6% responded. In Denmark, 496 questionnaires were distributed, 24 were excluded since they did not function as study programme leaders, and 220 or 46.6% responded. The survey in both countries only covered study programme leaders who have been recruited among the scientific staff, not study programme leaders recruited among administrative staff at the institution.

In Norway, data was collected in all types of public higher education institutions, and in Denmark in universities and university colleges. Our analyses are limited to the university sector, which is quite similar in the two countries, leaving out the Danish colleges and the Norwegian university colleges. The Norwegian data presented furthermore cover only the "old" universities (Oslo, Bergen, NTNU and Tromsø), while the "new" universities and the specialised universities are kept outside.

The survey was mainly explorative aimed at uncovering the potential roles and responsibilities of the study programme leaders. Below, we present findings on how the study programme leaders perceive and assess their own work, and how important they perceive a number of qualities, aspects and characteristics of the study programme they are in charge of. We have run t-tests to control for significant country differences.

Findings

In general, one could expect that formal titles and formalised roles related to managerial responsibilities at study programme level could be an effect of both indirect and direct forms of EQA, although such formalisation might be more expected in direct EQA systems as such systems would more likely be embedded in national standards regarding study programme organization and delivery. In indirect EQA systems, national standardisation is perhaps less likely as such indirect systems often is intended to stimulate to institutional autonomy. A consequence is that institutions are more likely to create internal quality management systems tailored to institutional traditions and strategic objectives.

As Table 3.1 indicates, there are distinct differences between Denmark and Norway regarding formal titles for those having study programme management responsibilities. In Norway, the titles used for the role of study programme leaders vary considerably, and the most striking difference is that a much wider range of titles is used in Norway than in Denmark. While formal titles not necessarily indicate real differences in roles and responsibilities, they do reflect the degree of standardisation regarding formal organization at this level. As such, Norwegian institutions demonstrate a strikingly lack of standardisation, where differences have been identified both between and within institutions. This finding is in line with what we might expect from indirect and direct EQA approaches, although it should also be underlined that the variety within Norwegian universities also indicates the lack of distinct institutional EQA systems.

Graversen et al. (2017) and Aamodt et al. (2016) also point to other country differences in the roles of the study programme leaders The Danish study programme leaders more often than their Norwegian counterparts state that they have a specific work description, specific tasks, responsibilities and reporting demands in their position. The differences are not very large but systematic which indicates that the role as study programme leader is more formalised in Denmark than in Norway. Furthermore, the Danish study programme leaders are slightly more experienced than their Norwegian colleagues (Graversen et al. 2017, fig. 4.1; Aamodt et al. 2016,

Table 3.1 Titles used for study programme leaders. Percent

	Norway	Denmark
Study programme leader	43	
Study leader	10	75
Vice-study leader	1	1
Coordinator	6	7
Programme assembly leader	26	
Head of department	7	
Educational leader	4	7
Dean	2	
Other	2	11
N = 100%	183	181

fig. 2.1). This may be because the position of study programme leaders was introduced earlier in Denmark, or because the study programme leaders keep the position for a longer time. Based on the longer experiences, one may conclude that the study programme leader role is more mature in Denmark.

The role as a study programme leader is conducted within a specific institutional and political context, and in interaction with several scientific bodies (boards or committees). Some of these bodies have an advisory role, other have decisive functions on the establishment or the modifications of the study programmes. Our main impression is that the role of the study programme leaders in both countries have a somehow weak formal administrative anchoring, but this is considerably more visible in Norway than in Denmark.

The relative weak anchoring of the role as study programme leaders in both countries should not necessarily be interpreted as the role of study programme leaders is unimportant or dispensable. On the contrary: they communicate and collaborate with several institutional bodies and persons, both among the scientific staff and the administration (Graversen et al. 2017, table 6.6; Aamodt et al. 2016, table 4.7). It should also be added that the study programme leaders usually are very experienced and have a high academic rank, primarily professors or associate professors (Graversen et al. 2017, table 4.4, Aamodt et al. 2016, table 2.4).

Study programme leaders have a range of tasks, which imply contact with several different stakeholders, (Table 3.2). When asked, the tasks reported most frequently in both countries, was "having contact with the study administration and "securing good quality in the study programme". Also "changing the composition of subjects" and "reporting of results" occurs frequently, but this is considerably more common in Denmark than in Norway. The Danish leaders also have more often contact with students. Study programme leaders seem to have a limited responsibility for changing the content of subjects; this is mainly the responsibility of the academic staff. In conclusion, the general picture is that Danish study programme leaders report to have a broader set of responsibilities than their Norwegian colleagues.

While formal tasks and responsibilities are indications of more formal roles, we also asked the study programme leaders to report on their degree of autonomy to make decisions on various matters concerning the programme. Between 10 and

Table 3.2 Tasks and responsibilities of the study programme leaders. Percent who responded "to a great extent"

	Norway	Denmark
Change the composition of subject[a]	53	72
Change the content of the subjects[a]	23	31
Quality assurance	68	72
Reporting of results[a]	53	68
Organise and report student evaluations	35	41
Contact with students[a]	43	60
Contact with the study administration	82	87

[a]Statistically significant country differences, at 5% level

Table 3.3 To what extent are
you free to make decisions on
the following matters?
(Percent responding "to a
great extent" or "to some
extent")

	Norway	Denmark
Type of teaching	58	65
Type of assessment	59	67
Reading lists	40	39
Subject descriptions	72	69
Learning outcome descriptions	77	73
Staffing	48	41

[a]Statistically significant country differences, at 5% level

32% of the respondents answered "to a great extent". This percentage might suggest that the overall statement "free to make decisions" is a quite strong expression. Therefore, in these analyses the percentages displayed in Table 3.3 also include 'to some extent'. Table 3.3 shows that there are still some differences between Denmark and Norway, and a slight tendency that the Danish study programme leaders – in general – have somewhat more freedom to make decisions on teaching and assessment in the programme, while the Norwegian colleagues have slightly more influence on staffing decisions. These differences are however not significant, but they show a coherent pattern. This pattern indicate that indirect EQA systems such as the Norwegian one might have a more administrative focus (subject and learning outcome descriptions, staffing etc.), while the direct EQA system, which the Danish one is an example of, would tilt towards more academic issues (such as types of teaching and types of assessment).

In the survey, questions concerning quality assurance and how issues related to quality assurance compare to other pressing issues handled by study programme leaders, were also deployed. A key dimension here is what study programme leaders think is the most important input for quality development and what they think are the most important aims and measures of quality development.

In Table 3.4, the responses by study programme leaders in Denmark and Norway shows several similarities. In both countries, knowledge development in the field is perceived as one of the most important input factors for quality development of the study programmes, but student feedback and evaluations seems equally important. As student evaluations have become a mandatory and integrated part of quality assurance regardless of whether EQA is indirect or direct, this finding is perhaps not so surprising although it might be more difficult to interpret, as attention to student evaluation may, on the one hand, reflect an increasing emphasis on teaching quality, while it can also reflect a drift towards consumer orientation in higher education.

The responses from Denmark and Norway do show two interesting and significant differences though. Signals from the labour market is considered as a much more important input in Denmark and can be seen as a direct reflection of the quite long tradition for linking EQA and relevance issues in Denmark.

The institutional quality system is considered as more important for quality development in Denmark, contrary to what we expected due to the long tradition of

Table 3.4 Input for quality development

	Norway	Denmark
Student feedback and evaluations	70	72
Knowledge development in the field	66	70
Labour marked signals[a]	27	54
National quality assurance system	27	26
Institutional quality assurance system[a]	37	55

[a]Statistically significant country differences, at 5% level

Table 3.5 Aims and measures for quality development

	Norway	Denmark
Strengthening coherence in study programmes[a]	78	90
Updating the curriculum content	64	72
Strengthened contact with employers[a]	40	73
Reduce drop-out[a]	45	71
Improve follow-up of students	51	46
More student-active teaching[a]	56	77
Improve recruitment to the study programme	46	52
Develop a good teaching culture among staff[a]	46	55
Strengthened administrative support to the study programme[a]	19	31
Increased scientific competencies in the staff	28	31
Strengthening R&D-based teaching	31	46
Develop and implement ICT in teaching	37	43

[a]Statistically significant country differences at 5% level

evaluating single programs in this country. This finding may relate to the fact that the EQA system in Denmark was in the start of a transformation at the time when the survey was conducted – a transformation from a direct EQA (more like the Norwegian one), towards a changed and more indirect EQA system. As such, institutional quality management systems were in the development phase at the time, which most likely might have affected this particular response, giving it a higher rating than it would have gotten if the survey had been run at a different point in time.

Turning to what measures study programme leaders perceive are most important for improving the quality of their study programme (Table 3.5), some of the previous differences between the two countries become visible once again. In general, the Danish study programme leaders put a significantly stronger emphasis on practically all the statements related to aims and measures for quality development than the Norwegian colleagues did. This difference should not be read as a stronger need for changes due to more dissatisfaction with programme quality in Denmark, but rather reflecting our initial expectation that direct EQA systems make study programme leaders at programme level more accountable than a more indirect EQA approach would to. The extremely high percentage of Danish study programme

leaders that prioritise programme coherence and integration, focusing on reducing drop-out rates, and is interested in strengthening the links to the labour market, are all indications of 'quality work' where the external political agenda is important, e.g. funding and financing of education programmes. Here, the direct EQA system that has operated in Denmark, with its strong focus on the efficiency and relevance of the programmes to the labour market, may have led to this focused attention and consciousness among the study programme leaders in Denmark about what to prioritise.

According to the study programme leaders in both countries, the most important aim for quality development is to strengthen coherence in study programmes, even if they are quite satisfied with the coherence in their programme. This apparent contradiction may indicate that in both countries continued work to improve coherence in study programmes is regarded as an important quality development measure – regardless of the EQA system.

It is somewhat surprising that the emphasis on reducing dropout is larger in Denmark than in Norway. Dropout could be said to be an equally important problem in Norway, at least according to OECD statistics (OECD 2016), and is an issue also high on the political agenda. It is, however, possible that these differences between the two countries do not primarily reflect the severity of the problem itself, but rather political attention and how this attention is passed on to the study programme leaders through the QA system, and through the funding system in particular. The fact that the funding system in Denmark is based on a 'taximeter' logic,[1] making drop-out and completion rates important measures, may very well have influenced this strong focus on reducing drop-outs.

Discussion and Final Reflections

In this chapter we have argued that study programme leaders are important in the process of 'doing quality work' at the institution – not least as the ones having the responsibility to link together administrative and academic issues in program delivery. Further, the ways in which EQA systems are designed affect how 'quality work' is conducted at institutional level, i.e. the formalization and task associated with study programme leadership and how these leaders prioritize among the many issues that may positively or negatively affect quality in teaching and learning. Our

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[1] The taximeter system is the primary activity-level dependent appropriation model for distributing state funding to HEI together with a number of supplementary management tools in the form of basic grants, targeted research and development funds, etc. In HE, the taximeter rates are based on the level of completed study activity (STÅ) and are determined in the annual Appropriations Acts. The intention has been to implement a system that is oriented towards results and incentives. Thus, the size of the grant is linked with the direct results of the institution, measured in terms of the annual number of fulltime students that have passed their exams or student fulltime equivalents (i.e. 30 ECTS per semester).

main expectations were that indirect EQA approaches would result in more 'administrative' oriented study programme leaders emphasizing accountability and reporting while direct EQA approaches would trigger more 'academically' oriented study programme leaders emphasizing programme content, coherence and educational delivery.

While the data certainly provide indications of 'academically' oriented study programme leaders in Denmark, this does not mean that these issues were not on the agenda by their Norwegian counterparts. However, the Danish study programme leaders have more standardized titles and job descriptions, as well as more autonomy to make changes within the study programmes – regarding both administrative and academic issues. This is a finding that also may be related to the more established Danish EQA system, and the possibility that more experience may have triggered more professionalization at institutional level. Another indication of the possible impact of a direct EQA approach is also the noticeable attention being paid to issues such as drop-out and labour market needs in Denmark, although one could argue that the political attention regarding these issues in the Norwegian political landscape has increased as well. At the same time, a few of the findings are not fully in line with our expectations regarding influences of direct versus indirect EQA systems, as the anticipated 'administrative' focus in Norway was less visible in some cases. As such, one could also argue that we should be careful in exaggerating the differences between the two countries as study programme leaders in both countries do share many task and responsibilities, and that different forms of coordination of both administrative and academic nature is central in both institutional settings.

We started out this chapter by pointing out that EQA is a governmental tool which can be used in various ways, not least to strengthen institutional autonomy (indirect EQA) or providing external accountability to society (direct EQA) (Dill and Beerkens 2010). The Danish approach clearly has a strong accountability function built into the system as demonstrated by the emphasis on relevance (labour market focus) and efficiency (drop-out). The Norwegian approach shows fewer signs of the need for accountability, although the institutional autonomy dimension is also rather invisible as perceived by the study programme leaders. The fact that the formal titles of those having managerial responsibility for study programme is highly diverse at the Norwegian universities is another indication of weakly developed 'quality management'. Why is this so? One possible explanation is that the two EQA approaches are related to other reforms in Denmark and Norway as well. For example, the EQA system in Denmark has a much longer historical track and influence than the Norwegian one, and radical governance reforms in Denmark where initiated in isolation from the existing EQA system. In Norway, one could argue that the EQA system was part of a changing relationship between the state and higher education institutions where this dimension has become more important than the internal quality management systems. As such, different EQA systems may indeed affect how the 'quality work' is perceived, introduced and conducted at the institutional level.

In the introduction, we also opened up for the possibility that the differences between the indirect and the direct approaches to EQA may blur over time as professionalization, specialization and experiences as to quality develop (Stensaker et al. 2011). Our collected empirical data do also hint at this option, for example, by the weight given to student evaluation and student feedback as a key determinant for actions taken by study programme leaders in both Denmark and Norway. The fact that Danish study programme leaders reported that they had much attention towards the institutional quality assurance system is also an indication that the transformations from a direct to an indirect EQA system, where the institutions take more responsibility for QA, in Denmark may have a strong influence at programme level within the Danish universities. The blurring between direct and indirect approaches to EQA may also be related to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance, and the possibility that national characteristics over time may be more influenced by 'European ideas' concerning how this activity should be organized (cf. Bollaert 2014).

In the introduction to this book, quality work was described as negotiated and dynamic where individuals may function as local problem solvers in their effort to balance multiple expectations. This chapter has tried to explore some of these dynamics by relating the work conducted by leaders at program level to larger system characteristics – external quality assurance. While our findings should not be interpreted as evidence of direct causal links between the different levels, the analysis do suggest that the larger environment indeed may matter for the perceived autonomy of the leaders. The different priorities in the work conducted by leaders at program level in Danish and Norwegian institutions suggests that the links between the "autonomy" and "academic" orientation should be further explored, and that further research perhaps also should look closer at how supra-national ideas, not least the ESGs, are impacting the work conducted at institutional level.

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Chapter 4
Technology as Quality Work? Educational Leaders and Teachers' Use of Digital Technology

Trine Fossland and Cathrine E. Tømte

Introduction

All over Europe, national higher education institutions' (HEIs) policies have outlined the importance of facilitating student-active teaching methods to enhance educational quality. Technology is often considered a means to facilitate this pedagogical shift. The European University Association (EUA) argues that digitalisation represents one of the three most influential challenges within higher education (Sursock 2015). However, this attention towards digitalisation within HEIs is not new. Stensaker and colleagues demonstrated more than 10 years ago that in Norway HEIs' response to the Bologna process and its ambitions towards student-active teaching and learning processes was to establish overall digitalisation strategies and to stress the importance of technological infrastructure. Their study also addressed the importance of communicating the overall purposes of using digital technology in pedagogical contexts to academic staff (Stensaker et al. 2007). Nonetheless, at least in Norway, in recent years we have seen renewed attention towards digitalisation within HEIs and the role of technology in supporting and enhancing the pedagogical shift towards student-active teaching methods, which again are often considered a means of quality in education (Lillejord et al. 2018).

In this chapter, we explore how this renewed attention to digital technology usage is manifested in teachers' and leaders' quality work within HEIs in Norway, which we interpret as the 'practices and processes involved in quality enhancement'

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57

(Elken and Stensaker this volume). Academic leaders and teachers are expected to 'translate' the national ambitions on digital technology use, including certain additional costs. We address the following research question: 'How do institutional leaders and teachers translate the national ambitions of digital technology use in their institutional quality work?'

We use empirical data, including institutional strategies and course documents, interviews with diverse leaders with responsibility for educational quality work, and study-programme leaders (survey), as well as observations and interviews with teachers and students from one institutional case study in the Quality of Norwegian Higher Education: Pathways, Practices and Performances (QNHE) research project (Fossland and Tømte 2018). Educational leadership, including the function of study-programme leader (henceforth referred to as SPL) in HEIs is often found to be difficult to define, as the same positions are constructed in many different ways.[1] In this chapter, we identify educational leaders as those staff members responsible for (a) full-time educational programmes (MA and BA) within public Norwegian universities and university colleges (Aamodt et al. 2016) and (b) education within the selected institutions in the QNHE project.

The chapter is organised in five sections. The first introduces Norway's national ambitions on the use of digital technology, while the second presents the theoretical approach to analysing leaders' and teachers' use of digital technology in quality work – that is, within a frame of translation theory and perspectives on competing institutional logics. The third section introduces the methods and data sources that underlie the chapter, while the fourth presents the findings and analysis of quality work related to national ambitions as well as describing the analytical scope. In the fifth and final section, we discuss the findings and present the major conclusions of our analyses. By identifying and analysing barriers and the translational costs included in teachers' and leaders' use of technology, we provide possible explanations for why institutional practices in digital technology usage have not developed as expected.

Technology as Quality Work: National Ambitions on Technology Usage

Over the last 10 years, the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research has flagged digital technology for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in higher education. In January 2017, the Ministry issued a white paper titled 'Culture for Quality in Higher Education', which emphasised the need for a cultural shift to promote quality work within higher education in Norway (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2017). This white paper underlines a need to strengthen digital competences, academic leadership, as well as institutional and national support structures in order to realise the potentials of digitalisation. The white paper

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[1] See Aamodt et al. (2016) for a more detailed discussion of the concept and the selection procedure.

states that "digital technology has a potential to create new conditions for teaching and learning, ways of organising content and new forms of communication and organisation" (p. 12), at the same time indicating that academic staff are not anchoring the use of digital tools in curricula, subject descriptions and work requirements (p. 51). Five main strategies and a series of actions towards realising those strategies are outlined in the paper. The Ministry wants to promote (1) ambitions on behalf of students, (2) active and varied learning activities, (3) a 'quality culture', (4) clear education management, and (5) closer integration and interaction with workplaces. The transformative aspects of these five strategies are obvious, such as using digital tools to create more active and varied learning activities, implementing new ways of sharing, communicating, and collaborating over distances, and using multimodal expressions in diverse ways (Fossland 2015).

The Ministry produces an annual status report on Norwegian higher education, which in 2018 clearly stated that HEIs are not fully exploiting the possibilities that teaching and learning with digital technology potentially can provide (Ministry of Education and Research 2018). For example, Norwegian students have reported that they experience the pedagogical use of digital technology in their education only to a small degree (Norgesuniversitetet 2015). Several findings have indicated that enthusiastic teachers are still the driving forces for educational innovation, and that the 'digitalisation of higher education' is primarily an administrative effort. Some have argued, for example, that learning management systems (LMSs) have been adopted as administrative rather than educational systems (Norgesuniversitetet 2015).

These findings indicate that certain costs are involved in the translation of Norway's national ambitions on digital technology usage. Firstly, digital technology use is time-consuming. According to Lillejord and colleagues, researchers have reported that both teachers and students face challenges when learning occurs across formats. Blended and hybrid learning methods require increased time commitment from teachers, while students are expected to develop digital competence along with content specific skills (Lillejord et al. 2018). At the same time that these demands for new pedagogical practices for teaching and learning with technology have appeared, teachers and leaders have to address several conflicting and competing institutional demands. Secondly, the number of educational leaders who promote the integration of technology in quality work is limited. Digital technology usage is often characterised by a focus on the technology itself, where teachers can be assumed to have only technical needs, such as having an understanding of how new digital tools work and having a supportive environment in which to learn about them (Conole and Fill 2005). Aagaard and colleagues found that a tool-based understanding in which traditional practices are digitalised still dominates, instead of focussing on how digitalisation can be used to transform and develop innovative pedagogical practices so that they will become more productive and relevant to society (Aagaard et al. 2018). Owens (2012) argues that in order for lecturers to develop digital technology usage in their teaching practices, they have both pedagogical and technical needs, as well as a need for support within the institution, such as support from their respective leaders. Systematic development also includes the strategies and processes of comprising digital technology usage in teaching and learning within curriculum development.

In a thematic analysis of the institutional hearings noted in the white paper on quality (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2017), Aagaard and colleagues investigated the extent of these hearings' connection of digitisation and education quality. They found that nearly all HEIs and other organisations that responded to the hearing call (except NOKUT, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education) highlighted digitalisation as being vital for developing quality work in higher education. The authors also identified discrepancies between the ministerial call for educational leadership and the very few institutions that had connected digitalisation to locally led development work on pedagogical enhancement and academic leaders' quality work (Aagaard et al. 2018).

Although this situation is not exclusive to Norway, the objective of this chapter is to further explore digital technology usage by examining how educational leaders and teachers interpret and translate Norway's national ambitions on technology usage in terms of quality work.

Translations and Translational Costs When Using Digital Technology in Quality Work

HEIs are organisations with social and functional purposes (Giddens 1991) that can be realised in a number of ways, for example by the means of digital technology. The latter can in this case be regarded as a form of 'institutional translation' of national Norwegian ambitions. Røvik (2007, 201) has argued that institutional translation (in our case, the processes on digital technology usage in higher education) requires educational leaders who possess knowledge, authority, and legitimacy to give the translation a better chance of success. A key form of reasoning in translational theory is that ideas – such as digital technology use in higher education – are adopted, changed, and transformed by *different* actors (such as the programme leaders and teachers in our study) when integrated into new contexts (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996; Brunsson and Olsen 1990). This happens because they undergo different evaluations and reasoning (cf. Czarniawska and Joerges 1996), which are expressed in the actual translation. Ideas such as technology usage move, travel, transform, and materialise in ways that can become a stage for further action and other translations. This way the original ideas and the context in which they emerge are transformed (Czarniawska and Sevòn 2005).

Within HEIs, technology usage as a phenomenon is not static and needs to be negotiated, distributed, and translated within the organisation, a process that often includes additional translational costs. One key notion comes from Weick (1976), who used educational organisations as a case when arguing that universities are examples of how 'loosely coupled' systems are both prevalent and important for organisational functioning. The formal structures, goals, and activities are only a part of the picture, according to Weick; the informal, chaotic parts can also be productive. A variety of strategies, involving language, rituals, events, the use of time and the way physical spaces is redesigned are some of the elements involved when

external environments is "enacted" (ibid). The term 'loose coupling' conveys the image that coupled events are responsive but that each event has an individual identity; the coupling can vary over time and leaders needs to reaffirm and solidify those ties that do exist (p. 276). In line with ideas within translation theory, leaders are responsible not only for being competent in evaluating ideas (before translating them) but also in 'reading and connecting' signals from the various parties involved. Røvik (2007, 2014) highlights leaders 'translator competence' as important, needed in order to carry out change and translation processes. Translator competence refers to the ability to translate practices and ideas (for instance) within or between organisational contexts and actors in a way that will give the process a better chance of success (Røvik 2007). But change and translation in the educational programmes and research activities of HEIs are not exclusively a question of leadership. On the contrary, HEIs are often portrayed as the opposite – rooted in academic autonomy, high standards of academic excellence, and an associated academic professional structure (Schofer and Meyer 2005).

There is no clear evidence that digital technology usage is especially prioritised on most academic leaders' agendas. According to Bryman's (2007) literature review on academic leaders, for example, such leaders' responsibilities are very broad and contextually bound, with a tendency to display a range of competing competencies and priorities that sometimes clash. Tømte et al.'s (2016) findings from a survey revealed that about half the deans at all public Norwegian HEIs reported having no or limited knowledge about how their own faculty addressed issues related to digital technology usage for teaching and learning purposes.

Scholars of neo-institutional theory have highlighted the importance of shared 'logics' or 'realisations' when defining institutions (Powell and DiMaggio 1991) and have explored issues of institutional change (Alvesson and Spicer 2018) that are relevant when analysing digital technology usage as a driver for change in educational quality work. The logics of universities are said to be rooted in the search for universal knowledge, academic autonomy, standards of excellence, and an associated academic professional structure (Shields and Watermeyer 2018). Implementation of policy at universities are often seen as challenging, as universities can be described as loosely coupled organisation with a strong hierarchy of teachers' operation in the ethos of academic freedom.

Recent work has also focussed on the multiple, competing, and even contradictory logics that often occur simultaneously (Greenwood et al. 2011). Shields and Watermeyer (2018) suggest three main competing institutional logics within universities in their conceptual and empirical framework: – the autonomous, the utilitarian, and the managerial. They argue that these multiple logics produce competing models of the university as an institution that have both practical and theoretical implications within the institution (Table 4.1).

In this chapter, we use the translations perspective to investigate the bridge between the national ambitions and the processes involved in technology usage in selected HEIs. Because our analytical approach is based on translation theory, a key element of our reasoning is that different people adopt, change, and transform ideas when they integrate them into contextual quality work. We use translational theory analytically to distinguish the broader ambitions regarding technology use within

Table 4.1 A conceptual and empirical framework for measuring universities' competing logics (Shields and Watermeyer 2018, p. 9)

Autonomous universities…	Utilitarian universities…	Managerial universities…
Provide forums for debate	Provide students with employable skills	Are hierarchical
Encourage critical thinking		Are bureaucratic
Provide social critiques	Provide students with knowledge	Are competitive environments
Develop knowledge that improves society	Develop knowledge for economic growth	Are similar to businesses
	Encourage entrepreneurialism	

Note: The framework has three dimensions, with four indicators for each dimension

the various policy developments and processes that take place in the local context. The diverse and complex ways in which technology usage is made sense of, adopted, or ignored are important parts of the ongoing translations of how educational leaders and teachers use digital technology in their institutional quality work, which may be influenced by competing logics.

Methodological Approach

The data used in this chapter are derived from the QNHE research project. This allowed us to address our research question from three distinct levels within higher education (Clark 1983): the supra-structure (macro or system) level, the middle-structure (institutional or meso) level, and the under-structure or micro (teaching and learning context) level. At the institutional level we have undertaken a document analysis of institutional strategic plans and annual reports related to the institutions analysed in the QNHE project. In addition, we have used data from a survey of study programme leaders (SPL), as well as interviews with educational leaders. The "under-structure" perspective comprises interviews and observational data from a case study of a particular course at one of the case HEIs of the QNHE project (HE 3). Table 4.2 presents our data sources according to these three perspectives.

Institutional Strategies

Two types of data sources cover our analysis of institutional strategies: annual reports from 2010 to 2014 and overall strategy and planning documents from 2014 to 2018, all drawn from three selected HEIs: HE 1, HE 2 and HE 3. In all documents we undertook systematic searches for the terms 'digitalisation' and 'technology' and coded the context in which these terms were mentioned. We organised the findings by each HEI before making subcategories of the findings from each HEI in order to frame the distinct contexts, which enabled us to identify similarities and differences across the institutions. Within the institutional strategy documents and

Table 4.2   Overview of data sources

Level	Type of data	Specification of data and informants	Institutions
Super structure	Documents	Governmental white paper	Ministry of Education and Research
Middle structure	Documents	Institutional strategies Annual reports	All selected institutions
Middle structure	Survey	Study-programme leaders (SPLs)	All HEIs in Norway (N = 551)
Middle structure	Interviews	Educational leaders	Six selected cases
Middle structure	Documents	Study-programme documents	Six selected cases
Under-structure	Observation Interviews Documents	Teachers and students at a specific course within an MBA programme	HE 3

Please also note that these three levels serve to illustrate the dimensions of quality work, although they do not illustrate causality dimensions between the levels as such

annual reports, we searched for elements of digital technology and the extent to which they were typically posed as elements for improving teaching and learning within the study programmes. In our analysis of these types of documents, our aim was to explore in which contexts digital technology usage was promoted.

Leadership Practices

Leadership practices were derived from two empirical sources: a survey among SPLs and interviews with educational leaders. The survey, conducted in Norway in spring 2016, addressed several topics on the role and responsibilities of the educational leaders, including three questions covering digital technology dimensions.

The purpose of the interviews with the educational leaders in the QNHE project was to understand their strategic thinking and priorities as leaders of quality work within their institutions. In this chapter, we selected a subsample of interviews coupled to our selection of study programmes from the three selected institutions (HE 1, HE 2, and HE 3). This means that educational leaders followed the 'quality chain' from the top leaders to the SPLs.

Teacher Practices

The data on teachers' use of digital technology were derived from one of eight in-depth case studies on teaching and learning practices at the course level within the QNHE project: online teaching and learning in an experience-based MBA

programme at HE 3.[2] All eight case studies addressed the opportunities and challenges teachers and students face in their everyday educational activities, and all involved issues related to how technology affected various types of student-active learning in different ways. The actual MBA case study provided information about how an online course design proceeded both challenges and opportunities that teachers and students encountered within this selected context. The educational practice analysis thus focusses on teaching and learning activities (based on selected modules/course segments), supported by interview data, with both educational leaders and teachers providing insights into the 'micro-politics' of digital technology use in teaching and learning practices.

Limitations and Analytical Scope

Two types of educational leaders are included in our dataset: study program leaders (SPLs) and other educational leaders responsible for developing educational practices. This distinction is confusing, as there are several ways to define these formal positions as well as the practices that these leaders are responsible for. Moreover, the SPLs may combine their roles as educational leaders and teachers, in that in most cases SPLs also teach within the programme for which they are responsible. Finally, especially among the larger HEIs, the SPLs have virtually no strategic responsibility. When reporting on these two levels, we will thus explicitly mention their roles as either educational leaders or SPL.

The different empirical sources were triangulated using the nationwide survey of SPLs and system-level analyses of study programmes. In addition, the selected in-depth case study was used for examining conditions for quality work across and within institutions. We synthesised the many different datasets into a 'thick' description to inform the reader of certain trends and perspectives on how digitalisation in HEIs is translated and managed within quality work in education.

Findings

The empirical findings are organised into three main sections: (1) strategic plans and other institutional documents at the central institutional level, (2) educational leaders' practices (both statistically and through document analyses and interviews), and (3) selected case study, which involves the in-depth teaching and learning processes of institutional practices in quality work.

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[2] To get a more detailed overview of the data related to all eight cases, see Nerland and Prøitz (2018).

Strategies and Institutional Quality Work

The strategies reflect high institutional ambitions towards quality work related to digital technology usage in terms of innovation, active and varied teaching and learning methods, and new ways of collaborating and communicating across campuses. These statements are consonant with the governmental white paper on quality in education, which also stresses a pedagogical shift towards active and student-centred teaching and learning, in where technology might serve as key drivers. The strategies have in common that they are bold in their ambitions, express aims to 'become a leading HEI', and brand digital technology as a central tool for institutions to achieve future challenges and various university goals. The institutional strategies state that technology ought to be used to enhance teaching and learning practices, attract students, and promote educational quality in education as essential. Their more general ambitions to become prominent or 'the best' on digitalisation is highlighted, but some of the annual reports also describe quality work related to technology in more detail.

Institutions also stress the need for support and effective infrastructure as well as the importance of sharing ideas. When we looked more closely at the selected HEIs (HE 2, HE 3, and HE 1), we found specific approaches that were partly influenced by the institutional profile of each of the three and partly related to national ambitions towards digitalisation among HEIs. HE 3's focus on digital technology usage in teaching and learning is clearly expressed in its institutional strategies on educational quality and didactics. The university's strategic thinking is closely associated with its multi-campus profile. During the period 2011–2014, there was a distinct strategic focus area at HE 3: flexible education (in Norwegian, '*fleksibel utdanning*'), the aim of which is to explore the possibilities that come with distance and flexible education using the support of technology. The university continued this approach in a new strategic focus area: the programme for educational quality (in Norwegian, '*program for utdanningskvalitet*') starting in 2014 (HE 3, annual report 2014, p. 10). In 2014, the university further explored these intentions towards educational flexibility for continuing-education purposes and with an eye on the possibilities that come with large-scale online education programmes, such as massive open online courses (MOOCs). HE 3 emphasises that quality work is closely connected to the teachers' digital and pedagogical competences. In recent years, the university has laboured to increase the status of its educational and pedagogical competence, and, together with HEI 4, it has pioneered an institutional approach to pedagogical merits.

We found that the institutions prioritised the introduction of digital exams and alternative digital-assessment forms, while they also promoted student learning through digital technology usage. HE 2 is one example; as the university stated,

> [the] increased use of digital solutions in education is an important focus, and the "digitalisation" programme was expanded in 2014. Digitalisation efforts will help to promote learning and students' learning outcomes. The focus includes a new web-based learning-support system, the stimulation of new digital student-active learning methods, and tools for recording and streaming lectures. We highly prioritise digital exams and alternative digital-assessment forms. (HE 2, 2014, p. 11)

HE 2 then highlighted that it has continued to develop future-oriented teaching and student-active learning and has strengthened the pedagogical dimension within digitalisation processes in terms of teaching and assessment. Another observation is that distinct strategic documents address technology usage, such as the digitalisation strategy at HE 3. We also observed other efforts, such as the establishment of several strategic arenas that promote the use of digital technology and quality work in order to attain overall institutional strategic ambitions. Some of the institutions had established distinct programmes to promote and support innovative ways of developing quality work in teaching and learning, such as HE 1:

> The 'Outstanding Professional Qualification' programme … cooperates closely with HE 1's education programmes and students to support specific research and development … initiatives, develop new and innovative ways of teaching, and to document and organise existing initiatives and experiences. The programme creates learning arenas digitally and, through meetings and workshops, develops quality indicators and stimulates quality development. (HE 1, annual report, 2014)

Another observation is that specific 'strategic focus areas' can be inspiring for the institution as a whole. HE 3, for example, takes a systematic approach to supporting initiatives from departments with developmental projects on teaching and learning or leadership development, as noted in its 2014 annual report:

> The Teaching Quality Programme is one of HE 3's strategic focus areas. The project is a continuation of the former project 'Flexible Education' (2011–2014)…. Members of all departments at HE 3 can apply for support. The funds are divided into three categories: 'seed', 'development funds', and 'lighthouse funds'. [These funds] can only be applied within one area and for a year at a time. A total of NOK 2.8 million was distributed among eleven seed applications, and nine in the category of development funds. Lighthouse funds, totalling NOK 1.5 million, are distributed by the Strategic Education Committee starting 24 February, 2015. In addition, the university board has set aside NOK 1.7 million for the 'digital exam' project. (HE 3, annual report, 2014, p. 10)

In this setting departments can apply for funding when the development of quality work on teaching and learning is the key. The establishment of a central strategic educational council was driven by the leadership and included all vice-deans, representatives from central leadership, administrators, students, and the resource centre for teaching, learning, and technology. Even though the amount of available funding is typically limited, numerous educational staff apply for the funds; the initiative is meant to translate the university policy and to promote and stimulate bottom up-initiatives and developments from the working floor of the institution.

Although we found strategic focus areas related to teaching and digital technology usage at all three universities, few of these strategic ambitions had been operationalised and translated into actions and strategies at the faculty, department, or study-programme level. When we looked into possible translations of the institutional strategies (departmental and study-programme documents), the broader picture we found was that they could be characterised as decoupled (Weick 1976) and "tool-oriented" (Norgesuniversitetet 2015). All three institutions highlighted that technological infrastructure was the basis for further work on quality at all levels within the institution. HE 2, for example, suggested that digitalisation would support administrative staff, with the aim of having them work more efficiently with educational staff

and students. HE 3 highlighted the geographical multi-campus perspective, since such an approach is related to technological infrastructure. Technological infrastructure thus serves as a foundation for quality work within the institutions to include administrative and digital technology usage in teaching and learning.

Leaders Practices and Institutional Quality Work

In our interviews with educational leaders, and in the survey distributed to the SPLs, we found a mismatch with the institutions' own strategic ambitions, as this was formulated in the institutional documents. We did not find the clear and strong institutional intention of putting 'technology work' high on the institutional agenda to have been translated by the educational leaders and SPLs within the selected institutions. We asked the SPLs three different questions on digital technology usage in teaching:

1. How central is digital technology usage in the development of teaching and learning activities?
2. What is the extent of technology usage in your study programme?
3. What forms of technology support have been provided?[3]

When programme leaders describe their "quality" work, the findings illustrated in diverse ways that technology usage was not a very highly prioritised area where organised development was a part of the quality work within the study programme. However when asked in the survey, as illustrated below by the different institutional categories, they still report that it is (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 To what extent is digital technology usage central in the development of teaching and learning activities at your institute/department? By type of institution[a], in percentages (Aamodt et al. 2016)

	Universities, before 2005	Specialised colleges	Universities after 2005	University Colleges	Total
No response	12%	10%	19%	13%	14%
To a small/no degree	10%	5%	6%	8%	9%
To some degree	57%	52%	51%	45%	50%
To a strong degree	20%	33%	24%	34%	27%
N = 100%	187	21	93	250	551

[a]Since 2003, the public higher education sector in Norway has changed from four universities, seven specialized universities and 25 university colleges (somewhat parallel to the Danish university colleges) into eight universities, five specialized universities, and eight university colleges in 2017

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[3]These findings on technology usage from the project were first published in a working paper (Aamodt et al. 2016).

The discrepancy between what they say is important and what they actually describe that they do, can be understood as an expression for a lack of implementation practices. As found in previous studies (Fossland and Gabrielsen 2017), the idea of technology use is widespread within the organisation, but lacks implementation and operationalisation of "quality work". We found a similar picture when we asked the same SPLs about the important of digital technology for improving teaching and learning within their departments. Although we found a few differences among different faculties, the broader picture was that digital technology usage was not highly prioritised at the study-programme level; departments within the humanities, technology, and medicine fields reported somewhat higher priorities than the social sciences and technical/mathematics departments (Aamodt et al. 2016).

When we looked into the local strategic documents, we found only a few elements that were directly coupled to the overall ambitions related to technology usage to enhance teaching and learning. Within the institutional programme plans, the technology dimension seemed to have been largely left out, with some exceptions where digital technology was mentioned in more general terms. We found very few documents where the institutional strategies had been translated into concrete action plans. The interviewees also showed a clear tendency that technology was not a central part of what educational leaders defined as their quality work. When asked how they viewed their role as educational leaders, and what their main tasks were, very few mentioned that technology was among their highest priorities. We may interpret that their answers, both in the programme-leader survey and the interviews, indicated their perspectives on their roles and responsibilities as educational leaders. The main picture was that the education leaders' strategies largely were disconnected from the more overarching strategies on technology in their daily quality work. In line with Weick's study (1976), their quality work related to technology was loosely coupled to what the leaders considered their most important tasks. The educational leaders had many other issues on their agendas, which may explain why they did not prioritise technology usage as something they would be held specifically accountable for, as one leader from HE 2 noted:

> … within research, nearly everything is about development; within education, it quickly becomes a question of daily operations and routines. Routines, quality assurance, systems, all these things that must be dealt with, and all the things we're asked to report on – they don't end up anywhere, and that feels a bit meaningless (centre manager, HE 2).

In line with Bryman (2007), this quote illustrates that leaders' responsibilities and quality work was broad and included many elements they were required to do that did not end up in educational development or practices and processes involved in quality enhancement that 'mattered'. Even though we found exceptions at all three universities, one observation was especially interesting: one of the universities was experiencing extended multi-campus challenges, which was reflected in more awareness of digital technology usage in relation to those specific challenges. As one leader said,

… since we have a multi-campus structure, we make full use of it.… In terms of compe-
tence, we're not only concerned with closing the formal gap; students should have an added
value, [which] is precisely that they learn to study with the help of modern technology….
(Head of department, HE 3)

In this multi-campus institution, the leadership was generally perceived as being
very engaged in issues of educational quality, which was one of the topics the lead-
ers promoted in the leadership elections. Although exceptions existed within all
three institutions on strategies and incentives meant to promote technology usage,
we found few notions about structures and strategies at the faculty level that were
directed towards enhancing the teachers' and study programmes' quality work
related to technology use. While further research is necessary – since we asked the
leaders more general questions about their quality work and their role as leaders –
we may conclude that the overall impression was that technology usage was not
prioritised to a large extent in their daily quality work, as few reported that their
quality work was directly related to technology usage.

These findings indicate that institutional quality work at the faculty level is
loosely coupled to the national and institutional ambitions related to digital technol-
ogy usage (Weick 1976). A few translational costs may arise when translating these
ambitions at the local level. While the data in our project do not provide any details
that could clearly explain the whole picture, we confirm that some of the challenges
revealed from previous research still exist (Lillejord et al. 2018). These challenges
may involve translational costs such as multiple, competing, and even contradictory
logics that occur simultaneously (Greenwood et al. 2011) like autonomy or bureau-
cratic requirements (Shields and Watermeyer 2018), when "translating" the national
and institutional ambitions on digital technology usage into pedagogical depart-
mental practices, including practices on the study program- and course- level.

Other explanations may be that the SPLs lack translator competences (Røvik
2014), or that, to many people, multiple, competing, and even contradictory logics
are of relevance simultaneously within the study programme is found to be more
accepted by educational staff than technology usage (Greenwood et al. 2011;
Shields and Watermeyer 2018). Our findings may also indicate that technology
usage is not a high priority in actual quality work. Translational costs such as time-
consuming elements related to technology use, challenges related to the lack of
providing adequate technical or pedagogical support as well as lack of effective
incitements to invest in developmental efforts, may be arguments that partly explain
why technology usage is challenging at the departmental and study program level.
In line with what others studies on technology usage has found (Owen 2012;
Norgesuniversitetet 2015)), our findings from the survey may indicate that technol-
ogy usage was not very high on the SPLs' agendas; they reported, not surprisingly,
that LMS usage was particularly prominent. Even though they were positioned to
"translate" the institutional strategies on technology use, several translational
"costs", lack of time and competing institutional logics made other obligations more
prioritised.

Teachers Practices and Quality Work

One overall observation across the eight in-depth case studies on the course level demonstrated that a range of activities and pedagogical approaches, including various use of digital technology were combined in courses and led to complex environments for teaching and learning. In line with previous studies (Norgesuniversitetet 2015), we found a tendency that learning management platforms played a central role in digital technology usage. Moreover, we observed little attention towards professional development of teachers' digital competences. The overall conclusion was that higher education practices, and especially their more student-activating modes, counted a range of dilemmas and challenges, including digital technology use (Nerland and Prøitz 2018).

If we look to the case study related to one course with a blended learning design, one key observation was that the facilitation of online teaching and learning processes required other types of competences, pedagogical approaches, and general awareness than those associated with solely campus-based teaching and learning contexts (Fossland and Tømte 2019). Students only attended one voluntary start-up gathering on campus; they accessed their course via the learning-management platform to gain access to peers, teachers, course content, and administrative information. One interesting observation was that, with a few exceptions, teachers with teaching responsibilities within this program did not follow the students closely and did not invest time to enhance their technology usage related to their teaching and students learning process. The program leader expressed it like this;

> One of the biggest challenges is that most of the academic staff do not have the necessary digital competence. They are not following up on the students in the VLS (virtual learning systems)… as these programs requires another form of presence from the teachers in order to be able to communicate with students that is outside campus (program leader, HE 3).

The importance of professionalising the administrative and academic staff in order to meet the requirements related to digital technology usage were apparent. Even though some of the teachers more closely followed their students learning processes and were interested to develop their technology usage, it is obvious in the teachers' interviews that improving their digital competences was not highly prioritised and that it required leadership involvement as well as a will to translate and involve the academic staff. Our findings indicate that both educational leaders and academic staff did not hold, or sufficiently prioritised to develop their digital competence, in line with the overall institutional ambitions. The teachers were rarely offered or invited to develop their digital competences, only a few incentives were found to be promoted in their daily quality work and teaching practices.

The case also showed that the educational leaders were not fully aware of how to support the teachers involved, for example, in ensuring that they would have access to adequate resources and facilitate the usage of technological infrastructure, or in aligning administrative systems to their type of students – adult learners in this case (ibid.). There are several possible explanations for this situation. Our interviews with the leaders indicated that they had difficulty getting teachers to prioritise their

digital responsibilities, other than to learn what was strictly necessarily to fulfil their agreement to film some of their teaching. We found several competing logics occurring simultaneously (Greenwood et al. 2011; Shields and Watermeyer 2018) like autonomy, that teachers prioritised their research or that they preferred following a strict line between the teachers' responsibilities and administrative mandates. One leader said that it was 'difficult to interfere with how employees teach'. Another challenge the leaders mentioned was that the teachers did not want to spend their time on the time-consuming elements related to digital technology usage and the challenges they often meet when learning happens across formats (Lillejord et al. 2018). Our findings have revealed that teachers with ambitions related to the use of digital technology in quality work, still appear as 'enthusiasts', in line with the findings of previous researchers (Aagaard et al. 2018; Norgesuniversitetet 2015).

Discussion

In this chapter, we have examined how educational leaders and teachers "translate" Norway's national ambitions on digital technology usage within institutional quality work. We have studied how key institutional documents and study programmes have addressed issues on quality work related to technology use, and how the educational leaders' and teachers' practices in their quality work relate to these documents. In line with Weick (1976) our findings demonstrate that the problem lies in the mismatch between institutional ambitions on the use of digital technology and the translation of these ambitions in the quality work at the study programme- and course level. One key observation is that the practices and processes involved in technology enhancement are influenced by several translational costs that create a mismatch between national strategies and the educational leaders' and teachers' practices. In the following paragraphs we will elaborate further on these findings.

Translational Costs Related to External Drivers

The ministerial white paper 'Culture for Quality in Higher Education' emphasised the need for a cultural shift to promote quality work within higher education in Norway. We have found that to a large extent, the quality work related to teaching and learning practices and processes involving digital technology usage for quality enhancement still rely on external drivers. Some of these drivers include (1) teaching and learning centres or external systems determined by HEIs' quality-assurance or external evaluations, (2) the use of LMSs or national initiatives such as e-campuses, and (3) the use of systems placed outside the academic context of teaching and learning processes at the departmental level, instead of facilitating and building up resources near the teaching and learning contexts and in relation to the involved leaders and teachers.

Stensaker et al. (2007) state that the actual institutions' response to external drivers was to establish overall strategies and to stress the provision of adequate technological infrastructure and overall visions. Ten years later, as demonstrated, most HEIs have such strategies at place. Nonetheless, another issue flagged by Stensaker et al., namely to communicate the overall purposes of technology, and how that technology should be linked with staff and pedagogy, remains a significant challenge that must be dealt with.

Translational Costs Involved in Educational Leaders' Connection to Institutional Strategies

Our findings have revealed that the institutional strategies are highly ambitious on digital technology usage to meet future challenges. In contrast to these strategies, the programme-leader survey and the interviews with the educational leaders clearly showed weak intra-institutional strategic coupling between the institutional ambitions and the actual quality work (Weick 1979). Although the selected HEIs in the QNHE project had launched overall strategies and had committed to digital technology usage, we found:

1. that the focus was on overall processes and was not translated into concrete quality work related to the practices and processes involved in quality enhancement;
2. little evidence of overall purposes and strategies on ways to couple technology to staff, pedagogy, and educational development within the institutional plans;
3. that the focus was more on digital technology per se than on enhancing educational practices and the pedagogical use of digital technology.

We cannot clearly state that these findings can be explained by a lack of leaders' translator competence (Røvik 2014) or simultaneously ongoing responsibilities with competing institutional logics. Even if the ability, time, or will (or a combination of these elements) might be plausible various explanations, we did find that the translation of practices related to technology usage was not generally a high priority. Local strategies and politics on prioritising the development and quality work of teaching and learning with digital technology have the clear potential to become more 'on task'. Our findings indicate that one part of the question is related to the fact that leaders need to possess knowledge (on technology and pedagogy), authority, and legitimacy to lend the translation a better chance of success (Røvik 2014).

Translational Costs in the Teachers' Contextual Reality

Related to meeting the institutional strategies and national ambitions on digital technology usage in local quality work, we have identified several challenges that can be characterised as translational costs. In line with previous studies

(Lillejord et al. 2018; Aagaard et al. 2018), we found several barriers to quality work related to digital technology usage, including the following.

1. Structural elements – such as the teachers' working hours, their perceptions of their responsibilities, the opening hours of the help desk, and how lecture halls were equipped – revealed several challenges related to the teachers' use of technology in their quality work.
2. Teachers who used technology clearly had to take extra time because of the translations they had to do to make things work.
3. Teachers' quality work, practices, and processes that involved a special focus on technology seemed to be left to individual enthusiasts to solve on their own, since very few collective initiatives were available for support.
4. The pedagogical use of technology as quality work was not interwoven into the collegial collaboration between teachers; their teaching to a large extent was understood to be due to their individual and private efforts.

The main result of these translational costs was that the teachers did not collaborate on their teaching methods or plan how technology would be a holistic part of their daily quality work.

The educational leaders' and teachers' quality work largely appeared to be decoupled (Weick 1976) from the institutional strategies on teaching and learning with digital technology. The leaders' work was focussed on activities that were reported for managerial purposes and other competing quality ideas; the teachers seemed to be concerned that they would lose time that they otherwise could have used on research. This view does not mean that they saw issues related to technology as unimportant, as demonstrated in the survey, but other practises and competing logics appeared to be more of a priority in their daily quality work. Leaders' responsibilities were not found to be reinforcing and solidifying the purposed coupled elements concerning technology usage at the department level. We also found clear indications that both teachers and leaders themselves needed to possess and develop digital skills in order to exploit opportunities related to pedagogical use of technology within their own departments. These findings indicate that technology usage needs to be negotiated through what Weick (1976) has outlined as a variety of strategies, involving language, rituals, events, the use of time as well as the redesign of physical spaces, when external environments (like the request for technology use) is "enacted" (ibid). Weick (1976) argue that leaders' needs to actively strengthen organisational ties or couplings in loosely coupled institutions, like the connection between institutional strategies and the ongoing quality work. He also argued that informal, chaotic parts can be productive, which might explain the many positive initiatives we found arising from teachers, either individually or in groups.

These findings indicate that ongoing competing logics (Shields and Watermeyer 2018) are a part of the picture when translating institutional ambitions on digital technology usage as a driver for change in educational quality work – a situation that requires further investigation. Even though we have found clear tendencies of what Greenwood et al. (2011) characterise as multiple, competing, and even contradictory logics going on simultaneously related to different positions involved in the local quality work at the institutional level, further research must be conducted to

investigate these mechanisms in more depth. Some of the tendencies that must be further elaborated upon include (1) the responsibilities related to the translation of institutional ambitions vis-à-vis digital technology usage and (2) the responsible leaders' potentially limited understanding of what the translation of institutional ambitions means in terms of securing digital competence among the staff and students involved in order to support and develop student-active learning.

We believe that the awareness of digitisation and the limited engagement of highlighting the development of teaching and learning through the use of digital technology could also be a result of several reforms that have challenged the institutions' hierarchical governance, such as the recent merging processes within Norwegian HEIs. These reforms have led to more hybridised and loosely coupled organisational and governance forms. Our findings can also be seen in relation to the fact that all Norwegian HEIs have implemented internal systems of quality assurance, often manifested through student evaluations of teaching (Michelsen and Aamodt 2007). We may interpret this finding as a gap between the leaders' awareness and responsibility for digitalisation and their involvement in what we have earlier described as national ambitions related to digital technology usage.

This situation has emerged while an overall change in perspective at the national level has occurred from more teacher-led education towards more student-active learning. We may expect this renewed attention to how technology may enhance various forms of teaching and learning activities to be found in overall strategies within HEIs and institutional documents, and to some extent in distinct study programmes and courses. This governmental interest has resulted in the establishment of national performance-indicator systems, external quality-assurance systems, and an increase in public-funding arrangements linking performance to resource allocation (Damsa et al. 2015). These systems do not focus directly on the educational quality work, but they may address how technology has a potential to be included to enhance quality work. The key take away would be that technology serve as one out of several 'duties' of the work plan of academic staff; how they translate those duties must be understood in the larger complex context of which competing institutional logics influence leaders' and teachers' quality work.

Conclusion: Challenges, Possible Solutions, and Future Research

The national ambition that teaching and learning with digital technology can improve educational quality and student learning has been solidly rooted in European (and Norwegian) higher education policies for the last two decades. Our study has indicated that HEIs still face profound challenges related to translational costs regarding national and institutional ambitions to enhance teaching and

learning via technology. Even though several initiatives, both internationally and from the Norwegian government, have been undertaken to implement technology in the practices and processes involved in quality enhancement, we have found few indications of a collective orientation towards digital technology usage. There is a need for further research to investigate the mechanisms connected to these findings in more details. This finding contrasts the national call for a 'quality culture' with the ultimate goal of enhancing teaching and learning with digital technology in higher education. On contrary, our study demonstrates that collective initiatives are moving slowly.

This chapter underlines the importance of understanding translational costs related to local challenges, competing institutional logics, and leaders' and teachers' own responsibilities and actions regarding the complexities of quality work. To fully understand quality work related to technology, we suggest new contextual studies to follow more closely quality-enhancement orientations related to technology usage. Even though technology usage in teaching and learning processes is high on Norway's national agenda, we have found several indications of a mismatch between the national ambitions and the institutional contextual quality work. There is thus a match and a mis-match. The institutional strategies are in line with the national ambitions, while a mismatch is observed when it comes to the actual practices at the departmental, program and course level. In other words, while (1) strategies for the implementation of teaching and learning with digital technology for educational purposes are moving in the right direction, (2) the overall strategies have stressed the provision of adequate technological infrastructure and overall visions, and (3) the established infrastructure is generally considered important for successful implementation, we have found that translating and likewise communicating the overall purposes of technology and how such technology should be linked with staff and pedagogy remains unsolved.

Future research needs to more closely delve into the institutional practices and translational costs involved in order to fully understand how national and institutional strategies on digitalisation are related to, and translated within, the different levels of the organisation. Researchers should also examine the consequences of different strategies on digitalisation in relation to different teaching and learning strategies within HEIs. Moreover, we suggest that researchers should scrutinise digital competence among teachers and leaders, since they make decisions about including digital technology in their daily quality work; an additional aim could be to challenge so called "tool-based" orientations when it come to the use of technology for teaching and learning. The fact that enthusiastic teachers are still an important driving force for change must be addressed and critically analysed. Newer research, as suggested here, would be significant contributions to shed light on necessary requirements to establish the quality culture the recent white paper on quality in higher education has called for.

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Chapter 5
Layers of Consistency in Study Programme Planning and Realization

Tine S. Prøitz, Anne Line Wittek, and Thomas de Lange

Introduction

The literature on quality in higher education teaching and learning often emphasises the importance of consistency,[1] which is an umbrella term that encompasses the totality of elements within study programs that are arraigned in accordance to one another. This totality ranges from elements of teaching, learning and disciplinary content, assessment, contextual embeddedness and institutional conventions to organizational rules; hence, a broad scope of factors that influence how study programs play out in practice. The literature on study programme consistency represents several conceptual entries to the analysis and understanding of study programmes; for example, constructive alignment (Biggs and Tang 2011), curriculum congruence (Ashwin et al. 2015) and curriculum coherence (Muller 2009). These notions, although highly elaborated and productive in their different ways, tend to capture a limited scope of dimensions, or segments, of how educational programmes are formed and realized.

Therefore, a starting point in this chapter concerns how such overarching notions of consistency can be brought to bear on study programme analysis and in quality work. For example, a range of studies, show how complex the notion of quality in

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[1] Based on literature in the field we use the concept of consistency as an umbrella term for the investigative focus of this chapter.

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79

education is, often referring to the multi-dimensional feature in educational programs that are comprised of a range of interrelated issues which have to be considered simultaneously by several stakeholders (Damsa et al. 2015; Nerland and Prøitz 2018). This chapter refers to one of the core issues of this book by its intentions to illuminate the multifaceted character of the quality work incorporating academics and teachers, the administration and leadership at different levels, and how the various activities are coordinated at the programme level (Elken and Stensaker this volume). This multi-dimensionality has shown to be a factor across both higher education institutions, as well as national borders, and is characterized by processes that depend on the interrelations between leadership, study programme coordinators, disciplinary communities, teachers, assistant teachers and students. Still, principle notions and investigations of consistency in higher education are addressing these issues through rather segregated conceptions such as coherence, alignment or congruence (Honig and Hatch 2004; Hammerness 2006; Lindvall and Ryve 2019). While the reason for this separation may be related to how these issues are often deeply embedded in broader concerns regarding curriculum and questions concerning the relations between knowledge, as well as the content and activities of teaching and learning in higher education (Tight 2012), our argument is to call attention to a more overarching scope where these analytic concepts represent various layers of reasoning to be connected in study programme planning and design.

The issues investigated and discussed in this chapter are anchored within the field of curriculum studies. Due to a common misunderstanding in higher education that curriculum studies are restricted to curricular documents, it is important to clarify that this study entails an understanding of curriculum study as: "… relations between knowledge, curriculum, teaching and learning, assessment and the understandings that students develop through their engagement with higher education programmes" (Ashwin 2014). Based on this departure, this chapter addresses the following research questions:

1. What significance does consistency hold in study program planning and realization; and how can this be conceptualized?
2. How can this conceptualization be illustrated empirically through contrasting study program planning intentions and student experiences?

The first research question aims at presenting a conceptual composition, enabling a more overarching analysis of program development and implementation, while the second research question aims at illustrating how this conception plays out mirrored against empirical program cases.

Following this line of thinking, we analyse how consistency is understood by programme coordinators and teachers and what this entails regarding consistency as *intentions* in study programme planning and, further, we analyse consistency as expressed in student *experiences*. In detail, the analysis focuses on issues related to consistency that can be observed in two selected study programmes to bring forward challenges that arise from ways of working with consistency. Empirically, we approach this by, on the one hand, displaying how educational program leaders explain their intentions with planning and implementation and contrasting these

intended premises with the involved student's experiences. By addressing these issues empirically, we identify informative gaps between intentions for teaching and learning, and students´ experiences in order to analyse and discuss the issues that are at stake; most notably, that of consistency in study programme planning. The study draws on an in-depth analysis of interview data with program coordinators, teachers and students from two study programme cases of law and organization & management. In the analysis, the interviews with study programme coordinators and teachers give access to their expressed intentions and understandings of consistency in programme planning, while the student interviews provide insights into how the students experienced these intentions.

Consistency in Programme Design and Educational Practices

In the following section, we elaborate on the already-mentioned conceptualisations of consistency in study programs. We also problematize some issues concerning each approach. The three approaches provide conceptual elements to our analytical platform. However, it is important to note that this chapter does not aim for a deeper conceptual analysis, but rather empirical analysis to investigate how the concepts of alignment, congruence and coherence can provide an illustrative basis for reflecting on and guiding hands-on study programme planning.

Alignment – Linkinzg Study Design, Activities and Evaluation

Biggs and Tangs' (2011) concept of "constructive alignment" – the linking of study design, learning activities and their evaluation – is often emphasised as a key way to make the different dimensions and phases in the academic plan/study program consistent. The focal point of the model for constructive alignment are in Biggs' own words (1996, p. 360): "…whether the teacher can operationalise desirably high levels of understanding in ways that denote performances that can be elicited by teaching/learning activities, and that can be assessed authentically". The model emphasizes the function of the curriculum, "or unit objectives", to be communicated clearly in terms of content specific levels of understanding that imply appropriate performances. While the teaching methods and assessments: "require students to be placed in contexts that will likely elicit those performances, and the assessment tasks address those same performances" (Biggs 1996, p. 360). Constructive alignment also includes dimensions on how teachers and students interact more productively through more clearly defined curriculum statements, thereby influencing the social climate of the learning process. Constructive alignment has been

criticized for representing a rationalistic view on how curricula are to be developed (Ashwin et al. 2015). In curriculum design, constructive alignment is often used to propose a "logical model" for curriculum development followed by assumptions that the learning content is known in advance, and that it is quite straight forward to design a curriculum that matches it.

Congruence – Interconnectedness of Education Components

The basic notion of alignment is that we teach and assess in line with what we want students to learn (Ashwin et al. 2015). An alternative idea supplementing and extending on alignment is the notion of congruence (Entwistle 2009; Hounsell and Hounsell 2007). Congruence highlights the complexity, interconnectedness and linkages between student characteristics, staff aims and the *inner logic of the subject and its pedagogy*. The inner logic is here understood as the nature of the discipline, methods of teaching adopted by the academic community (Entwistle 2005) and the *general principles of course design* for example influenced by the department and institutional conventions (Entwistle 2009). Congruence also draws attention to components, such as student background and aspirations, programme and course organization and management, curriculum aims, scope and structure, and provided learning support. Even though the idea of congruence builds on Biggs' focus on educational aims, Entwistle (2007, p. 10) emphasizes that: "The term 'congruence' was chosen to avoid the implied linearity of the word 'alignment'." The notion of congruence, therefore, extends the scope to include a magnitude of relations, as well as vertical and horizontal dimensions forming study programs and students learning activities.

Coherence in Knowledge Organization in Study Programs

The third concept, addressing examinations of curriculum, draws our attention towards consistency of the inner principles or *coherence* between programme design and knowledge organization. Here, a distinction is made between programme designs that predominantly take the cumulative structure of the discipline and its scientific concepts as its organizing structure, and designs that emphasize the relation to work practices and relevant learning activities for future professional contexts (Muller 2009). The first type of design emphasizes conceptual coherence, while the second emphasizes contextual coherence (Muller 2009). A curriculum with *conceptual coherence* is typically characterized by involving vertically ordered, sequential content, with a strong hierarchy of abstraction and conceptual

complexity. In contrast, *contextual coherence* is characterized as involving various practical segments, which are well connected but conceptually less vertically and sequentially ordered: 'each segment is adequate to a context sufficient to a purpose' (Muller 2009, p. 216). Further, different disciplines require different degrees of conceptual coherence, and the more conceptually coherent the curriculum is, the more formal the curriculum requirements. In more segmented curriculum, the sequence matters less, and the context matters more, and contextual coherence is strived for. For example, external requirements may be of greater interest in certain contexts. It is also relevant to note that the greater the conceptual coherence, "the clearer the knowledge signpost must be, both illustratively and evaluatively" (Muller 2009, p. 216). It is not unlikely to anticipate that degrees of conceptual and contextual curriculum coherence will influence what is considered as important in study program designs and for the structuring of activities of the study as well as in choice of types of assessment and examinations.

With the previous elaborations in mind, we will draw on these three notions of constructive alignment (Biggs and Tang 2011), curriculum congruence (Ashwin et al. 2015) and curriculum coherence (Muller 2009) in our analysis of consistency in study programs. While these three concepts are often used interchangeably in the literature, despite their principal differences, the concepts clearly also hold adjoining and overlapping aspects when analysing curriculum structure, programme design and educational practice. In our analysis, we will distinguish clearly between the concepts by applying the above definitions within an analytical framework and combine these concepts with the dimensions of intentions and experiences. In this way, we apply a multi-dimensional analytical framework, which is inspired by reports and observations of programme and course planning and practice in Norwegian higher education (Nerland and Prøitz 2018).

In the analysis of alignment, we are focusing on references to clearly defined units of objectives, teaching and learning in the context for performance and assessment of the same performances (Biggs and Tang 2011). For congruence, we are looking for linkages between: (1) student characteristics (background, aspirations); (2) the inner logic of the subject and its pedagogy (how programme material is selected, organized, presented and assessed) and (3) the general principles of programme design (how teaching and learning environment is designed and implemented) (Entwistle 2005). For the aspect of curriculum coherence, we focus on conceptual consistency as vertically ordered, sequential content, and with a strong hierarchy of abstraction, conceptual complexity and contextual coherence as various segments that are well connected but less vertical and sequential and where each segment is adequate to a context (Muller 2009).

Considering the multiplicity of dimensions involved in programme planning, the three concepts can be viewed as bearers of competing approaches but, more importantly, perhaps to be complementary aspects in curriculum planning. We consider the three approaches for consistency in programme planning to offer an analytical framework for the study of the data material (Fig. 5.1).
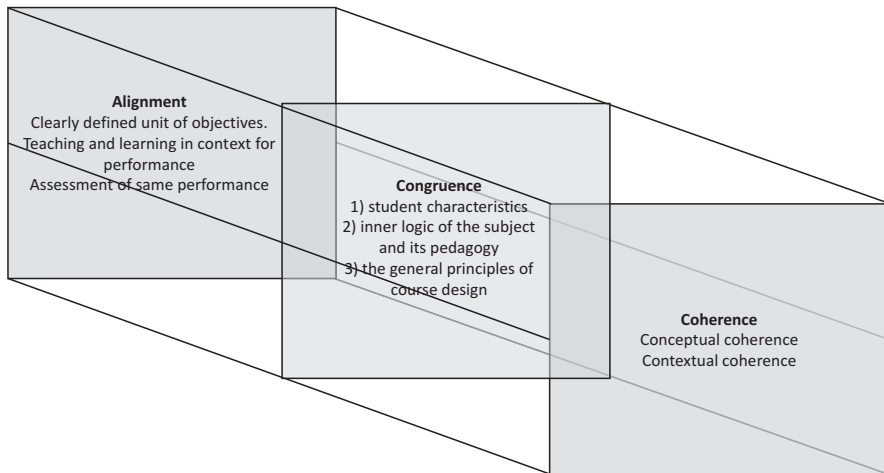
Fig. 5.1 Approaches to consistency in study programmes

Method

The study draws on an analysis of qualitative data material from 2 study programs in Norway, and consist of interviews with study program coordinators and teachers and focus group interviews with students (Kvale and Brinkmann 2007).[2] The selection of the two study programmes can be characterized as information-oriented (Flyvbjerg 2011) and purposeful sampling (Gall et al. 1996), as they were selected based on the expectation that they would provide rich data relevant for the analysis and on the basis of being studies acknowledged for their well thought through programme designs (Nerland and Prøitz 2018). For a broader scope of analysis, they were selected based on being different studies of law and organisation and management at two different higher education institutions. The data material includes two interviews with study programme coordinators and in-depth interviews with students in law and organisation and management programmes. All interviews were conducted by the support of a thematic interview guide, audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. In the following, the analysis of the data material is presented after a short context description of the two study programme cases.

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[2] The material was collected as part of the larger research project on Quality in Norwegian Higher Education. The QNHE project was a joint effort between collaborating researchers of the Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU) and University of Oslo (UiO) funded by the Norwegian Research Council, see web page for information about the research project http://www.qnhe.no/

Context of the Study Programmes

At the time of data collection in 2017, both cases were in a situation of recent or ongoing study programme revision. This provides our study with a novel insight into the issues that are of concern during curriculum change and questions and reflections related to such change efforts.

In the law case, our observations are based on changes implemented in a five-year master's programme at a research-intensive university in Norway, comprised of about 550 students on a yearly basis. In this case, our main data draw on reform efforts in a five-year master's programme in law with the following aims. First, how to implement digital technology to support teaching and the student learning. Second, to learn about law by integrating the learning of judicial principals with exercising practical law procedures. Third, support students in writing legal arguments though specific teaching arrangements.

The management case was based on observations from a three-year bachelor's degree programme at a middle size university college in Norway. These types of programs are widespread in Norwegian higher education, offered by several institutions and accommodate a large group of students. Within this program, our data is from personnel management teaching that can be described as assignment-driven, with lectures and assignments following a progression, building on each other up to the final exams.

Programme Intentions and Student Experiences in the Law Programme

In the following, we will analyse the law programme on the basis of the leadership and teaching staff intentions for educational redesign, followed by an examination of how these changes were experienced by the students. We start with presenting the leadership perspective represented by two informants, a departing and a successive program coordinator, respectively.

Intentions

As a starting point for explaining the changes in the current law programme, the coordinators started with explaining what they perceive as highly traditional ways of organizing and designing law education in general. They refer here to similarities in the disciplinary content included and presented across higher education institutions in Norway. When addressing what could be changed in order to improve legal education in Norway, the informants mainly pointed at teaching: *In the way that we teach, there are differences, but the subjects in themselves and how the components*

are put together are similar and do rarely change. One of the program-coordinators exemplified this by emphasizing the teaching in criminal law, which used to be conventionally taught: *We worked very traditionally with lectures over several weeks and some seminars (…). Generally, the teaching had remained the same for a long time (…) and with little variation in the type of teaching.* When asked about the starting point for the revisions, they explained that: *When changes in the law were passed, we saw an opportunity to revise the teaching and how it was connected to other elements in the program.* Both coordinators also underlined the importance of how the teachers were involved on different course levels: *It made sense starting with courses because (…) there are groups of teachers who work closely on a disciplinary basis. Then you have a group that works together.*

Regarding the teacher-level, one teacher described how the curriculum revision had been intended as an opportunity to rearrange their traditional way of organizing the content of the discipline and its teaching in a more integrated way:

> There are so many thematic connections between (different) subjects, which is why they (now) are taught during (one) semester. But traditionally they have been split up, (in separate disciplines) in series of lectures (…). We felt that all these three subjects, are very integrated and that the separation is artificial. It is a hermeneutical circle that, to fully understand human rights, you must have detailed knowledge from the other subjects. And to understand those subjects, you have to … it's sort of like where do you start in this circle? So, the revision was very exciting and through this kind of project we got a bit a carte blanche to rearrange it. That was my kind of professional introduction to this.

As we see from the statement above, disciplinary integration was a clearly-stated intention of the reform efforts in this programme, even before the interviewer addressed this issue. When asked more directly about intentions of the reform, the informants also emphasized breaking away from the monotony of traditional teaching: *We reduced the number of lectures and increased student engaging activities, where the students themselves had to work with tasks related to realistic situations… more variation.* The aspect of engaging students with professionally relevant tasks is explicitly underscored. But the teachers and coordinators also connected other aspects of relevance to assignment tasks, which is illustrated in the following utterance: *they (the students) are supposed to write essays and procedural statements for the court. They do it in groups, and they have to hand it in.* These writing assignments were considered as particularly relevant, since this kind of writing and collaboration is common in professional practice. Regarding the overarching intention of the changes, the programme leaders appear to emphasize the connection between different disciplinary components:

> Another thing is the connection between the subjects. Previously this was taught separately in lectures, now it is presented in a more integrated way. Human rights for example are broken up in sections and related to parts of other subjects. In this way, we challenge a bit the traditional way of organizing this.

Again, we see a critique of the previous way organizing teaching in separate subjects-lanes. When asked why they choose this design, the informants explained that students needed to see and connect elements across different subjects. They also needed to learn how to make these connections by using these elements as

resources in their written arguments: *If you participate in teaching and hand in assignments then you will succeed because you have trained, but in particular if you bother to also read the comments that you get, it will affect what they can accomplish by the end of the year*. The last statement in this quote also suggests that giving specific feedback on these integrated tasks was an intended effort in the reform. In addition to these explicitly-stated intentions of variation, knowledge integration, practical relevance, is that the use of digital technologies was applied as a resource in making this reorganisation work smoothly during the practical implementation.

Experiences

Taking the next step to the students' experiences of the reform, we start with their perception of the aims and stated learning outcomes in the programme. In this respect, the students considered the statements and descriptions as clear and understandable, but more demanding and complicated than their earlier studies. Students also expressed a wish for more information, especially at the beginning of each course, to prepare themselves for upcoming learning demands and activities. Even though the students had access to extensive information made available during lectures, as well as content overview, syllabus, timetables, online lectures, ad hoc information and statements by teachers made available online via a Learning Management System (LMS), the students still expressed a need for more information about teaching, learning and task activities. Some frustration was also related to inadequate and sometimes contradictory information.

On the positive side, the students emphasized the motivational value of practical approaches close to professional practice. Concerning the connection between different teaching activities, the students experienced the lectures as a relevant preparation for seminars and group-based assignments (see Chap. 10, in this volume). They also expressed that the 'work-related aspects' through visits was valuable for developing their understanding of the profession. One student even underlined that the *'time pressure situation, with only 46 hours of preparation for a procedure in court, makes this "realistic" and a very positive and challenging experience'*. These student experiences comply well with programme intentions.

There were other challenges pointed out by the students, such as presented programme elements not turning out as planned. For starters, only a few students came prepared for work-related arrangements at the beginning of the semester, leading to more limited debates than were anticipated. Negative experiences with student-centred approaches were also mentioned in regard to activities that depended heavily upon student participation but which were poorly attended.

Some of the student-centred activities were highlighted as particularly beneficial. This counted especially for the seminars involving students actively in writing assignments. These seminars were considered as very fruitful opportunities to learn through observing, discussing and handling written assignments. A major

consideration was that these seminars represented a bridge between different teaching and syllabus elements. The following comment illustrates this integrative aspect:

> That you solve cases, is a way to learn how you understand the subject and it prepares you for the exam, the actual work with assignments. Getting help with this by the seminar teachers … yes it puts it in a practical perspective. Most of us need help with this. It's difficult. And in these seminars, we learn to understand the more implicit details that we do not have a clue about in the beginning and which you can't read about in the books. That's what we learn in the assignment seminars.

While the above elaboration gives us an insight into the benefit of engaging in seminar sessions, the students also addressed the importance of how the assignments where shaped and formulated:

> The assignments we were presented with during seminars were different compared with previous parts of the programme. We did not do any of the small assignments, which was typical in previous parts of the programme. Instead we were presented with more comprehensive practical assignments. This worked really well.

The success factors in working with comprehensive assignments are attributed to working with larger integrated judicial problems, as well as working on these tasks within teacher-led working-seminars aimed at supporting the students. The comprehensive assignments, combined with seminar work-shops, thereby served as an opportunity to learn how to *grasp the complexities of the discipline*. An additional positive aspect was mentioned with respect to the final assessment: *it was much better to work on these extensive assignments since they are much more similar to what we are given in the final exam*. At this point, we see that the writing seminar, as an intended integrative element, is regarded by the students as a positive experience.

But this element was associated with a challenge of passive students: *Some of the students do not take responsibility in seminars; they lean back and just take notes. So, some students do not contribute*. The student informants are here indirectly identifying passive students as a hindrance to their own learning and suggesting measures to push these students: *it should be stricter already in the beginning. When students are passive, the teachers should demand more from them so that they contribute. They could do this by asking questions, make them answer questions and do presentations*. This proposed handling of passive students seems to be handled differently by the teachers, while the student informants prefer that more direct demands be made so as to force their peers to take part (see Chap. 9, in this volume for a discussion on the issue of "free riders"). The informants point to the importance of devoted teachers.

In summary, by contrasting the intentions of program coordinators mirrored against student experiences, the following aspects are revealed: the changes from the traditional organization of separated subject lecturing into a variation of integrated and professionally relevant teaching activities was well received by the students and regarded by them as an opportunity to learn the discipline in a more fruitful manner. Discrepancies in intended and experienced program development surfaced mainly in how these integrative elements were implemented. This partially relates to an underestimation of the complexity of enacting an integrated programme

in practice. Indeed, such an implementation presupposes extensive planning and coordination between leadership and teaching staff. Also underestimated was the complexity of the planned faculty intensions, which are hard to convey even though extensive information was provided during lectures and digital platforms. Finally, passive students were considered as a problem by both teaching staff and students.

Programme Intentions and Student Experiences in Organisation and Management

In organization and management, the program coordinator described how they started the ongoing process of revision at the time of the interview based on two main reasons. First, courses were made smaller (from 15 to 7.5 credits). This is partly an adjustment in line with a general development that they had observed in other departments and programmes, but also as an adjustment to other studies in the same department in order to enable more collaboration between students across courses. The idea that collaborative work enhances learning is strongly accentuated both by the program leader and the interviewed teachers. One of the teachers explained the approach. First, students learn more from dealing with the subject content when they have to discuss it with other students. Second, the importance of collaborative skills is part of the required competency as professional managers or HR-employees, and it is more effective regarding the time you spend as a teacher; *If I should give individual comments to 80 assignments….* However, the students perceived this differently, stating that they wanted individual feedback rather than peer feedback in groups, like the teacher informant in our case stated; *We use a lot of peer-feedback, but they think this is not "for real". They want to hear the opinion of the teacher*. This was considered a challenge for the teachers, given the high number of students and the teachers efforts in connecting activities and elements in a mix of lectures and required assignments, assessed by the teacher as pass or fail, and peer feedback.

Yet, another reason to revise the programme was to redistribute fiscal resources from the bachelor programme to develop a five-year masters. The informant also supplemented these reasons with student feedback about the different courses being too large and extensive: *…but it is also based on feedback from students, who might have thought that some of the topics were very big and heavy, and we see that it might be easier for both students and employees to have smaller courses.*

In relation to this, the program coordinator also pointed out that student feedback in student evaluations motivated discussions about how they teach. When asked if their discussions concerned issues of consistency, she dismissed this by: *When it comes to the relationship between the different parts of the study, I think the students will find that there is a good connection between the different courses, and I also think that the students are experiencing, or, we know from surveys, they are a little over the top of these study quality surveys compared to similar studies.*

By and large, the students appreciated the learning activities and pedagogical approaches used in the current case. They also shared the overall vision of the programme of aiming to develop a certain competence that combined both practical and academic aspects. This came into view in how the students described the learning potential of the home exam, as related to the opportunity to reflect on and employ perspectives from the literature in their exam. Considered as a whole, the program is constructively aligned in the sense that the pracademic ideal serves as a joint frame for the teacher and the students, and that the teaching arrangements are specifically designed for the purpose of addressing this ideal. The students seemed to recognize ways of working across the courses, and to be familiar with the intended learning outcomes. The group assignments also resembled each other in their form, in the sense that the students should respond to or enact a practical situation and then write a report in which their reflections on the situation should be grounded in theoretical knowledge and concepts from the programme literature (See Chaps. 9 and 10 for in-depth discussions on the design of specific courses within this program).

Based on the analysis of the student-interviews, the students recognize and appreciate the way the programme was designed and how the teachers combined various educational elements. They highlight two aspects in this regard. They underscore the way that the teacher applies dilemmas in her lectures and invite them to discuss these, because it makes them *reflect*. The lectures, as well as assignments and content literature, was described as very relevant for future work by the students. A typical example from the interviews is this statement: *I would like to have a job within Human Resource Management, and this has opened up a big range of different areas that belong to that type of position.* We see here how practical segments are well connected, with a high consciousness towards the professional practice of management. Contextual coherence is clearly given a higher priority than conceptual coherence. The teachers explain this priority by highlighting the practical nature of the discipline.

Contextual coherence was also established by the frequent use of cases as a point of departure for group work. According to the students, this was decisive for their efforts and learning how to justify their actions as professionals by theory would serve them well in practice. Based on the analysis of student interviews, it is striking how positively the students characterize one activity as particularly useful: *This assignment stood out as a magnificent example of the "pracademic" way of working*. *I believe that this is the best assignment I have ever been up to*. When students are asked *why* this activity gave such a high outcome, they replied that they learned a lot from the practical arrangement of enacting the whole process of recruitment for a position. One student says: *This is the activity I remember best, because it was practical*. The experience made them reflect upon elements that they had not been thinking about earlier; for example, how much work it is to prepare this process properly, or how complex the interview-situation is. The experience made the students more conscious about how to act in both roles, and they also realized how biased they were in their earlier approaches to the situation. Even though this

activity was specifically designed so that the students would have their own experiences of the entire process of applying for a specific position, several students talked about the usefulness of this experience for the sake of applying for a job.

In summary, the programme coordinators emphasize several intentions for the programme revisions, such as to make the course units smaller and to enhance the opportunities for student collaboration across courses. Mostly, the intentions are supported by reasons concerning the size of programme units either due to student feedback or as adaptions to other structural developments such as the master programme, but also concerning handling feedback activities for a larger student group. It is interesting to see how the issue of consistency between courses is good and that the quality of the study reported in student surveys confirms this. According to the students, it is easy for them to see how the different courses are linked. However, the students report that the different courses could be a bit repetitive; "In the third year, several of the courses took up the same themes as we have had earlier. Some of these have been rather repetitive and could have been replaced with something new." In the specific course of basic personnel management, the teacher explicitly encouraged the students to use relevant elements from other courses in the assignments. The analysis also shows that the students sometimes struggled with separating the different courses from one another, which can be interpreted as an indicator of curriculum coherence. There is a clear link between programme design and knowledge organisation. As already mentioned, the program is particularly characterized by the high degrees of contextual coherence; the practical segments are well connected, but it is less vertically and sequentially ordered conceptually.

Discussion

The data material displays a magnitude of variations of intentions for study program planning and change. However, pedagogical ideas seldom seem to be the main factor to drive developments of new designs. Rather, students drop out, reports on troublesome student evaluations or revisions due to societal developments initiate change. Various pedagogical ideas for the renewal of teaching methods in programmes and courses, and the integration of theory, knowledge and different practice oriented or practical assignments support arguments for change. The interview material illustrates how the issue of consistency (Entwistle 2007, 2009; Ashwin et al. 2015) emerges in a multitude of interconnected aspects with influence on the study programme formation; for example, in how aspects related to the organization of the programme, its ways of teaching and its assignments and exams, as well as the needs of students, form a complexity of interwoven issues relevant for the study programme consistency.

The analytical approaches introduced early in this chapter and the empirical material seen together seem to display how the intentions of the programme

coordinators were to vary aspects that they regarded as important for the wholeness and the consistency of the programme. The students seem to understand the more overall aspects of consistency in the designs but do not seem to recognize programme elements designed for more multi-dimensional approaches to programme consistency.

The analytical framework applied here draws on important contributions for our understanding of consistency in study programme planning but, in our experience, they are not individually sufficient as guidelines for study programme planning. The studied material shows how the informants draw on a range of aspects in their understandings of consistency and in their descriptions of how they work to achieve study programme consistency. They describe consistency as something that can be achieved through varied approaches and that entails combining varied considerations of a more internal character, such as disciplinary concerns or ways of teaching and learning, that fits their students the best, as well as more external character of reaching higher enrolment numbers or preventing drop out and poor student evaluations. Further, the material indicates that the analytical approach we have employed lacks what we consider to be a fourth layer of *local institutional consistency aspects* that influence how consistency is understood and "worked with" at different institutions and in various study programmes depending on certain and unique institutional traits and the local surroundings of the HEI (Fig. 5.2).
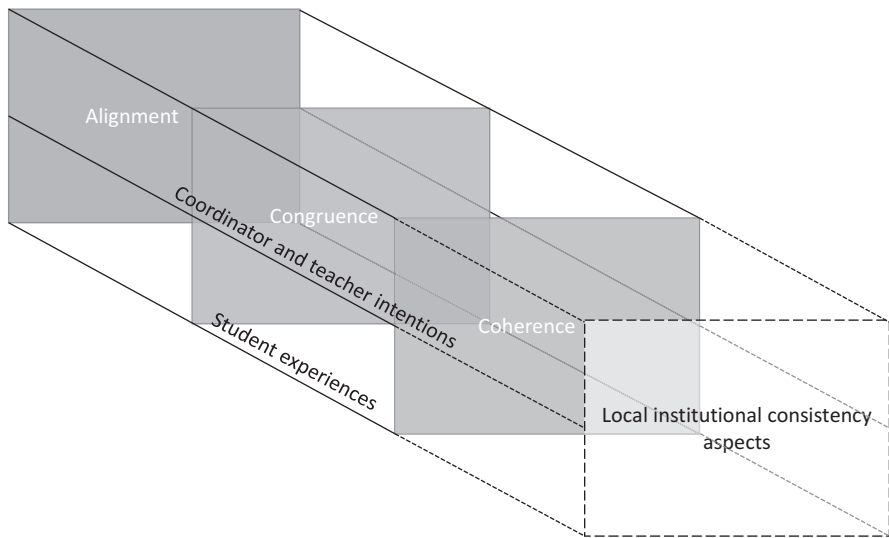

Fig. 5.2 Layers of study programme consistency

Integration of Knowledge

The data material also displays aspects related to the organization of knowledge in study programmes and inside and between courses within the programmes. For example, integrating theoretical and practical forms of knowledge seem to be a key to the teachers' pedagogical vision in both programmes. Although to a greater extent in organisation and management, the educational activities also seemed to support such content and thematic integration. Lecturers' applications of concrete examples and illustrations from real-life professional contexts were reported to help the students to see the relevance of the theory. However, the relationship between theory and practice also appears as somewhat blurred. When students used the concept of "theory", they referred to everything that was written in their textbook, which included theoretical concepts as well as practical examples, empirical material and discussions. In other words, the concept of theory covers a lot and seems to relate to everything that is conveyed in a written format by actors external to programme courses. On the other hand, the term "practice" is also used about a range of elements, like the practical illustrations given by the teacher in lectures, discussions and group assignments; all that is conceived as relevant knowledge by the students. Thus, the concept of "theory", on the one hand, and "practice", on the other, seems to overlap. This might be explained, in part, by the character of the knowledge domain of the study programmes studied, although in quite different ways. As stated by the teacher, courses in the organisation and management programme had recently been subjected to theoretical developments. While in law, the efforts to integrate theory and practice was more about changing long traditions of how theory was taught and to engage students in activities where they could integrate knowledge from several laws while simultaneously acquiring experience through role-playing. The revisions of the law programme were explained by the programme coordinators as having its roots in changes in the criminal law. Coordinators and teachers saw this as an opportunity to revise and modernize the programme so that both theory and disciplinary knowledge were reorganized into a more *hermeneutical* approach, in combination with student engagement and the use of more authentic teaching methods. The law case can be interpreted to illustrate what Muller (2009) has described as challenging the *conceptual spine* of the study programme through a process of redesigning and reorienting the programme towards more contextual coherence to meet student needs by designing the curriculum in terms of external contextual coherence instead of internal conceptual coherence. Central elements in this change were redesigning the curriculum and introducing new teaching and learning activities.

Authentic Learning Activities

Looking further into the activities of case assignments and role play, we notice that these were experienced as productive learning activities by the students. The activity that stood out as particularly stimulating for students was role play in organisation and management and the procedural experiences in law (see also Chap. 10, in this volume). This might be explained as an example of congruence (Entwistle 2005), where the students characteristics (student background and aspirations), the inner logic of the subject and the programme design form a productive whole in which students get to activate their variegated experiences through the learning activities. A challenge in this regard might be that teachers and students operate with different basic assumptions about "relevance". While the teacher might take it for granted that certain learning activities are relevant for the students for example as future personnel managers and recruiters in organizational life, the students seemed to think of it as more relevant for their lives here and now. This points to a more general challenge in how consistency in educational content can be made relevant for learners in different life phases, and the ideal of creating 'authentic contexts' (Keys and Wolfe 1990; Rule 2006) might mean in different knowledge domains considered the life of students. More specifically, it raises the fundamental question of consistency within a larger framing of how learning activities, such as experience-based knowledge, can prepare students for future positions they are not yet prepared to take.

A challenge of the employment of student engaging activities is that it is quite time-demanding and vulnerable with respect to the manning and engagement of teacher support. The workload in the organisation and management programme was characterised as "absolutely extreme" by the teacher. In the law case, both teachers and students described a change in workload as student activated teaching requires more work from both teachers and students. This points to an overall consistency challenge of not seeing teachers' or students' work or the different activities in isolation but keeping the whole work process for both teachers and students in mind when designing study programmes. With respect to this issue, it can be questioned whether any of the consistency concepts presented here manage to capture the consequences of increased complexity added by more student-centred approaches.

Constructive alignment was, by and large, achieved by the structures of both programmes. However, there are reasons to ask whether the ideas of alignment can be fully achieved if the students do not recognise how the different assignments build up to the final exam. In both cases, the consistency between defined learning outcomes and final exams seems to be weak. In both cases, the revisions of the programme and the active student approaches in assignments and activities are set aside in the final exams and, as such, makes a breach with the intended and enacted consistency efforts of the teaching activities. For example, the three group assignments in the organisation and management programme were compulsory but did not count in the final assessment.

To return to the ambition of this chapter to investigate: What issues related to consistency in study programme planning can be observed between two selected study programmes and what challenges arise from ways of working with consistency. There seem to be several answers to our question. The issue of consistency can be acknowledged by coordinators, teachers and students, but seen mostly in relation to concrete and hands on activities. Coordinators point to intentions of improving the study programmes to meet student needs, making programmes less boring, theoretical and more student engaging. Teachers describe intentions and enactments of programme activities in relation to how theory and practice can be more strongly integrated to support student understanding of learning. Overall, the activities employed can be considered as aiming for learning through activity where the right theory and the right activity together can form an arena where student characteristics, the inner logic of the subject and programme design to use Entwistles (2005) words, meet over the content to be activated = learned. To a large extent, the student experiences follows this way of thinking through their appraisals of what they learned mostly from – the role play and the procedural exercise. However, when final exam approaches, a breach in the alignment (Biggs and Tang 2011) can be detected in the consistency within and between programme and course activities. According to Muller (2009), this may be understood as challenging the conceptual spine and the knowledge base of the studies. Our two cases may be examples of how the conceptual coherence of the study may be interpreted to strike back when it is time for final exam and the qualifications acquired are to be validated.

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Chapter 6
Exploring Student Participation Challenges in Student-Centred Learning Environments

Monika Nerland

Introduction

Pedagogical approaches that engage students more actively in explorative and knowledge-generating activities are encouraged by current higher education policies and practices and are considered to be an important means of developing so-called student-centred learning environments (SCLEs). While this term has somewhat different interpretations, there is a general agreement that SCLEs highlight opportunities for students to work on real-world problems, to gain practical experiences from practices that are characteristic for the domain they are studying, and to take ownership of their own inquiry processes (Land et al. 2012). Approaches that are often affiliated with SCLEs include project-based learning, problem-based learning, different forms of inquiry-based learning, as well as the use of case analyses and simulation games, in digital or face-to-face environments (Land et al. 2012). Furthermore, scholars underscore that activities should be guided and that students should have the opportunity to activate their previous experiences as well to access a range of knowledge resources during the learning process.

Such approaches are generally found supportive to learning (Land et al. 2012; Damșa et al. 2015) and, through the opportunities they offer for variegated tasks and participation modes, they have the potential to engage an academically diverse body of students (Northedge 2003; Hockings 2009). At the same time, such activities can be challenging for both teachers and students. They alter the traditional student and teacher roles, in the sense that the students are expected to identify relevant knowledge sources and find ways of productively using them, while the teachers support and guide their explorative processes. In some cases, student-centred approaches also contribute to increasing the workload of both parties. Moreover, although

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coined with the ambition to foster a deeper engagement among students (Baeten et al. 2016), it has proven challenging to engage all students in productive ways through these approaches. Some research has indicated that student-centred approaches may be ineffective for as many as 30% of higher education students (Hockings 2009), while other studies have pointed out their risk of reinforcing the differences in the academic accomplishment of students. The latter rests on the acknowledgement that explorative and knowledge-generating activities tend to be more beneficial for students who have prior knowledge of the course content (Gil et al. 2010) or those who have developed capacities for self-regulation and independent work. It is known that student engagement and forms of participation vary, increasingly so in the era of mass education. However, less is known about the students' reasons for not engaging as encouraged by the teachers or anticipated in the course designs, as well as about what constitutes their sources of hesitancy. A better understanding of these issues is needed in order to develop learning environments and support structures that would be beneficial for the majority of students.

This chapter aims to further explore how extended responsibility for the accomplishment of learning activities is experienced by students, with emphasis placed on the forms of hesitancy that occur and the reasons behind their emergence. The concept of "hesitancy" is deliberately used here as an open-ended concept to capture different forms of withdrawal or limited participation in activities that may occur in SCLEs. Whilst the concept bears resemblance to broader and more established terms, such as academic engagement or disengagement (Kahu 2013; Lawson and Lawson 2013; Kahn 2014), the intention here is to focus more specifically on reasons that students may have for their reluctancy to participate as anticipated in specific student-centred activities, without necessarily labelling this as a sign of academic disengagement. As shown by different studies of participation in online environments, students may very well be intellectually engaged even if they take on more "invisible" roles (Beaudoin 2002). Hence, rather than examining what leads to engagement or disengagement in general, the aim of this chapter is to explore different forms and reasons behind hesitancy towards active participation in student-centred activities. To do so, it is assumed that hesitancy emerges from experienced participation challenges, which may have different origins and which are further conceptualized below. First, a brief review of research is presented to shed light on the general challenges faced in higher education more generally with respect to accomplishing SCLEs.

Identified Challenges in Accomplishing SCLEs

From previous research, it is known that expectations placed on students in SCLEs involve responsibilities that go beyond engaging actively with the course content. Students are also often expected to monitor their own work processes and are

encouraged to make important choices about what and how they are going to learn (Doyle 2008). However, the extent of these responsibilities varies according to the types of activities and course designs. The literature points towards different epistemological underpinnings in SCLE notions regarding how extensive the responsibilities placed on students should be—from highlighting their active role in learning activities to also including them in the course design planning and development stages (Hains and Smith 2012; Lea et al. 2003). A number of studies have examined the forms of teacher resistance towards taking on new roles in the context of student-centred approaches, including their attitudes to teaching and their taken for granted roles (e.g., Aliusta and Özer 2017; Johnson et al. 2009; Robertson 2005; Sadler 2012). Researchers have also investigated to what extent institutional and pedagogical conditions matter for the accomplishment of inquiry-based learning and other forms of student-centred approaches. For instance, a study by Spronken-Smith et al. (2011) has found that inquiry-based learning was more accepted when it permeated a study program as a whole and when it was sufficiently supported by both management and staff developers. Few studies have examined the student experiences regarding specific challenges they face in participating and taking on extended responsibilities for activities. It is known that student instructional preferences and course experiences are related to their approaches to learning (Baeten et al. 2016) and that their capacities for self-regulated learning are related to academic emotions and psychological flexibility (Asikainen et al. 2018; Trigwell et al. 2012). Moreover, research has indicated that experiences, as well as capacities to take part, relate to the type of participation required by specific activities (e.g., see Pfaff and Huddlestone 2003). Hence, the way students experience learning environments may vary significantly as a result of multiple personal and contextual factors. In order to develop a better understanding of how and why students may hesitate to take on more extensive responsibilities for their own learning, there is a need to see the teacher and student responsibilities as related and co-produced and to examine in more detail how different forms of hesitancy occur in the context of specific activities and learning environments.

This chapter explores these issues by drawing on a series of case studies conducted within the *Quality of Norwegian Higher Education* (QNHE) project, which focused on how teachers and students in different disciplines and course contexts worked with and experienced various student-centred approaches. The next section outlines analytical perspectives on the student role and possible sources of their participation hesitancy. Subsequently, the QNHE case studies and analytical strategy are introduced and a thematic analysis of participation challenges and forms of hesitancy, which occurred in these case studies, is presented. The chapter ends by discussing dilemmas in engaging students to accept more responsibilities for learning processes and activities and how this may inform ongoing quality work that aims to develop student-centred learning environments.

Different Perspectives on the Positioning of Students in Higher Education

To investigate the forms of and reasons for student hesitancy to engage in SCLEs, this chapter employs a relational perspective on the student role as one that is constituted through the social practices and discourses at play in the learning environment. Social practices and discourses incorporate the notions of good performance, what forms of engagement are seen as appropriate, and how responsibilities for activities should be socially distributed. As such, they offer the participants—students and teachers—positions from which to act and make sense of educational activities, which come with both rights and duties (Ashwin 2012; Harré and van Langenhove 1999). Institutional positions, such as those of the students and teachers in higher education, tend to be implicit and taken for granted by the participants. However, they are interdependent and continuously shaped by the ideas and ways of thinking that are dominant in the institutional environment, which means that they change over time as new educational discourses emerge and gain ground.

The notion of SCLEs builds on and has emerged from constructivist perspectives on learning (Land et al. 2012). This includes attention towards learning as emerging in the interaction between persons and their social and epistemic environments in which processes of meaning making, exploration, and knowledge integration are significant. In efforts to create SCLEs, an emphasis on activating the students' previous knowledge and experiences in the context of working on real-world problems typically exists. Activities often require knowledge sharing and participation in social processes, through which the students' previous experiences are examined and linked with new knowledge and experiences. Adding to this the fact that learning often involves accessing and making sense of information from a range of sources, learning is understood as a series of performative actions through which students actively construct knowledge and through which the actions and achieved insights become consequential for further action (Säljö 2010).

This *performative view* on learning and the student role is, however, debated and interpreted differently in the literature. From a learning perspective, Säljö (2010) argues that acknowledging performativity as a learning metaphor offers a better understanding of how learning takes place in digital and distributed environments and of the role that advanced tools (like ICTs) play in this regard. Moreover, the performative view draws attention to what the student does and what potential for enriched understanding his or her actions entail. Access to knowledge resources, as well as opportunities to participate and contribute to joint social practices in relevant ways, become significant features of the learning environment.

Another take on performativity is presented by Macfarlane (2015), who raises the question whether increased expectations to articulate and "perform" learning in collective spaces undermine the private spaces and the autonomy of students to determine for themselves how they want to engage with the course content. From this perspective, performativity is linked to accountability and control, not only of the outcomes of learning but also of the very processes that lead towards them. The

positioning of students as active co-constructors of knowledge is here seen as a means of regulating the student role in ways that, for instance, may be easier for socially engaged and extroverted students to embrace than for those who are shy or introverted. Moreover, when the assessments of learning products and outcomes also become dependent on the students' performance capacities, often also in group-based activities, this may generate social pressures to participate in accordance with collective expectations. This interpretation may, however, be criticised for not sufficiently taking into account how professional work practices and demands to expertise increasingly require social and collaborative skills, nor how knowledge in many fields is unfolding and changing over time as it is employed, adapted, and further developed in different contexts of practice. When knowledge is seen as sustained through enactments in social processes rather than as a stable entity, this also has consequences for what it means to learn and to demonstrate expertise in relevant ways and, in turn, for the role that higher education should play in the development of this expertise.

Rather than continuing this performativity debate, this chapter considers both interpretations as a means to explore various forms of participation hesitancy among students. While the performative view on learning brings attention to the *social* and *cognitive challenges* that students may face when trying to participate in different learning environments, the perspective on student performativity and pressures towards public performance brings attention to *affective challenges* (e.g., manifested as anxiety), experiences of alienation, or lack of autonomy. These categories—social, cognitive, and affective dimensions—are commonly used in studies on student engagement (Lawson and Lawson 2013). In this chapter, they are used to distinguish between various types of challenges and how these may generate hesitancy to participate In addition, challenges may arise from a lack of transparency or clarity regarding what is expected from the students. Several scholars have pointed out the built-in tensions and paradoxes of the teacher and student positions in SCLEs, which may generate uncertainty and lead to inactivity. In this research, too, there has been a stronger focus on revealing the tensions present in the teacher role than those existing in the student role (e.g., see Robertson 2005; Scager et al. 2016). This chapter complements this research by further investigating the challenges and participation hesitancy from the student perspective.

Case Studies and Analytical Approach

The analysis and discussion that follows draws on and expands the overall findings of the case studies conducted at the course level in the QNHE project, presented in a comprehensive report edited by Nerland and Prøitz (2018). These case studies examined how educational practices are organized, enacted, and perceived in different domains and program context, with an overall focus on how various student-centred pedagogical approaches were employed to foster student engagement and learning. There were eight course case studies in total, six conducted in Norway and

Table 6.1 Overview of the case studies

Case	Course and programme context	Level	Key pedagogical approaches	Main researcher(s)
A	Program development course in a Computer Engineering programme	BA	*Project-based learning*	Crina Damsa
B	Ecology course in a Biology programme	BA/MA	*Portfolio-based* course, comprising different assignments	Rachelle Esterhazy
C	Personnel management in an Organization and Management programme	BA	*Case-based learning* and *Role play simulations*	Line Wittek & Monika Nerland
D	Supervised practice in a Nursing programme	BA	*Technology-based simulation*	Yngve Nordkvelle & Odd Rune Stalheim
E	Criminal law course in a Law programme	MA	*Moot courts*, collaboration with the professional field	Trine Fossland & Thomas de Lange
F	Economic management and financial analysis in an experience-based MBA programme	MA	*Online teaching and learning*, combined with campus activities	Trine Fossland & Cathrine Tømte
G	Field course in ecology research in a Biological and environmental sciences programme	BA	*Problem-based learning,* in collaborative research projects	Heidi Hyttinen
H	Research methods course in a Law programme	MA	*Lectures and essay writing*	Heidi Hyttinen & Anne Haarala-Muhonen

BA Bachelor level, *MA* master level

two in Finland. They included different pedagogical approaches, such as problem-based learning, case-based learning, project work, portfolio-organized work, field work, and different types of simulation exercises. At the same time, they also included more traditional lectures and seminar activities. The project team looked for well-functioning cases, thus, courses that had received good evaluations and/or were recommended by programme leaders were selected, including cases that could exemplify different kinds of technological uses. An overview of the cases is presented in Table 6.1.

For each case study a rich data set was collected, comprising of participant observations of the course activities, interviews with teachers before and after the course/observation periods, group interviews with students, and collection of course documents, assignments, knowledge resources, and other materials. The observation period for each course was between 2 and 3 weeks in length, constituted of approximately a 12-h observation minimum; however, this varied somewhat as observation periods were adapted to specific course designs. Within these frames, some activities, which were considered significant in the course design, were

selected for in-depth examination and were followed from a particular starting point (e.g., the introduction of new knowledge content or an assignment), through students' work with the content/assignment, to a completion point in the form of an assessment. The students who agreed to be followed more closely in these learning activities were interviewed in groups (3–5 groups per course). These cases were subjected to a joint analytical strategy that aimed at revealing both how the different course elements (types of instruction, learning activities, assignments, assessment criteria, etc.) worked together in the enactment of the course and how these were experienced by the teachers and students. The methodology is further described in the report edited by Nerland and Prøitz (2018), which also includes detailed descriptive reports from each of the eight case studies.

For the purposes of this chapter, a secondary analysis of these descriptive reports was conducted with a specific focus placed on the participation challenges that were reported by students and on the forms of participation hesitancy that were described in the case studies. This was done by subjecting the material in the reports to a thematic analysis, following the lines suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Social, cognitive, and affective participation challenges formed broad categories of this analysis and, based on the above perspectives, they were interpreted in the following way:

- *Social challenges* are challenges related to the collaboration and interdependencies with fellow students/participants;
- *Cognitive challenges* are related to the understanding of concepts, tasks and expectations, ways of activating prior knowledge, and procedural strategies for how to approach problems and knowledge contents; and
- *Affective challenges* relate to the discomfort with social exposure, feeling of not belonging, as well as to the anxiety experienced during activities.

These categories were then further detailed through an inductive coding for the forms of hesitancy that occurred in the reported cases. In addition to the three predefined categories, inductive reading also generated a fourth category that was called *organizational challenges*. This was used to denote the challenges related to time–effort organization: when, for instance, assignments and intensive work expectations coincided with similar expectations in other courses and led to more limited forms of participation. From this thematic analysis, some examples were further explored to reveal possible reasons for their emergence in various course contexts.

Findings: Participation Challenges and Sources of Hesitancy

The review of the case reports showed that all types of challenges mentioned above were present and that they also often co-existed in the courses. Whilst most forms manifested in some way of another in all the cases, their relative presence varied, as

did their specific forms, in relation to tasks and activities. *Cognitive challenges* were most noteworthy in the courses that related to hard or clearly demarcated knowledge domains, such as engineering, biology, and law. These domains often embody cumulative principles for knowledge organisation and participation often requires conceptual understanding of theoretical knowledge (e.g., Muller 2009). However, more than simply registering difficulties in understanding scientific concepts as such, these cases also displayed challenges in selecting and integrating knowledge for problems at hand and in procedural approaches. This may be due to the chosen analytical approach that highlighted experiences with course designs and activities. However, it may also be related to the more flexible paths that students could follow in their work.

Affective challenges, on the other hand, were more frequent in the courses that engaged students in different types of role-play and simulation activities in which practical skills were tested out and assessed. These activities challenged the students to use their personal knowledge and experiences as a collective learning resource, and the efforts to create learning situations that resembled real-life settings generated different emotions among students, such as nervousness and insecurity as well as excitement and enthusiasm.

Social challenges were identified across several cases and were particularly related to group dynamics and the different modes of student participation in activities in which collaborative learning processes stretched over time. Strikingly, these challenges were typically expressed in terms of irritation towards fellow students who were not engaging as expected by, for instance, not doing their part of the collaborative work. However, they could also take on a more task-related form, such as experiencing difficulties regarding how to enact peer roles and how to regulate the social process when working together.

Organizational challenges were of a more practical nature; however, when these occurred they tended to generate other types of challenges, such as social and affective ones. In several cases, the students expressed experiencing challenges related to prioritizing between tasks when the workload became unmanageable and to distributing their efforts on various parallel activities. This was particularly observable in courses where the students were also enrolled in other courses during the same period and the workload was not coordinated between the courses. However, it could also occur between different activities within the same course, leading to, for instance, an absence from lectures when group processes were more intense, as well as between work and education commitments among part-time students. When these challenges generated less participation or commitment to joint activities, they were more likely to lead to frustration and collaboration problems.

The identified participation challenges are summarized in Table 6.2. It should be noted that the types of challenges are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they may be intertwined and serve to reinforce each other. Moreover, the challenges student face seem to be related to the types of tasks they are presented with, which can be more or less cognitively, practically, or emotionally demanding. The courses included here embody a variation in terms of approaches and tasks, thereby denoting different requirements presented to the students. Consequently, the cases complement

Table 6.2 Participation challenges reported in the case studies

Cognitive challenges	Social challenges	Affective challenges	Organizational challenges
Challenges in understanding what content from lectures is relevant for what tasks when students are responsible for organizing their own work (B, G).[a]	Frustration when peers do not do their part in collaborative assignments (C).	Challenges related to being exposed to peer assessment (C, D).	Difficulties in organizing time and effort in relation to the work requirements in parallel courses (A, B).
Challenges in understanding the procedural requirements of tasks (A, C, H).	Challenges in (procedural) co-regulation of joint activities (C).	Challenges in staging one's own life and personal experiences as a collective learning resource (C, E).	Difficulties in organising own work within a course with multiple tasks and timelines (A, B, E).
Challenges in understanding how requirements relate to the course work (B, H).	Challenges in providing critical feedback to peers (C, D).	Challenges in distinguishing authentic training tasks in education from real-life situations (C, D).	Difficulties in combining work with study activities in experience-based, part-time study activities (F).
Challenges concerning the variation in preunderstanding and existing knowledge of students (A, B, C).	Challenges in connecting socially with peers in online course contexts (F).	Anxiety related to the consequences of own (in)expertise (C, D).	
	Demotivation when fellow students do not attend/sign up for participation in voluntary activities (E).		

[a]Letters A–H in brackets denote the cases in which the challenges were prominent

each other in mapping the types of challenges that students face in student-centred learning environments.

All the identified challenges were found to constitute sources of participation hesitancy, however, they do so in different ways. *Cognitive challenges* can lead to an unwillingness to take independent responsibility for work processes and can cause students to approach the teachers for approval of their work early on in the process rather than to live with the uncertainty caused by the independence of their explorative process. This was, for instance, illustrated by the group processes presented in case B (Esterhazy 2018; see also Esterhazy and Damsa 2017) and in case G (Hyytinen 2018). Alternatively, these challenges can lead to postponed engagement, as illustrated in case H, for instance, where the students were confused as to what role different activities should play in the course and how the criteria for assessment should be understood. As one student from this case expressed in relation to the lectures offered: "I was also a bit lost on what the purpose of the different

parts was. Quite often it's been useful if a visiting lecturer interested in the matter has explained some things. But quite often during this course I missed the common thread of what the purpose was" (Hyytinen and Haarala-Muhonen 2018, p. 180).

Affective challenges, on the other hand, could lead to a withdrawal from activities, to a deliberate choosing of less exposed roles when possible, or to an avoidance of tensions and uncomfortable situations with peers. The cases involving role-play are particularly illustrative in this respect. In case C (Wittek and Nerland 2018), for instance, the students expressed anxiety towards being assessed by peers when they were asked to take on the role of a job applicant in a roleplay scenario on recruitment practices, which in some instances hindered their participation and led some students not to take their role-play seriously. Although the purpose of the activity was to train the students in vacant position candidate interview and selection techniques, the role of the applicant was experienced as the more vulnerable one. As one student commented, this was because "everybody will have to apply for a job and go through a recruitment process" (Wittek and Nerland 2018, p. 89) and they, therefore, felt that it was themselves and their professional background that was being assessed in the role-play. Moreover, the students in this case study also expressed experiencing difficulties in providing critical feedback to peers, which can be interpreted as an effect of the personal character of the exercise. Both in this case and in case D (Nordkvelle and Stalheim 2018), the experienced authenticity of the tasks generated insecurity and hesitancy among the students as to whether they would be able to cope with professional practices in their future professional life.

Social challenges were, in several instances, related to the experienced frustration that resulted from other students' engagement levels—possibly caused by other types of challenges—which can potentially also lead to lack of commitment among the more engaged students. This was expressed as a problem among students in case E (Fossland and de Lange 2018). In this case, several joint activities, such as a work-related debate and a moot court exercise, were dependent on the students' preparation and commitment. When only a few students prepared for the debate exercise and committed to take active roles in the optional moot court exercise, this generated a sense of free riders in these activities. As one student expressed, "some of the students do not take responsibilities in seminars, they lean back and just take notes" (Fossland and de Lange 2018, p. 130). The interdependency of the students in student-centred approaches was here put on a stage, leading to requests for stronger teacher regulation of participation modes from the more active students. Similarly, in cases A and C, examples of problems with different levels of student commitment to group projects were reported (Damsa 2018; Wittek and Nerland 2018; see also Damsa and Wittek, Chap. 7, this volume).

Organizational challenges can lead to limited participation in optional and joint activities among those who experienced them, however, as indicated above, such limited participation can, in turn, lead to other participation challenges among fellow students and in collaborative processes. Examples of such challenges were reported in case B (Esterhazy 2018), which presented a diverse student group combination that had different parallel course commitments and overall optional activities in the course, resulting in several students not taking advantage of feedback and

supervision opportunities that were offered. Another example was found in case F, a course in an experienced-based master programme, in which the students reported difficulties with finding the time necessary to participate synchronously in online seminars because these tended to be scheduled during working hours or when they had other commitments (Fossland and Tømte 2018).

In sum, these examples point out the need for teachers and other parties involved to more thoroughly explore the reasons different students have for not participating as encouraged or desired when such situations occur. Behavioural patterns that appear similar upon first glance may have very different origins, thus requiring different forms of support. It is also important to note that even same situations are highly likely to generate different experiences for different students and that those situations that trigger insecurity or withdrawal among some students can have the opposite effect on other students. The next section discusses some of these dilemmas, followed by some suggestions as to how the challenges identified in these case studies can inform quality work at the level of higher education teaching and learning practices.

Discussion

The participation challenges identified in this chapter support the view that student-centred approaches do not necessarily resolve the problem of designing teaching and learning activities to include an increasingly diverse student body. These approaches are demanding for students to engage in, as they require social, emotional, and epistemic investments towards which students take different stances and for which they are differently prepared. At the same time, the types of challenges discussed above support the claim that teacher guidance is highly needed in more student-driven activities and that attention should therefore be placed on how different activities and modes of teaching can support each other in productive ways (Northedge 2003; Elen et al. 2007). In this work, several issues should be considered.

First, it is important to underscore that challenges are not in themselves a bad thing. As shown above, challenges are often related to experiences of uncertainty, and this state may be both productive and required for meaningful learning to take place. In the case studies examined here, this was identified as students rated some of the activities, which were imbued with affective as well as social challenges, as very important for their learning—the role-play exercises in cases C and D, for instance. Although this may be more of a case for the engaged students, it nevertheless underscores the importance of exposing students to uncertainty and challenging their current state of knowing through various tasks and activities. Hence, although the analysis of these courses displayed a range of experienced participation challenges, this does not imply that the activities were not supportive to student learning. What can be taken away from this analysis, in general, is that, rather than avoiding challenging students, the ambition should be to calibrate the degree of uncertainty regarding the students' sense of mastery and to be conscious of which

work process phases such states can be prompted in and how the experiences can be consolidated after risk exposure. Furthermore, it is important to be aware of the difference between challenging students intellectually and emotionally, as well as how these may interplay. As pointed out by Scager et al. (2016), one of the balancing acts in higher education practices concerns the balance between challenging the students' understanding and providing psychological safety. How this can be done needs to be thought out more thoroughly in specific educational contexts, based on knowledge about the characteristics of particular student groups.

Second, it follows from the above that an extended notion of student participation and forms of engagement is needed. Several scholars have, in recent years, advocated for including more contextual factors in research on student engagement. For instance, Kahn (2014) argues that modes of participation are related to student reflexivity and to the ways in which their agency is mediated by the forms of reflexivity encouraged in the learning environment. This implies that the ways of explicating the rationale for activities, as well as encouraging meta-reflection and joint discussions about activities and participation modes, are significant support structures that can assist students in taking productive stances regarding their own participation. This is, however, not only a question of teacher-student interaction. Equally important are the social dynamics among the students and their collaborative processes. Previous studies have shown that co-regulation of social processes is challenging and, indeed, that it also represents something that needs to be learned (Damşa 2014; Järvelä et al. 2018). As reported in several case studies from the QNHE project, students require teacher support and assistance in form of external participation regulation to help them accept these responsibilities. Hence, providing guidelines for how to proceed with tasks and how to manage the collaborative process is as important as supporting student understanding of content knowledge.

Returning to the earlier discussion about performativity in today's higher education discourses and practices, the participation challenges identified in this chapter show that both the ways in which students are positioned in student-centred learning environments and the ways in which they enact and experience these positions are imbued with tensions and often marked by a lack of transparency in what is expected. Not surprisingly, the types of teacher role tensions previously identified (e.g., Robertson 2005) are also reflected in the student role. Adding to this the fact that students are experiencing their learning environments in quite different ways, there is a need to account for broader dimensions of the student experience in the discussions relating to higher education quality. However, this needs to be balanced with the need to secure a personal space for students. Lawson and Lawson (2013) argue, in the context of general schooling, that

> the study of ambivalent student dispositions calls particular attention both to social-cultural and affective indicators of engagement and the ways in which student thoughts and feelings about the activities, people, and place of school may interact to form diverse educational pathways. (p. 451)

In higher education, one may ask whether this interest in the thoughts and feelings of students can go too far, prompting some students to disengagement rather than

engagement. An alternative route might be to follow Säljö's (2010) notion of performativity as a learning metaphor and focus on the knowledge-related activities and their purposes, support mechanisms, and generated outcomes in ways that encourage but not invade the students' personal experiences as learning resources. In explorative and knowledge-generating activities, this may take the form of allowing students to "see" the products of what they are generating and securing sufficient time for the teaching-learning process to consolidate experiences and new insights. Furthermore, it may be desirable to calibrate the degree of responsibilities and challenges to match the students' different ambitions in a course. The feasibility of this latter advice is, however, dependent on other factors, such as the course size, the previous knowledge the students have within the domain, and the degree of interdependency in the social organisation of course activities.

Conclusion

What, then, are the potential implications of this discussion for efforts to enhance the quality of higher education practices? Following the conceptualisation of quality work in Chap. 1 (Elken and Stensaker, this volume), such work spans different levels in higher education and dilemmas can arise between them. For example, it is likely that some of the difficulties programme leaders might face in managing the development of SCLEs are related to insufficient awareness about the types of challenges that the students experience in these environments. Moreover, if the expectations to student engagement are too standardized or strict, then the students' sense of autonomy may be hampered along with their willingness to participate. As such, the insights presented in this chapter serve to substantiate several dilemmas raised in the introductory chapter of this book. One of these concerns the dilemmas arising between new teaching and learning ideas and the established quality culture within a study programme. Another concerns the dilemmas arising between the need for increased formalisation in the educational offerings and the autonomy of teachers and students.

Where issues of teaching and learning are concerned, it is important to recognise the quality work carried out at the practice level, which is directed towards course and programme development.[1] Here, the participation challenges discussed above could be addressed prospectively, in the sense of taking actions in the planning of tasks and activities to prevent serious challenges from arising. Cognitive challenges may be addressed by recognising that student-driven activities need to be guided and through a consideration of the means (such as teacher-led instruction, tools and artefacts, or modelling activities) that can provide relevant support for specific tasks. Moreover, it seems important to be aware of what learning in a given domain

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[1] See also the final chapter in Nerland & Prøitz, eds. (2018) for general recommendations to quality enhancement in course and programme development.

entails and to communicate the rationale behind different activities in a clear manner. Social challenges can be taken into account by considering what demands different tasks and activities pose to social regulation and by providing guidelines, including assessment criteria, for this dimension of the students' work. Affective challenges can also be reduced by securing transparency in participation demands and providing procedural guidelines for how to approach collaborative processes. In addition, the examples from our case studies indicate that planning sufficient time for debriefing and consolidation of experiences after high social exposure is important. In short, quality work, in the form of planning activities and course designs, is crucial. At the same time, it should also be kept in mind that some level of uncertainty is needed for meaningful learning to take place and that certain strategies for encouraging students to move beyond their immediate comfort zones are, consequently, hallmarks of educational quality.

Organizational challenges are challenges of another kind and, as discussed above, they often emerge due to a lack of coordination between parallel courses and/or activities. To account for potential participation challenges, quality work in the form of teacher collaboration and activity coordination in the planning phase is important. When more emphasis is placed on the students' engagement and responsibility for learning activities, their total workload and work situation needs to be taken into account. This issue stretches beyond course context and points out a need for coordinating work on the programme level. For instance, pedagogical approaches could have a better grounding when they are contextualized within the study programme as a whole, and when students can advance not only in their cognitive accomplishments but also in their ways of working as they proceed through their programme. Spronken-Smith et al. (2011) argued that deploying student-centred approaches is a matter of cultural change and found that these approaches are more accepted when they permeate a programme than when they form stand-alone activities. Such acceptance is also important for preventing participation hesitancy and can be catered for by coordinating programme development across groups of academics, management, and supporting staff.

At the same time, it is important to consider how far activities can and should be planned. Both the literature on SCLEs and the current discourses on quality work emphasise the role of students as co-partners in achieving educational quality (e.g., Evans et al. 2015). Hence, quality is not secured once and for all through careful study designs. Rather, quality work needs to be constantly developed by the involved parties, that is, in collaboration between teachers and students and between academics involved in different courses of a study programme. This is not to say that responsibilities are equally distributed, as quality work is and should be an institutional responsibility. However, the rights, duties, and expectations that come with today's positioning of students also include contributions to improving courses and programmes. Zooming out to this level could raise new questions about participation challenges as well as further needs to explicate the roles and responsibilities of different parties in higher education today.

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Chapter 7
Making Group Learning Work. Processes and Pedagogical Designs in Higher Education

Crina Damşa and Anne Line Wittek

Introduction

Higher education is increasingly challenged to support prospective students in developing capacities for advanced knowledge work and in learning to solve open-ended problems that often are too complex to be solved by individuals only. In addition, an increasingly diverse student population leads to a need for more flexible pedagogical approaches and learning designs that have potential to address students' learning goals and interests; and to ensure a better quality of teaching and learning in higher education (Elken and Stensaker, Chaps. 1 and 10, this volume). Group learning that involves students in solving open-ended problems and managing collaborative work has been proposed as a way to enculture students into learning situations that foster interaction with peers and replicate potential work scenarios (e.g., Damşa and Nerland 2016; Muukkonen et al. 2010; Spronken-Smith et al. 2011).

For students, learning in (small) groups opens up an array of opportunities. Participation in group-based activities is intended to provide students with the opportunity to share, discuss, and elaborate on ideas, solve complex tasks or work on joint projects (Damşa and Ludvigsen 2016; Jensen et al. 2015; Rummel and Spada 2005), but also to learn and practice dialog, provide feedback, or develop relational skills (e.g., Edmunds and Brown 2010; Van den Bossche et al. 2006; Muukkonen et al. 2013). In practice, most of group activities have demonstrated added value when used as a form of activity, but present also challenges when it comes to organizing such activities in a way that is conducive of learning. One would assume that learning in groups would to be a low threshold and natural activity, given the extensive involvement of students in informal interaction (e.g., online social networks). But collaboration that is meaningful and productive for students'

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learning seems not to be automatically attained when groups of students are placed together and work on collaborative assignments or projects in institutional contexts. In other words, a student group is not necessarily an already established community with customary ways of acting. Meaningful group conduct can be achieved through a recursive, gradual process simultaneously triggered and influenced by individual input, interaction with peers, and supported by feedback and guidance (Damşa and Nerland 2016; Eberle et al. 2014; Järvelä et al. 2016). From this perspective, it is important to understand the way group learning accommodates students' varying needs and interests, but also mobilizes what it takes to ensure quality of both the learning process and its outcomes.

For teachers in higher education, the task of designing for productive group learning is currently intersecting with the overarching endeavor to establish student-centered learning environments (SCLEs) (see Damşa and de Lange 2019; Land et al. 2012). SCLEs can be suitable arenas for group learning, with designs that allow students to engage in working with knowledge together, practice various skills and strategies characteristic to team work, and which provides them with the opportunity to learn taking responsibilities with regard to their own and the collective learning process. Teachers' work and design efforts that contribute to fostering group-based learning are not extensively documented in the research literature. A distinct set of studies examining the pedagogical design of collaborative tasks that stimulate the learners' engagement. (e.g., Dimitriadis and Goodyear 2013; Kali et al. 2011; McKenney et al. 2015) identified a complex orchestration of tasks, resources, opportunities and challenges that arise in the design process when learning is viewed as an open process, shaped by the various actors involved (students, teachers), is situated in particular disciplinary and institutional contexts, and includes affordances of intellectual, material or digital nature. However, this research also indicates a clear need to better understand how group learning is taking place and is being organized. This type of studies follows the general trends, by referring mainly to 'good' collaborative learning or group-based learning, but what does it mean and how can it be realized?

To better understand group learning and how it can be fosterer, this chapter outlines and discusses*, first,* 'ingredients' that matter, as purported in the literature, for students' meaningful and productive learning in groups. *Second,* it examines two empirical cases with illustrative potential, by analyzing how small group learning was designed and experienced. *Finally*, it scrutinizes how teachers think of and engage with designing activities that are conducive of learning, and their experiences and reflections on the process and its outcome. Ultimately, the aim is to arrive at insights on how quality can be achieved in relation to group-based learning and how pedagogical design and teaching can enhance the learning experience, and to distil implications and recommendations for the practice of higher education.

The central notions about group learning, extracted from conceptual and empirical literature will be discussed in relation to empirical examples selected from two cases from the project 'Quality of Norwegian Higher Education: Pathways, Practices and Performances'. The empirical examples are situated in disciplinary course contexts and illustrate learning designs where group–based learning activities have a central role.

Uses of Group Learning in Higher Education

Learning in groups can take place in relation to small, short-span tasks during particular course activities (i.e., discussion assignments during lecture, seminar or online) or through larger assignments that span a longer period of time. Research in higher education contexts documents much of the latter, which can differ in the type of structure provided to the learner (from open-ended problems to clearly specified end-products) and the nature of the process (focused on problem defining and solving a complex problem, or in producing concrete solutions).

Project-based learning involves students in pursuing projects that resemble real-world activities of experts (Krajcik and Blumenfeld 2006), common in business, engineering, and design education (e.g., customer projects. The questions guide students in investigating disciplinary issues, which is expected to result in a *product* (report, experiment, software etc.) to be assessed in the end (Spronken-Smith et al. 2011). Learners are provided with specifications for a desired end-product, and the guidance is more oriented toward particular procedural aspects. Empirical research on PjBL documents a contribution to students' motivation, experience of knowledge relevance, creativity, and transformative experiences in relation to the resources and procedures of the disciplinary domain, but also challenges regarding logistics and assessment and difficulties in aligning with other courses (Damşa and Nerland 2016; Jensen et al. 2015). The teacher's role is usually to guide the students in their choice of methods and use of theories, as well to assess the project outcomes.

In *problem-based learning*, students learn by applying knowledge and skills to generate a solution to a problem (Hmelo-Silver 2004). This approach has been elaborated within medical education learning and emphasizes self-directed learning around the investigation and resolution of ill-structured, authentic problems. The problem is a trigger for inquiry in organized in group work, where each learner is responsible for exploring to find possible solutions. Still, no significant differences in learning outcomes were found, but more self-regulation, constructive conceptions of learning and higher appreciation of discussion with peers (Lycke et al. 2006). Other studies show that students learn by reacting to and modifying each other's ideas to increase understanding of the problem (Hmelo-Silver 2004) and efforts to enhance the group's understanding. Problem-based learning requires modeling, coaching and explicit structuring are recommended as strategies to support students in this process (Lycke et al. 2006). In *case-based learning*, students handle realistic problem situations, often in seminar settings but can also be applied in breaking up lectures. The method draws on similar characteristics of PBL regarding mobilizing prior knowledge. The work is usually more teacher driven, often supplemented with brief lectures and/or workshops, and confined within specific areas of the curriculum (Struyven et al. 2008). To some extent, the teacher's role is to both coach the students and supervise the case work without lecturing.

Inquiry-based learning comprises a range of activities emphasizing investigative work with knowledge (e.g., Aditomo et al. 2013; Spronken-Smith et al. 2011) and open-ended, student-directed exploration. Empirical findings indicate a strong link

between teaching and (disciplinary) research or supporting student research and knowledge production (Spronken-Smith et al. 2011; Shaw 2011; Zimbardi and Myatt 2012), and improvements in collaborative work in small groups and in conceptual learning (Loyens and Rikers 2011; Muukkonen et al. 2010). Difficulties are identified in accomplishing both knowledge-production and active and collaborative participation simultaneously (Lewis et al. 2010). The teacher's role in IBL is commonly as a guide and supervisor, helping students refine queries, hypotheses, and arguments, as well as use of relevant sources and resources.

Literature study groups are used in an adapted format in higher education, where students engage in discussion of the literature and can bring their interpretations to critical analysis of peers. Studies generally show a positive attitude of students towards this form of activity, while activities and strategies are actually highly regulated by the teacher, who decides the group size, discussion time, roles of members, and provided examples of on-task behavior (Spruijt et al. 2012). Mayo's (2002) study highlighted the value of peer interaction and dialog, and the potential for moving the emphasis of teaching towards built-in questions and personally derived explanations by the students.

The reviewed studies indicate that the 'success' of group-based learning can be much determined by the students' interest for the domain and the way they participate in the organized learning activities, but also, by how the pedagogical design of the group activity facilitates their interaction with knowledge, procedures or resources of the domain, and with the other participants. Support structures and processes are needed to help students make sense of (new) knowledge and how the collaborative process takes place.

Group Learning – Constitutive Dimensions and Framing Processes

Constitutive Dimensions

Group learning, small group learning especially, has been examined and theorized within social psychology and influenced the way group-based learning was theorized in educational contexts. Due to major epistemological shifts in the field, current conceptualizations are informed by socio-cognitive, socio-constructivist and social cultural perspectives on learning, and attempt an integrative, comprehensive depiction.

We pose that there are a set of dimensions that are defining for learning in collaborative groups and we conceive of these as constituting, in an interdependent way, the phenomenon of group learning. First, Baker (1999) and Damşa (2014) elaborate on an *epistemic* dimension, which entails the actions and interactions that lead to the co-construction of concepts, knowledge, solutions, etc. This consists of interactions that are productive when "new meanings or knowledge are

co-elaborated, and/or fulfill some specific (constructive) function with respect to cooperative activity" (Baker 1999, p. 179). Damșa (2014) describes productive epistemic actions as ranging from identifying lack of knowledge about a particular problem/topic, finding and sharing relevant knowledge, generating analyzing and elaborating ideas together, problematizing and providing feedback to advancing ideas/solutions, materializing them into concrete outcomes – texts, (material, intellectual, digital) products or performances of various kinds. At this level, the collaborative exchanges concern understanding of new knowledge or creation of new knowledge, which is needed in relation to a particular learning goal or concrete need.

Second, collaborative endeavors, especially when spanning a longer period of time, are difficult for an individual learner, and for more individuals working together are even less straightforward. Therefore, *a procedural, or process-regulative* (Damșa 2014) depicts the collaborative tasks and collective responsibilities attached to the tasks and the others members. Shared planning, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of progress, and reflection on process and product are actions identified at this regulative level. Baker (1999) poses that actions within this regulative dimension are triggered by and are instrumental in relation to a shared goal, which brings together individual contributions to serve a common purpose. In relation to this, Van den Bossche and colleagues (Van den Bossche et al. 2006) emphasize the importance of *group cohesion* as the 'shared commitment among group members to achieve a goal that requires collective efforts of the group' (p. 499).

Finally, Barron (2003) emphasizes the importance of productive group work beyond the intellectual accomplishment aspect. She identified that groups considered more productive deal with issues of power, role status, and engagement. Rather than using cognitive aspects to depict productivity, a *social-relational dimension* is thus foregrounded. Van den Bossche and colleagues (Van den Bossche et al. 2006) and Baker (1999) pinpoint the importance of constructive conflict, where disagreement can represent trigger for further elaborations, when addressed properly; and where interactive pressure can lead group peers to negotiate meaning, and to pursue solutions. Social conditions under which intellectual efforts can be productive are of importance, but *psychological safety* plays also a big role (Van den Bossche et al. 2006). This is the specific capacity of the group to alleviate negative effects of interpersonal risk-taking, reducing potential for embarrassment or threat, while group potency amasses the beliefs held by the members with regard to the ability of the group to attend to the work collectively.

In sum, this comprehensive depiction indicates that a group learning is a process of shared construction of knowledge or practice, in which participants cumulatively share and manipulate knowledge, and which can be jointly built as combination of participants' ideas, input, contributions (Hamalainen and Vahasantanen 2011). The aim is that members of a collaborative group engage in interdependent (intellectual, social, relational) activities and interactions, in order to attend to shared goals, consisting shared conceptions of the problem, knowledge products or new practices.

Pedagogical Design for Learning in Groups

Conceptually, we follow notions that depict design as a process of preparing situations and 'things' for others to learn (Goodyear and Dimitriadis 2013). This implies a flexible framework, where identified design problems represent the specific way of combining the ingredients needed to create the flexible environment that caters for the students' individual of collective learning processes. Designs for learning should not be understood as pre-made configurations of course elements, but rather as dynamic arrangements, open for adjustment to the emerging needs of an increasingly diverse student population, often enacted in the interaction between teachers and students. Such design implies thus that learning and activities in themselves cannot be designed, but can only be designed *for* by creating and configuring 'course components' that make such learning activities possible.

The designable components can be tasks (i.e., suggestions to the learner of good things to do, using texts of other forms of communication), physical (artefacts, resources) and social architecture (participation, interactions, types of activities) for learning. All these are to be interpreted (and pursued/used) by the learner, i.e., enacted through the learning activities. The teacher/designer can specify learning goals and propose activities, while the learners can construct their own interpretation of requirements of a designed task and work accordingly. Goodyear and Dimitriadis (2013) refer to locus of control, which can lay with the teacher/designer but most often in learner-centered environments lays with the learner. This implies also that the process is iterative, since these realities of a learning situation are constantly changing. The students have different needs and the contexts and conditions for implementing the envisioned design may vary, requiring constant reflection and adjustment.

For teachers, an important part of their design work entails also identifying and solving challenges, often related to multiple, and sometimes competing, intended learning outcomes and the fact that design is not delimited in time and space. Design work should be seen as a normal part of the regular flow of ongoing educational practice, as a non-linear process that comprises several loops and entry points over time (Goodyear and Dimitriadis 2013). For analytical purposes, Goodyear and Dimitriadis (2013) distinguish several phases in a design lifecycle: configuration of the course components to create a specific learning environment; orchestration or real-time management of the activities during the enactment of the course; and reflection/redesign of future course iterations. In this chapter, we focus on the reflection phase in the design lifecycle, as we are interested in exploring the way teacher envisioned the designs for group learning, and their experiences and challenges once these designs were implemented.

Empirical Context and Dataset

This contribution draws on two empirical studies conducted in the context of a larger project in two Nordic countries (see Damşa 2018; Wittek and Nerland 2018). These studies illustrate cases in which the main teacher initiated some type of

pedagogical (re)design (see Table 7.1 for an overview). Participants in the studies were the main teachers and associated teachers (n = 3), teaching assistants (n = 2) and 28 undergraduate students organized in 8 groups in total. A rich dataset was collected in each of the courses, documenting the teaching, learning and assessment activity types. Table 7.1 below provides an overview of participants, curriculum, activities and data.

Case 1. The selected 10 ECTS course in Software Engineering in a bachelor's degree programs in an engineering and information technology at a university of applied sciences in Norway. The course, introducing students to project-based programming, was designed by a lead-teacher and taught by a team of two teach-

Table 7.1 Overview participants, course features and data types available

	Case 1: Software Engineering course	Case 2: Organization and Management course
N of teachers	2 + 3 TA's	1
N of students total (N groups)/ data analyzed	170 students in the cohort 5 groups with 15 students (3 students in each group)	80 students in the cohort 3 groups followed empirically (4+4+5 students)
Main assignment features	Development of software, Programming languages (Java, fxml), Deliver a functional product (game), Individual documentation of process, Project work	Roleplay; interview 2 applicants for a fictitious position, based on application letters all students had to submit in advance
Group learning features	Groups formed based on an algorithm (with grades from previous semester) Group project consists of 8 cumulative sub-tasks, developed iteratively Groups were to organize their work and collaboration Individual programming must feed into the joint group project Guidance on needs-basis	Each group needed to decide on who would take the role as an interviewer and who would be the note taker. Interviewees were from other groups in the same cohort.
Types of data	Observations of lectures, coaching hours, labs, course documents Video-recorded group discussions Products of group work Pre-and post-course interviews with the teachers Post-course interviews with TAs and the student groups	Observations of lectures, instructions for assignments and exam, course documents Video-recorded group work, including role-play Pre-and post-course interviews with the teacher Post-course interviews with the student groups
Types of analyses	Content analysis of observations Thematic analysis of interviews and group discussions	Content analysis of observations Thematic analysis of interviews and group work

ers and 3 teaching assistants (TA's). The course's main activity was a collaborative project, with the student groups required, the groups were required to develop a digital board game (called 'Game of life' or GoL), using the principles, programming languages and strategies learned during the course (i.e., Java, CSS), and to document individually their programming work. The collaborative project was supported by a variety of learning activities, including weekly lectures, programming laboratory sessions (programming labs), and TA-led coaching sessions. The groups could meet twice a week, during the lab time, but also outside lab hours. The TA's and teachers provided feedback during lab sessions and online both of the process and on the developing project, the latter during two rounds of formative assessment.

Case 2. The second case is a second year (third semester) course in a bachelor programme in Organization and Management at an applied science university in Norway. The course places special emphasis on ways of engaging students in activities that integrate theoretical and experience-based knowledge, a so-called "pracademic" agenda (Jørgensen et al. 2011), with students being expected to adopt knowledge, ways of thinking and theoretical background within the field, as well as applied skills for the practical life of work (ibid p. 212). The aims of the course were to enhance students' knowledge and skills regarding how a HR unit can support the learning and development of the employees, drawing on the pracademic ideas mentioned above. The course was manned by one teacher, who was responsible for all lectures, assessment of assignments and exams as well as for organizing student group activities. The course lasted for 7 weeks and the core teaching activities were lectures and three pass/fail assignments to be solved in groups. During previous semesters, the students have had extensive group work exercises.

The *data* included for analysis in this chapter was represented by interviews with teachers and teaching assistants (midway and end of the course), group interviews with the participating students, field notes and incidentally observations of the course activities. The two latter data categories were used to provide background description of the examined dimensions of group work and design thereof. The primary data were the interviews, which were *analyzed* through qualitative content analysis, with themes being sought according to the two main lines of investigation in the chapter: (a) teachers' envisioned design of group work and experiences therewith, and (b) the students' engagements and experiences with the group work.

Group Work in Practice – An Empirical Account

Case 1: Group Work in the Software Engineering Course

Group Work as Part of the Learning Design

In the Software Engineering course, the course plan stipulated that the students were expected to: acquire conceptual knowledge related to object-oriented programming; develop skills in applying various programming techniques; and develop competence in setting up and managing projects in groups. In order to achieve these outcomes, the lead-teacher *re-designed* the course, based on '*discussions with students who previously were enrolled in the course and on what I thought was best for the student in terms of learning activities' (Midterm interview lead-teacher, T1)*. In the interviews, the lead-teacher articulated his vision of the need for students to learn programming knowledge and skills; and which pedagogical strategies he planned to use in order to make this happen. The theoretical knowledge was to be conveyed through lectures, which focused mainly on principles and logics of coding, and reasoning with these conceptual tools. But the lead-teacher insisted that teaching and learning to program is not about giving the students the solutions to problems (often encountered in this process) but about providing them with the necessary knowledge, guidance and resources to find and develop these solutions by themselves: '*... what we are interested in is not to describe solutions for the students, but to get them to come up with solutions themselves. So... we can coach them, on how to find solutions, but the students must take the necessary steps themselves to… generate these solutions.' (Midterm interview*, T1).

The group work and assignments were the central element in the course design and were aimed at stimulating students to engage with the conceptual and practical aspects of programming in Java. The collaborative project involved work with concepts, practical use thereof, joint development of ideas and solutions, planning, coordination, communication, constant monitoring and evaluation of own work and progress. The teacher considered that group work is an appropriate approach for students to engage in this process together (since it can be challenging) and to explore authentic programming practices, since projects are the typical activity form in the professional field. In these reflections, the teacher makes clear reference to epistemic aspects of the group work, wherein the learning of knowledge and software development practices in group work context are emphasized.

The way the student groups engaged with the collaborative project task showed some common strategies: discussions during face-to-face group meetings (or on skype), individual work while sitting together and short moments of consultation, feedback seeking when encountering problems, communication via mobile devices or social media when not meeting in person. Most of the students worked together

during the 2-h lab sessions, but others spent many more hours sitting together and working on the projects, choice motivated by the wish to allow more time for group discussions (up to 8 h in some cases). Some groups have chosen to meet less frequently, have Skype meeting sessions and divide labor. The lab sessions were identified by the students as a useful form of activity organized in the course, because it allowed self-determined work pace, interaction with peers and student-assistants, and opportunities to work and receive feedback on the group project.

Design Decisions and Experiences with Group Work

The teacher was fully aware that group work is a complex activity and invested much thought and energy in designing for the group work to facilitate productive and sustained progress in the programming work: '*…it is very complex to work in a group… to design a good group activity is also very complex.*' (*Midterm interview*, T1). For this reason, the teacher envisioned the group work as a task that needed to be well structured and followed-through with a series of design decisions. Generally, the students' experiences with the collaborative project assignment were positive. They indicated that, besides the knowledge of programming, they learned about: (a) the nature of project work in the field of software development; (b) the problems that can arise and the solutions to be pursued when engaging in practical development work: '*When you sit and program and working with the group on the project and you're using a list, for instance, and you see how it works, then you understand why it was brought it up in the lectures.*' (*Final interview, Group 1*); (c) the amount of work necessary to realize the project; d) the types of collaboration needed when working on development projects, etc.

The main design decisions leading this current learning design, identified based on the interviews, observations and course document analysis, are outlined below.

(a) The *groups were organized* according to an algorithm, which placed students in groups according to their performance in the previous semester. His rationale for organizing groups based on performance was to avoid free-riding and increase the chance for collaboration and discussion on topics that everyone would have knowledge of and be able to handle. The experiences with this selection were mixed; this strategy was not welcomed by all students, because some preferred to work with students they knew from before; few, however, had an objective explanation of why this was not the recommended way. The TA's and the teacher have made additional efforts to mediate problems that arose in relation to group work. While still considering this as good principles, the teacher acknowledged that there is need to better organize work in such level-specific groups: '*We will consider what we do next year, for all categories of students…. Because we must plan for those who need to learn the basics of programming, but also…when they (students) come to such a high level and there is no guidance s/he has to function somehow in the group …*' (*Final interview, T1*).

This design decision targeted a combination of epistemic and socio-relation nature. The teacher's reasoning and decisions were driven by his to have students with similar level of knowledge and skill working in project groups together. This setup emphasizes the epistemic advancement, presumably made possible by a levelled competence in the groups. However, socio-relational aspects seem to have influenced the functioning of some groups, where the cohesion was low due to lack of familiarity and possibly, psychological safety for some students.

(b) Structuring the project *assignment* to be performed step-wise (with the 8 sub-assignments with increasing difficulty), in order to provide students the opportunity to build their knowledge and experiences with this type of knowledge & activity gradually. This was one feature the teacher was content with, in the sense that it gave all students the possibility to engage in a structured manner with the group project. While the teacher anticipated that complexity of the project was a potential difficult for the students, the step-wise assignment strategy did not seem to address it completely. Most of the students indicated they were not sufficiently aware of the complexity and difficulty of the assignment, both in terms of the knowledge content and the way of organizing the collaborative project work. Of the most important issues, the students named: (a) incapacity to estimate how much complexity should be built into the software, (b) lack of capacity to anticipate what knowledge would be necessary (and what they should spend their study time on), (c) difficulties deciding how to divide labour and how to merge output of individual labour together, and (d) difficulties with planning the development work.

The pedagogical design of the project combines also epistemic and regulative aspects. By organizing the project through a series of assignments, building on each other and increasing in difficulty, the teacher provided scaffolding to the group work for both the work with programming knowledge and skills, but also for the organization of the process. By solving the sequence of assignments, the groups' work and planning were assisted by this existing structure, which provided direction and check points needed in the progress of the activity.

(c) Planning *guidance of group work* was designed in form of feedback during seminars (called coaching sessions) *and* guidance on needs-basis (in person by TAs or through email by the teachers). The observation data indicated that the feedback provided during the coaching sessions and the lab was useful, especially because it was tailored to the groups' needs, and was applied (as opposed to the lecture material). But both teachers and TAs indicated that they often relied on their intuition and experience to organize the guidance and feedback for the various groups. Generally, the feedback was appreciated, but some groups reported the need for more guidance to organize project work: '…*but then we get back to strategies on for example GitHub, how to actually make the collaborative coding work. Guidance on how to plan a project, that is something that could have been done more (Final interview, Group 2).*

The teacher's preoccupation to design a guidance component into the course design indicates attention and understanding of the regulative aspect of the group work. Having envisioned a complex project, the teacher was aware of the need for guidance and support, including both substantive aspects (e.g., tutoring wtr. programming problems) and the management of the collaborative project. The latter seemed in need of at greater level of detail, since a number of groups struggled with advancing their project, for due to challenges of regulative (planning, coordination) and socio-relational (lack of cohesion, different levels of ambition) nature, rather than epistemic ones.

(d) Planning for two (formal) *formative assessment* moments; approval of the group's plan and strategy by the teacher/TA was a pre-condition for continuing the project work and a formative assessment moment 2 weeks before the final deadline, when the groups were to present their product and received feedback. T1 indicate that the project was *'a very good way to assess their programming skills as well as their group working skills. It has just the right amount of different sort of technologies you should use, and show how to use them differently.' (Final interview, T1)*. All student groups suggested that a more clear elaboration of assessment criteria and better communication about them would have been helpful.

Including formative assessment in the course design emphasis the attention for supporting the groups both at epistemic and regulative level. Such assessment moments have complementary function to the guidance planned in the design, in that they provide the groups checkpoints for both the substantive quality of the project work and for the progress of the process. Such checkpoints, accompanied by substantive feedback, provide input for adjustments in both dimensions, e.g., addressing errors in the code, or planning more face-to-face group meetings to addressed these errors together.

Case 2: Group Work in Management Education

A main challenge in the management course was that it largely concerns practical skills and experienced-based knowledge. However, the theoretical development of the subject is seen as important for students to be able to justify their decisions and hence to develop a 'pracademic' competence: *'This is what the course is about: To raise awareness of them in how they can use the theory to suggest alternatives and give reasons for their choices' (Initial interview, T1)*. In order to achieve these intentions, the teacher considers group work to be an appropriate approach for students to learn about theory in ways that inform their practice as professionals for a future job; *'they have to involve in collaboration and they have to engage themselves' (Initial interview, T1)*. The group work in this course is envisioned as tasks that need to be fulfilled and followed up by the following design components: (a) establishing

a stepwise structuring of group work, (b) leaving the constellation of groups up to the students and (c) provide all groups with feedback to their assignments

(a) The teachers structured the assignments in a stepwise manner that constantly impel the students to apply elements from the syllabus book, reflect upon these elements and discuss possible interpretations. She also encourages the students to integrate relevant ideas, concepts or approaches from other courses in the program. In a role-play-assignment, the students interviewed 2 applicants for a fictitious position. Interviewees were from other groups in the same cohort and based on application letters all students had to submit in advance. During half a day, the groups enacted the entire process of recruitment, and the process was closed by offering the job to the preferred candidate. After the session the groups wrote a written report based on their experiences. The teacher gave written feedback to all groups after submission. The students underscore this activity as exemplary: '*This assignment stood out as a magnificent example of the "pracademic" way of working"' (Interview, female student, Group C).*

This practical and highly collaborative experience was productive by supporting the students understanding of the procedures and concepts involved in the activity. This can be identified as an example of productive epistemic actions in the sense that the students identify lack of knowledge within the group, leading up to the need for preparation and sharing of knowledge. This actions also made them reflect upon elements that they had not been thinking about earlier, a process that included both generalisation, analysation and elaboration of ideas as well as materialising ideas into concrete outcomes: '*It was clearly demonstrated how complex the situation was and how difficult it is both for the interviewer and the candidate to behave normally at the same time as you focus on all the other aspects needed in the situation" (Interview, female student, Group C).* The experience also made the students more conscious about how to act in both roles, and they also realized their bias in their ways of approaching such a situation. Finally, the role-play activity was underscored as useful by the students because of the opportunity to integrate and draw lines between different types of knowledge from diverse courses within the program, which forms complex processes of reflection and redesign.

(b) With regard to group organization, the responsible teacher explains that '*when students can decide the constellations themselves, the level of conflicts within the groups is highly reduced*". The students typically choose peers that they have learned to know, and: *they are most concerned about who they don't want to collaborate with' (Initial interview, T1).* One of the groups explained that the most important reason for choosing one another was that they knew each other well from before, furthermore it was highlighted as important to collaborate with students with the same level of engagement, and also similar ambitions when it comes to what marks you are heading towards: '*We made a good choice when putting together our group, all of us have the same kind of engagement. All of us are reaching towards A's or B's" (Female student, group A).* The strategy of leaving it to the students themselves to decide from the constellation of groups

illustrates how the social-relational dimensions is crucial to make collaborative activities work.

The opportunity to make group constellations themselves appears as a capacity of the groups to reduce negative effects of interpersonal risk-taking and reducing potential for embarrassment or threat. The role-play activity certainly created engagement, however, the whole activity depended on serious involvement by all participants. In one of the groups (C), one of the 'jobseekers' did not approach his role seriously. He laughed and made fun of the situation, something that ruined the session for the other students in the situation: *It was very disappointing. When I started to interview this guy, he did not manage to stay serious, and it want possible to … Nothing came out of it actually … (female student group B).* All members of this group expressed disappointment regarding this experience, their psychological safety was challenged by the peer who did not engaged seriously. The students explained that they had put much effort into preparations, and had high expectations for the role-play experience and outcome. It is interesting to note that even though this "unserious" peer ruined part of the session, they still described as having a good outcome in the final interview:

'S1: I think this gave a very high learning outcome
Interviewer (I): You think so …
S1: I think so, because you could apply what you had read
(All students: Yes, Mmmm, nodding)
S4: And you can reflect upon it afterwards, together.
S1: Yes. You remember it better when you use it, when you see …. Cause when you just read "in a process of recruitment it is proper to use interviews, because that gives you the most information", well it is difficult to understand. But now we had an interview for ten minutes, and actually feel how much information you get out of the person you interview in ten minutes.'
(Interview, Group C)

This can be interpreted as an indicator of high level of group potency that helped the group attending to the work collectively and hold on to the beliefs about the task and the collaboration structures held by the group. The students in this group keep on working as they have been instructed, in spite of the peer student that spoiled the process. The issue of free-riders occurred in some of the groups; a few participants seemed to do most of the work. We also found examples of groups spending their time with other stuff than they were supposed to do in the planned slots of time. The video recordings of group processes also demonstrated that there were tendencies to conflicts and disagreement in some of the groups. Such conflicts where linked to division of labour, and to the fact that not everyone took the same responsibility for the work to be done by the group.

(c) When it comes to feedback on the assignments, we can see a discrepancy between teacher's intentions and students' experience. While the teacher stated that she gives carefully feedback to all groups, the students' experiences are varied. Group A could not remember to have had any feedback at all: '*We did not receive*

any feedback I think … it was just approved, wasn't it?' Group B on the other hand found the feedback from the teacher very useful: '*The teachers gave us most useful and constructive feedback, it gave us a clear idea about what we had done well and what we had to work more with' (Interview Group B).* The students in this group explained that the teacher pointed clearly at what was really good in the text, but also what they had to develop further.

What Matters for Group Learning

This chapter set out to explore characteristics of group learning, the way these were enacted and the teachers' reflections around this pedagogical effort, all in the context of two courses in software engineering and management. By understanding group learning as a process that involving not only interaction at epistemic level (when it comes to knowledge matters), but also of regulatory (procedural) and social-relational nature, we took a specific interest in examining how the group work was designed by teachers and enacted by students, and what were aspects that mattered for the quality of the process and outcomes of this work. When it comes to the way the designed group activities were enacted, we observed both difference but also similarities across the two cases. First, the designs were quite complex in their composition of learning activities and plans for student engagement. Both courses included a range of activities, assignments and varying forms of teacher support, some planned in detail, but which led to some difficulties in their practical enactments. In both cases the teachers acknowledged that their design was a bit idealist, and experienced the need to adjust activities on the way; a finding that resonates those of several other studies (Damşa and Nerland 2016; Jensen et al. 2015; Kali et al. 2011). A common issue appears to be workload for the group work (see the software engineering course). Both teachers experienced challenges related to the students' parallel commitments in other courses, and had to address issues related to group functioning and support for students who needed differentiated guidance due to the task's level of difficulty.

In both courses, there was some discrepancy between the teacher's self-perceived effort to provide feedback to all groups and the accounts given by the different groups. The variation found in this particular course indicates that students' further work on the feedback received was left more to the students' voluntary initiatives, rather than being an element of the designed course activities and subject to guidance by the teacher. In this case, while the epistemic component of the group learning has been planned and ensured by the teacher, the regulative and social-relational were left to the students to figure out – dealing with.

Designing Group Learning

Identified by the literature, the matter of *group formation* was observed also in these two cases as being important. It was done in significantly different ways: in the software engineering course, the group constellation was carefully managed by the teacher, based on an algorithm, with the intention to place students according to the performance in the previous semester. In the management course, the students formed groups according to their preferences. It is interestingly to note that an important rationale for these rather different ways of forming groups, was to avoid free-riding and conflicts. However, the teachers in both cases recognizes that group formation is a difficult task that includes a range of factors, while students in both cases state that they would prefer to be in a group with people they know. According to Van den Bossche et al. (2006), psychological safety is one important team trait, referring to the capacity of the group to alleviate negative effects of interpersonal risk-taking, reducing potential for embarrassment or threat. By working with known peers, the potential for risk-taking is presumably reduced. However, leaving it up to the students to choose peers that they know well and feel safe with (as was the case in the Management course), might not trigger what Van den Bossche and colleagues (Van den Bossche et al. 2006) call constructive conflict, where disagreement and divergence triggers for further negotiations and elaborations. There was little of this type of constructive conflict in the Management case, still, the students indicated added value and some learning outcomes.

The *choice and framing of the task(s)* should lead to potential to trigger students to reflect on theoretical ideas and enable them to apply such knowledge in concrete or authentic situations (Damşa and Nerland 2016; Loyens and Rikers 2011; Muukkonen et al. 2010; Spronken-Smith et al. 2011). To nurture such complex processes, there is a need for dynamic arrangements, open for adjustment to the emerging needs of finding solutions to the problem at stake. For this purpose, the teachers in both cases employ group tasks with a high degree of relevance to professional life, as the best way to raise awareness of the students on how to reason and how to give rationales for their professional choices (see also Jensen et al. 2015). When working with these assignments, the students had to suggest concrete alternatives for measures and problem-solving.

For teachers, *designing* group learning comes along with the task of making available pedagogical designs that enhance learning wherein the role of the students is central. This study provides evidence that the teachers' conceptions and experiences with pedagogical design are only a part of a complex process, entailing complex dependencies and interactions between various factors, and foreground the notion of teaching-as-design (Goodyear and Dimitriadis 2013). Concretely, while the design for the group learning was rather clearly envisioned by the teacher in the software engineering group, the way it played out contained various processes and live adjustments in order to make it work. The teachers invested knowledge and pedagogical thought is constructing this design, while the reality of the learning situation activated aspects related to: the knowledge domain (abstract knowledge of

programming and the need for students to find ways to understand it), guidance mechanisms (some groups were in needs to sustained guidance and advanced scaffolding) or conflict resolution (some groups experienced breakdowns that required individualized tutoring). This perspective emphasizes the various aspects that can be involved in and interconnected in the design process and the design product, ranging from the teachers' pedagogical assumptions but also strategies, to contextual factors or the approach to the design process itself (see also Kali et al. 2011; McKenney et al. 2015).

While a chief principle arguing that group learning design should ensure students' engagement and involvement still applies, we agree with Dimitriadis and Goodyear (2013) that the design efforts by the teacher must inevitably take into account for contingency, and provide space for emergent enactment and potentialities for learning. In the software engineering course, the teacher was optimistic about the way the group work introduced the students to the programming practice, challenged them to work together for generating solutions, and to learn about collaborative work. The new design led to drastic changes for the group learning, in size, types of tasks and activities constituting the collaborative project, the way groups were formed, the forms of guidance and assessment. Adjustments were made during the course period, especially in the tutorial style and guidance – this aligns with the notion of the non-linearity of the design process, with adjustments being made possible as required by the situation (Dimitriadis and Goodyear 2013; McKenney et al. 2015). At the same time, the need for further adjustments, such a reconsidering the complexity of the project and preparing for a more structured and systematic approach guidance and feedback (as recommended by Lycke et al. 2006) was acknowledged. We observe that the design and potential redesign addresses epistemic and regulative aspects of the group work (see Baker 1999; Damşa 2014). While acknowledged, the social-relational matters appear to be considered more difficult to address, especially with the consideration for the large number of students and the unlikeliness to be able to accommodate all students' needs. Van den Bossches and colleagues' (Van den Bossche et al. 2006) suggestion applies, with the recommendation of combining formalized techniques for forming groups (such as the algorithm-based one used in case 1) with tailored solutions depending on students' needs.

Finally, not unimportant, group work cannot be realized by teachers or by students alone. As also shown in other studies (e.g., Kali et al. 2011; Lindblom-Ylänne et al. 2006; McKenney et al. 2015) a range of contextual factors influence on how such activities are enacted and how the designs are developed through these enactments. We also noticed that both the discipline and the teaching context matters for how teachers envision and approach such tasks. In addition, the students' variegated needs and contributions to the group work and the relations between this task and other course activities (and even courses students are taking in the same period) seemed to be of particular importance. This calls for a greater awareness to the wider study program contexts and to the students' world as learners when designing learning activities.

Concluding Remarks

What are the implications for teacher' work when planning for group learning? *First,* we would argue the necessity to acknowledge that group learning activities, just like other activities (e.g., lab sessions, tutorials, and portfolio assessment), are not ready-made elements to be inserted in course designs. Rather, it is the relations between a range of elements in the course design and its wider educational context that define what these activities become. The cases in our study illustrate how the group learning needed to be carefully tailored to the knowledge content of the course, its intended learning outcomes and anticipated learning challenges. Moreover, the expectations and needs of an increasingly varied group of students played an important role in how these activities were enacted and in how needs for adjustments emerge. This calls for pedagogical conceptions and reflexivity that are not restricted to generic principles in teaching and learning (see also McKenney et al. 2015) to be flexible enough to allow for students' active participation and influence on the activities (Goodyear and Dimitriadis 2013).

Finally, the studies in this chapter address collaborative learning, group learning in particular, a form of activity frequently used in higher education and discuss them in light of considerations of how these practices can be safeguarded and enhanced. Indirectly, this is an effort meant to contribute to ensuring the quality of the primary processes (see also Elken and Stensaker, Chaps. 1 and 10, this volume). The chapter places forward an important argument, that educators, administrators and policy makers alike, should acknowledge that enhancing quality, and especially quality of teaching and learning, requires a solid understanding of what and how students nowadays learn, and how teachers and institutions can provide and sustain both processes and environments that enable and support learning and development that prepare students for being knowledge and skilled future professionals.

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Chapter 8
Plenary Teaching: Examining Opportunities for Student Involvement and Knowledge Exploration in Large Classroom-Settings

Thomas de Lange, Anne Line Wittek, and Trine Fossland

Introduction

Plenary sessions play an important role in higher education and can be organised in a variety of ways to serve a range of purposes (Damşa et al. 2015; Nerland and Prøitz 2018). Plenary sessions often consist of traditional lectures but can stretch from no, little to substantial student involvement. This teaching format has although been quite criticised (Brown and Manogue 2001). One such critique originated from the student-centred learning movement that emerged in higher education in the 1970s (Northedge 2003; Sfard 1998). This movement called for teachers to cease lecturing and, instead, rely on students' individual learning processes, giving them opportunities to explore their own interests through more active, participative engagement (Northedge 2003, p. 169):

> The whole idea that people could be taught anything was challenged. Learning, it was argued, is a process initiated and accomplished by the student […]. 'The less the teacher talks the more the students learn' was a popular precept for leaders of tutorial discussions.

Our interest in this chapter is, first, to explore how quality work can be operationalised within this kind of large classrooms setting, and second, to investigate how knowledge is presented and unpacked through different types of student-teacher interactions. Based on this focus, we aim to present some of the opportunities this teaching format represents by presenting two illustrations that show how plenary sessions can be arranged flexibly in accordance with both disciplinary and

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pedagogical dimensions. With this view, we consider plenary sessions as a format that can make important contributions to quality in teaching and in supporting student learning in a range of ways (Damşa and de Lange 2019; Wittek and Habib 2013). Conceptually, we argue that plenary sessions hold a potential for knowledge recontextualisation (in the sense of developing and changing insights) which is a matter of how disciplinary content knowledge is provided to students and integrated with other parts of an educational programme. Based on this notion, we investigate how plenary sessions give students opportunities to link abstract concepts to enactment of professional practice and to explore procedures, tools and theoretical models in ways that enhance personal meaning making.

We will approach this by presenting two plenary-teaching environments involving students during lecture sessions. The cases permit us to unpack how two distinct plenary sessions represent valuable opportunities for student learning though discussion of disciplinary knowledge with opportunities for recontextualisation. The twofold purpose of this analysis is to investigate the following questions:

1. How do plenary-teaching arrangements provide opportunities for engaging with disciplinary tools, such as concepts, procedures and models, and how are these tools acted upon?
2. What potential do plenary sessions hold for recontextualisation of knowledge by the involved students?

Based on a socio-cultural perspective, we conceptualise the teaching arrangements in these cases as clusters of cultural tools that mediate and reshape the teaching and learning activities in these settings (Wertsch 1998). Moreover, we conceptualise the notion of knowledge transition as a process of recontextualisation provided for by pedagogical arrangements. Empirically, the chapter draws on observations of course lectures in a Bachelor of Arts programme in organisation and management and course lectures in criminal law in a university-based law programme in Norway.

Theoretical Framework

The socio-cultural perspective applied in our analysis emphasises that knowledge is always rooted in specific cultural practices (Littleton and Mercer 2013; Vygotsky 1978). In management education, the contextual relation cultural practices is apparent in how differently management is taught and assessed when compared to ways of enacting organisational leadership and administrations in the workplace. In the case of law, this difference appears in the organisation of law education compared to judicial institutions and practices in society. Our two cases illustrate how educational programmes are formed by certain sets of cultural practices, which bring with them conventions, tools and ways of arguing. Knowledge within these disciplines and professions, becomes enshrined in various types of tools. Knowledge is in this sense mediated through tools as contextually embedded resources which mediate

and reshape cultural activities, as well as providing opportunities for individual learning (Vygotsky 1978). Consequently, through the use of culturally developed tools, knowledge can be constructed, shared and acted on.

Specific teaching arrangements offer students clusters of cultural tools designed to help them make sense of current cultural practices. In professional programmes, it is important to make the core mediational tools visible to students and allow them to play and act with these resources and thereby investigate their meaning potentialities. While disciplinary knowledge conveys the principle notions of the field, teaching arrangements are intended to enable students to make sense of how to learn the discipline and engage with cultural tools within the profession (Mäkitalo 2012; Wertsch 1998, 2007). Our unit of analysis in this chapter is mediated actions at the level of practice, were we discuss the potential for learning in plenary sessions at a conceptual level.

The concept of recontextualisation sheds light on how particular tools not only mediate meaning making across contexts but also reshape an activity and its inherent interactions (Linell 1998). Situated meanings are never constructed from scratch; instead, resources for meaning making generally are constructed over time within sociocultural practices. Opportunities and affordances for meaning making are already present in linguistic resources and contexts, as well as mediational tools, such as teaching arrangements and the disciplinary concepts or professional procedures addressed in them. In any activity, the product and the carrier of meaning are constantly re-enacted and reconstructed (Guile 2011): '…without human agency, words and music are mute, even dead, unless someone re-enacts them again and again, giving them new life' (p. 110). This quote implies that mediation by activities are largely socio-individual processes, produced in the iterative expression of socially established activities and humans' agentic actions. As Linell (2009) noted, mediational tools 'are geared precisely toward making it possible for words, or rather: people using those words, to make meaning in situ' (p. 58). This situated notion stresses a shift from tools people learn about through interactions with other people (an interpersonal process) to tools people develop through cognitive and inward (intrapersonal) processes (Vygotsky 1978, p. 57). The concept of recontextualisation highlights that activities consist of complex, interrelated processes of thinking (e.g. conceptual restructuring) and acting (repositioning) differently than the taken-for-granted notions of the context. Based on this contextual awareness, the concept of mediation thus has three facets or functions: (1) restructuring; (2) repositioning; and (3) recontextualisation (Guile 2011).

Given these theoretical assumptions, it is of particular interest to explore how the core cultural disciplinary content within the management and law professions are put into play within the educational arrangements of plenary sessions, what roles students are invited to enact and how they perform within these pedagogical frames. When students take active roles in programme-related activities, they must construct knowledge suitable for their current context. In formulating utterances (verbal or written), students must interpret the tools in play. When producing utterances, students must make their understanding of the subject matter visible for both themselves and other actors. They have to rethink the subject matter (restructuring) and

act according to the (new) context to which they are introduced (repositioning). Finally, they must make the symbolic and material tools they encounter into new forms of thinking and acting that meet the demands of the current context (recontextualisation). However, students cannot make sense of anything without a social system 'operative for interpretation at a given time and place' (Gee 2000, p. 110). The representational system relevant to the students in our two examples comprises the disciplinary and professional ways of acting and thinking or the culture and norms developed over the history of the law and management professions, as well as the management of law and management education. We aim to explore how teachers introduce content knowledge and teaching arrangements to students as mediational tools and how both they put these tools into play. The question is also how plenary sessions can accommodate the important function of establishing a representational system for students while also serving as modelling opportunities for restructuring, reposition and recontextualisation.

We argue that plenary sessions can play an important role in developing shared knowledge when providing discursive opportunities for their participants. Participation in plenary sessions can thereby prompt discourses by letting students engage with a wide range of relevant cultural tools. Furthermore, we argue that a discursive framework can facilitate analysis of plenary sessions as activities in which knowledge is transmitted at the boundary of interactional and socio-individual levels, which can add nuance to research. These learning potential of these discursive activities are not always easily identified concretely but, reside on theoretical perspectives which will be discussed in the end section of this chapter.

Methods and Data

Empirically, the two cases presented in the following draw on data from a larger project on quality in Norwegian higher education funded by the Norwegian Research Council (for details, see Nerland and Prøitz 2018). The data presented in this chapter came from observations of a criminal law and management education course at two institutions conducted over one academic year. The data sources included course descriptions in the syllabi, pre- and post-course interviews with teachers, post-course group interviews with students and observations of course teaching activities. Table 8.1 gives an overview of the main data sources for this chapter.

Our analytic approach began with gaining an overview of the corpus by examining the interviews and conducting observational protocols (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009; Silverman 2013). Based on this preliminary examination, we selected samples from the observations and the interviews that illustrated how the teaching sessions were enacted and perceived by their participants. The extracts selected for detailed scrutiny represented incidents in which the participants engaged in activities in which they collectively explored, elaborated and questioned content knowledge. We scrutinised this material to understand how these activities were

Table 8.1 Main sources and collected data in the two cases

	Management case	Law case
Number of teachers	1	4
Number of students	80	99
Primary data	Pre- and post-course interviews with the main teacher Post-course interviews with three student groups Observations of plenary sessions	Pre- and post-course interviews with the main teacher Pre- and post-course group interviews with the teacher team Post-course interviews with the student groups Observations of lectures and tutorials
Supplementary data	Audio-recorded group discussions Products and resources used by the students Course documents	Audio-recorded group discussions Products and resources used by the students Course documents

constituted through interactions and what potential they had to support the students' learning, as conceptualised in the theory section. To illustrate this interactional constitution, we selected excerpts from both cases illustrating how content knowledge and teaching arrangements were enacted and what functions they performed in their courses. The excerpts were selected with the aim to gain thick descriptions of how content knowledge and teaching arrangements were constituted as mediational tools and how the students and teachers engaged with them in these plenary activities.

Some additional notes on our analysis are needed. The primary study focus was how the teaching arrangements were enacted in the chosen cases. A primary tool in the inquiry was an in-depth, systematic search for forms of student participation and signs of potential for recontextualisation of knowledge.

Empirical Cases

The Management Case

The course in basic personnel management was attended by 80 students in the second year of a bachelor's programme in organisation and management. The entire course was delivered by one teacher responsible for all the lectures, group activities and assignment and final assessments. A common challenge in organisation and management programmes is to incorporate practical experiences from organisational life and create a productive relationship between theoretical and experience-based forms of knowledge (Wittek and Nerland 2018). The intended learning outcomes emphasised knowledge of basic functions in personnel management,

various aspects of employee–employer relationships, ethical challenges and diversity issues, the ability to relate personnel practices to organisational aims and strategies, and the capacity to reflect on and use theoretical knowledge to handle practical situations.

The course aims were to enhance students' knowledge and skills related to how an Human Resource (HR) unit can support employees' learning and development based on the bachelor programme's overarching objective to offer a 'pracademic' study programme. Such a pracademic programme fulfilled three functions:

– to serve as a pedagogical tool to support students' learning of abstract theory
– to address relevant aspects of both practical skills and analytical competencies
– to act as a career-promotion tool crossing the threshold between education and work

To create a productive relationship between theoretical and experience-based forms of knowledge, the course involved different forms of case analyses and group assignments, in addition to plenary sessions. Some plenary sessions included instructions for group work, written assignments and exams. Most of the course textbook was covered in the lectures, which were based on specific chapters or thematically related to assignments. The lectures were supported by PowerPoint presentations, which the teacher uploaded on the Learning Management System (LMS) several days in advance. The students also knew which parts of the textbook the lectures would cover. The lectures drew on web-based human resource management resources and everyday-life examples of organisation issues familiar to the teacher.

The lectures and assignments followed the same progress over the course and built on one another through the final exam. Only during the plenary sessions did the students have the opportunity to meet the teacher. In addition to the lectures, these sessions transmitted various kinds of information and provided a space for the entire student cohort to meet, ask questions and make practical arrangements. The course's organisation established a sequence of activities as illustrated in following figure (Fig. 8.1).

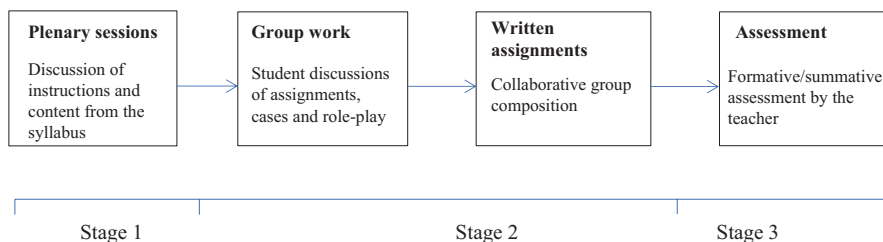| **Plenary sessions**	**Group work**	**Written assignments**	**Assessment**
Discussion of instructions and content from the syllabus	Student discussions of assignments, cases and role-play	Collaborative group composition	Formative/summative assessment by the teacher

| Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 |

Fig. 8.1 Overview of the teaching and work activities in the plenary sessions

Law Education

The second setting was a criminal-law course delivered to fourth-year students in a five-year master's programme in law education at a research-intensive university in Norway (Fossland and de Lange 2018). This course introduced fundamental principles and practical exercises in how to critically engage with criminal law in courtroom settings. The goal of this combined focus was to give the students basic knowledge of legal principles and procedural training in the handling of criminal issues. The course combined traditional content-oriented lectures, case-based assignments and legal topics presented in realistic professional settings, engaging students in a range of practical examples and exercises in how to act and operate in criminal-law practice. This course involved various arrangements, such as field visits, meetings with experienced practitioners and training in writing legal statements, all designed to reflect how such practices were performed in professional settings.

For this case, we explored one specific practice in plenary sessions: a moot court, in which the students simulated handling a specific criminal case in the courtroom, in particular, the imprisonment an indicted person in custody. This procedural case was explored through several teaching events, including lectures on law and legal precedence, a moot court in which the students played different roles as prosecutors and defenders, the writing of a final statement on imprisonment based on the moot legal hearing and, finally, a plenary session in which a course teacher commented on the students' statements electronically submitted on the course's online LMS. Figure 8.2 provides an overview of the series of teaching activities and work elements related to the courtroom statement.

Figure 8.2 illustrates how a series of teaching events and tasks constituted the integrated events of the plenary session in which the imprisonment statement served as the site of interactions between the students and teachers. These events created several situations challenging the students to recontextualise knowledge from the theoretical issues and principles presented in lectures (stage 1), to act on these principles in a simulated courtroom setting and write realistic statements (stage 2), and, finally, to receive feedback and discuss the written assignment and the overall process in a final plenary session (stage 3).

The empirical focus of this study was the plenary session in the final, third stage in this process. We chose this session as it addressed the research questions in a
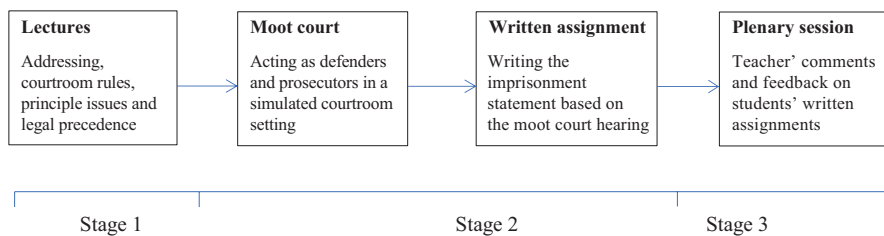

Fig. 8.2 Overview of teaching and work activities in the imprisonment statement

most interesting way. In this plenary session, a course teacher who had read all the submitted assignments invited the students to discuss them; commented on the shortcomings, challenges and problems the students encountered; and provided written suggestions on how to write similar statements in practice. This plenary arrangement was organised as a lecture but had different dynamics than the traditional lectures in stage 1, more actively involving the students in discussing the assignment. This plenary session illustrated how the students and the teacher engaged in a dialogue, which revealed the connections throughout this series of teaching and task events. In our analysis, we focus on how the students were invited to discuss the assignment in this plenary session and how the students' voices influenced the teacher's argumentation and assessment of their submitted work.

Analysis

In this section, we examine how clusters of tools unpacked within the two selected teaching arrangements were constituted in the two cases and their potential for recontextualisation. For both cases, we briefly describe how the plenary sessions were organised, including their physical surroundings. We also present explanations and observations of these settings from the perspectives of both the teachers and the students, as well as selected extracts from the sessions showing the ongoing dialogue during the teaching.

The management and law cases involved significantly different practices in content knowledge and educational arrangements, therefore they are analysed separately. However, both empirical cases illuminate how the responsible teachers made significant efforts to help the students build links between conceptual tools and practical implications, invite students to position themselves as future professionals and thereby making disciplinary tools into new forms of thinking and acting for the learners. Below, we explore how the students reflected on and joined the activities in the two observed plenary session cases.

Analysis: Management Case

The plenary sessions given by the management teacher followed the same pattern in all our observations. A few days before each session, the teacher uploaded on the LMS her PowerPoint slides, which typically each contained only a few points, perhaps three or four headings.

The teacher explained that she preferred to talk freely about the headings in her slides. She used a wide range of practical examples to give her students an idea of the linkages between the theory and the practice of management. The teacher explained:

> The difference between our students and others who are given similar tasks is that our students must be able to justify their choices and decisions with support in the professional domain and literature. Moreover, this is what this course is about: to raise their awareness of how they can use the theory to suggest alternatives and give reasons for their choices. (Teacher, initial interview)

The sessions took place in a seminar room that had a flexible arrangement of chairs and tables and did not have a podium for the teacher. When the students entered the room, the tables were typically arranged in a four-by-four structure, with the chairs positioned to allow all the students to face the large screen in front of which the teacher stood. Although the classroom had about 45 seats, and the student cohort numbered 80, the responsible teacher explained that the lectures were not compulsory, and experiences with other courses in the programme showed that the space was sufficient.

As mentioned, an important approach the teacher used was to discuss practical examples from her professional and private life. In one example from a lecture on work, management and health, the teacher highlighted the importance of awareness of stress symptoms among employees. Being so aware can be difficult, she stated, as we often have other explanations for various symptoms. As an example, she told the story about a friend who visited her GP about symptoms she believed had a physical explanation; however, the conversation with her GP revealed that her pain was rooted in work stress. In the same lecture, the teacher underscored the importance of staff experiencing justice in their work environment and meaning in their everyday activities. To illustrate her point, she referred to a study on Jewish female prisoners from the Second World War who coped well with life after trauma, in part, the study concluded, as they could find ways to make sense of their lengthy lives as prisoners. The teacher also used anecdotes and narratives from her own work life as illustrations. In the interviews, all the students noted that they highly appreciated the teacher's use of different methods of concretisations. The following extract is from group interview A, but similar exchanges also occurred in the other group interviews.

Excerpt 8.1

1. Student 4: It's like …[1] we do have sessions that build up the theory we have, then I experience that—at least for me, then—that I remember better. (*[2]). Because I learn better when I …
2. Student 2: … Do things …
3. Student 4: … Read it and see it (*)
4. Student 1: It's about seeing how things are connected. (*)
5. (…)
6. Student 2: I think the teacher we have in this course is really good (*) at making a lecture interesting.
7. Interviewer: Why? What does she do that makes it interesting?

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[1] Ellipses indicate interruptions by other participants.

[2] Asterisks indicate that one or more students confirmed an utterance by nodding their heads or making minimal responses (e.g. 'yes' and 'mmm').

8. Student 2: Well, she puts dilemmas in our heads that make us think.
9. Student 4: She uses examples (∗), and the way she speaks is not so mono-
   tone. (∗)
10. Student 2: She has … it's a conversation.
11. (…)
12. Student 3: And she has a sense of humour—that keeps us alive. (laughter)
13. Student 1: And you just notice that she has a lot of experience. (∗)

The students' commentary on their participation in the plenary sessions indicated interesting potential for recontextualisation. According to the students, actively exploring the academic approaches at stake helped their meaning making. They had to rethink the subject matter and use disciplinary knowledge by 'doing things' (line 2), 'reading and seeing' (line 4). The teacher thus modelled active investigation of the meaning potential of the concepts, procedures and models introduced in the lecture. The students also cited the teacher 'put[ting] dilemmas in their heads' (line 8) as an important impetus to try out possible interpretations.

Student Participation and Discussion

At the beginning of the management course, the teacher recommended that the students read the relevant chapters before each lecture. All the observed lectures included frequent solicitations of student participation in buzz groups and plenary discussions inviting the students to articulate their viewpoints and ideas. The teacher thus facilitated conceptual restructuring for the students. By formulating their viewpoints in buzz groups and plenary sessions, the students made their understandings, as well as misunderstandings, visible for themselves and their peers. These activities had high potential for rethinking the subject matter, as the students had to act according to the new context in which they were participating (repositioning). The teacher typically wrote the students' ideas as bullet points on the blackboard and then referenced them throughout the rest of the lecture. The discussions rarely concerned scientific concepts but more frequently focused on the students' own opinions and conceptualisations. The following excerpt is from an observation log from a lecture on demographic changes in work life.

Excerpt 8.2
This plenary session was an introduction to an extensive group assignment in which the students were provided with a case narrative requiring them to envisage themselves as professionals in an HR department. According to the teacher, the purpose of the lecture was to prepare the students for the assignment. After providing practical information about the assignment, the teacher started her lecture by showing her students statistical material from 1995, showing that the largest group of academic staff in Norwegian universities was between 50 and 60 years old. She explained to her students that age can be understood and defined in different ways, such as chronological age, functional age, psychosocial age and organisational age. To explain the meanings of these different forms of age, she used a variety of practical

examples. As she proceeded, she underscored the concept of organisational age. However, before moving further into the academic approach, she encouraged the students to explore the issue at stake. The first question she asked concerned how the students, as future leaders, would argue in a situation in which some employees had to be terminated. Who would have to go, and what relevance would age have in such a matter? The students started the discussion in small, buzz groups of two to three persons. After 4 min, she opened up the class to the plenary discussion. Several hands were raised, and the teacher pointed at the students one by one to invite their comments. One female student underscored the fact that people today change jobs frequently, and she asked whether this should have implications for how they thought about employees' age. 'That is a very good question', the teacher replied and then illustrated the topic using several examples from work life. The discussion continued for about 15 min before a new question was posed. This time, the teacher asked if employees' home situations were relevant in processes of staff termination. What about employees who were especially vulnerable? Again, the students discussed [the questions] in buzz groups before continuing the discussion at a plenary level. The teacher followed up on nearly all the students' comments by bringing in concepts, empirical evidence and new examples from real-life experiences.

The framing of the plenary lectures and the structure established by the teacher at the beginning of the course clearly had the potential to encourage active participation by both the students who took active roles in the plenary discussions and those who followed the discussions as active listeners. The organisation of the plenary sessions created a space to explore and elaborate tools, giving the students opportunities to reconceptualise the disciplinary knowledge in simulated professional settings. The plenary sessions thereby represented approaches to content knowledge as negotiable tools with the potential to reshape the teaching arrangements and mediate meaning making across contexts as well as meaning making at a personal level.

Mediation across Settings

In the interviews, the students stated that they read the syllabus in advance to prepare for the discussions they knew were frequently part of the lectures. The students found these discussions to be motivating and relevant to their future work. It should be noted that not all of the students prepared themselves as described nor actively participated in the classroom setting, a pattern that the teacher described as normal. The potential for recontextualisation we identified in this specific context, therefore, was not relevant to the entire cohort.

With this in mind, we identified functions that linked together different course elements in the plenary sessions. These functions must be seen in light of the fact that one teacher was in charge of all the course components. Her responsibility for the course gave her a unique ability to draw connections among the course elements, an approach she used extensively. Excerpt 8.1 illustrates how the teacher elegantly combined the syllabus, lectures and assignments and challenged her students, as future managers, to reflect on issues and play with different interpretations

and solutions. This way of combining elements exemplifies how the teacher made use of the modelling opportunities in plenary sessions as an educational arrangement. During the lectures, the teacher frequently invited in the students' voices, and their contributions were important to how the sessions proceeded, as illustrated in Excerpt 8.1.

According to the students, these plenary sessions offered a variety of opportunities to externalise their knowledge and positions and act on these often preliminary interpretations. The different course activities formed a cluster of interrelated tools for recontextualisation, and according to the students, the plenary sessions and the teacher's capacity to make them interesting and interactive was highly important for their learning expereinces.

Analysis: Law Case

The plenary session in the law case was physically arranged as a lecture in an ordinary lecture hall with fixed seating for students and a podium for the lecturer in front of a large screen. The lecture hall had approximately 120 seats, but students occupied only three-fourths of them during the observed session, which lasted 60 min. During the observed session, the teacher remained stationary behind the podium and did not use any visual media on the large screen. Nearly all students attending the session had brought their personal laptops, and the teacher invited them to use their computers to access the course LMS and view the assignment example of an imprisonment statement the teacher had written in preparation to the session.

The plenary session as such was divided into three parts. First, the teacher introduced the purpose of the session and explained how it was related to handling the courtroom process and the obligations of relevant legal parties. Next, he discussed the specific assignment to write a final statement after the courtroom hearing based on the statements the students had delivered immediately before the plenary session. The teacher then began addressing specific requirements and how the assignment resembled courtroom life and professional practice. He also reviewed the students' submitted assignments, summarised his impressions of their work and discussed common rules and expectations for these kinds of written statements.

Introduction of the Plenary Session

Conversational data from the introductory section of the plenary session revealed several interesting aspects of the recontextualisation of knowledge. Excerpt 8.3 is a direct transcription of the beginning of this introduction as the teacher explained the reason behind the crime discussed and what the assignment was supposed to address at the intersection of professional practice and legal education in the criminal-law setting, particularly regarding learning procedural aspects:

Excerpt 8.3

Teacher: Court decisions are not based on the same methodological and scientific work as you now have become familiar with [in legal education]. And this discrepancy is especially [evident in] the case [of] imprisonment orders [the assignment prepared for this session]! In these kinds of statements, the main purpose is, first of all, to handle the case quickly. The point here is to make sure that the law is correctly understood. This is what is being considered throughout the processing of the case in the system. It is not expected that you will write a brilliant explanation of evidence requirements. It is just about checking that the deputy judge has [understood] the probability requirements correctly. It, therefore, is obvious that we do not use a lot of space on these things. This premise implies that we only can spend limited time on this.

In this excerpt, the teacher explained the expectations for writing imprisonment statements in professional practice and how much time professionals had available to write such statements. This writing practice thus invoked a different set of rules of the trade than the more methodological and scientific ways of writing practiced and learned by the students during other parts of their legal education. The teacher further discussed this difference with the students:

Excerpt 8.4

Teacher: There are a few things that are different when you write a court decision compared to academic writing—let's say, a home exam or scientific work, a master's theses or any of these ways of learning how to write text. An unfortunate aspect of law education is that you mainly learn to write in ways that do not resemble the ways you write in professional practice. Here [in the education setting], you practice your writing through exams and assignments which are structured in ways that may resemble reports, but this structure and logic rarely resemble what you will engage with later on in practice. Also, as attorneys, the meter is running, and if you only sit there and write [simulates writing on a keyboard with his hands]. … It's, therefore, critical to consider what you choose to put down in writing and how you spend your time.

Here, the teacher further explained the differing textual practices in law education and professional practice. To frame the assignment, he suggested that the reason for the particular assignment on court statements was to allow the students to write texts highly relevant to legal practice, with short, focused statements in a maximum of three pages. The teacher also challenged the students to recontextualise their existing disciplinary knowledge by extracting relevant legal principles from lectures and curricular sources and translating them into (1) oral argumentations in the courtroom setting (moot courting); and (2) written court decisions, representing recontextualisations of the arguments presented in the courtroom hearings. All this had to be done within a realistic timeframe.

The students were new to this method of legal procedure and statement writing, so the final plenary session was intended to explain the reasons for this pedagogical design and its importance for the students' learning. The plenary session, therefore, was aimed at giving the students feedback on their written work, presenting an

example of a typical, realistic statement and allowing the students to ask follow-up questions. During this introductory portion, which lasted approximately 10 min, the students had minimal involvement and no invitation to engage in plenary dialogue.

Student-Teacher Dialogue during the Plenary Session

In the second part of the session, the teacher discussed the assignment content and the details of its performance in the example and the students' work. The students were asked to access the LMS to read the teacher's written example and were encouraged to engage in dialogue, which they often initiated. This dialogue interestingly was not purely student–teacher oriented but also involved several turn-takings among the students. Several student–student dialogues involving different students emerged. Excerpt 8.5 illustrates one such incident in which a student problematised an issue from the moot-court session.

Excerpt 8.5

Student 3:	If the defence hesitates regarding the question of guilt, and they base their ruling on the main hearing, then you have to act and make a decision related to this, right?
Student 4:	From the pre-trial detention hearing?
Student 3:	Yes, from the detention hearing.
Teacher:	The detention hearing… yes, I actually do. And when thinking back to the [moot] procedural hearing, it actually was one of the defenders who pointed out a mistake which the prosecuting authority should have looked into. I think that should maybe be presented.
Student 3:	… Right.
Teacher:	That is a good point.
Teacher:	Yes? [pointing at a student with a raised hand]
Student 5:	A question that was raised was: what if the deadline for when you can be charged was overdue in accordance with 183? [paragraph 183 in the Criminal Procedure Act]
Teacher:	Was it?
Student 5:	Yes, if I have understood the regulation correctly, it is within 3 days. … [Several students start speaking simultaneously.]
Student 6:	… Yes, that was pointed out by the other who … Carl Edward… [several voices]
Student 7:	… And was overstepped, which was also pointed out.
Student 8:	… It was the other guy.
Student 6:	Ok.
Teacher:	Yes, that is actually a very good point. So in my groups, there were …
Student 9:	The others in our procedure—was it Carl Edward who pointed out that he didn't think of that when he designed the assignment? It, therefore, was not something they really emphasised.
Student 5:	He at least said that he had made a note of it and that he was glad that we made him aware of it.
Student 9:	Yes.
Teacher:	And it is a good thing that you are making me aware of it, too.

The moot courts were arranged in six parallel sessions, so the hearings took slightly different argumentative directions. Here, student 3 addressed the need to consider the specificities of each courtroom hearing in writing the statements. The teacher confirmed this point as a relevant contribution. Student 5 next raised a possible breach in the timeframe defined in paragraph 183 of the relevant human-rights legislation. This issue initiated a vivid discussion among several students as the topic seemed to have been discussed in previous, parallel court hearings. The students also collectively explained how a teacher responsible for the assignment had overlooked this issue. The teacher also confirmed this input as a relevant contribution.

Interestingly, in this conversation, the first student's utterance about the processing of the case sparked a string of additional student comments on the issue. This conversational pattern clearly distinguished this plenary session from the traditional lecture approach in this criminal-law-course context and likely also from traditional, teacher-led lectures in general. Another interesting aspect of this conversation was the influence of the students' comments and contributions on the teacher's perspective on the assignment. As seen in Excerpt 8.5, the teacher confirmed several points made by the students and consequently modified his own approach to the written statement. Moreover, this plenary conversation illustrated how the students extracted and recontextualised meanings from the events in stages 1 and 2 (see Fig. 8.2) in the context of writing statements. The students' dialogue thus not only served as a clarification or elaboration but also recontextualised disciplinary knowledge and influenced the teacher's assessment. In the third and final phase of this plenary session, the teacher summarised the discussion and reiterated the purpose of the exercise. In this summary, the teacher also acknowledged the students' critical input addressing unclarified aspects of the assignment and debating the rationales behind the writing of legal statements.

Having provided a selective impression of how this dialogic session emerged, we briefly present two reflections describing this plenary event in the interview data. The first extract came from an interview with a course teacher.

Excerpt 8.6

It's sort of a dialogic teaching, which opens a space for them [the students] in trying to reflect or they reflect on issues together, or they, plain and simple, listen to how the teacher reflects as an example. (Teacher 2)

As teacher 2 explained, the observed session was not primarily intended to present disciplinary content but was more focused on encouraging the students to participate in practical reasoning. A student informant in a focus group similarly described the session.

Excerpt 8.7

We also had a plenary session based on this assignment after the moot court, and here, we clearly saw that this was very different from a traditional lecture. It was a completely different dynamic. (Student 3)

The student informant emphasised the differences between traditional lectures and this type of plenary session aimed at discussing and giving feedback on the

written assignments after the moot-court hearing. I summary, also this plenary session thereby offered opportunities for students to externalise their knowledge and positions and act on these together with the teacher and fellow students. Moreover, the session brought together a range of interrelated tools for recontextualisation, especially regarding enactment of the law in courtroom settings and different writing practices between education and professional practice.

Discussion and Conclusions

Based on the empirical results above, we now revisit the first research questions presented in the introduction on how do plenary-teaching arrangements provide opportunities for engaging with disciplinary tools, such as concepts, procedures and models, and how these tools are acted upon? In the following, we will discuss our findings from the two cases in relation to the three conceptual notions presented in the theoretical section on (1) introducing of a representational system; (2) modelling; and (3) experimentation with relevant tools.

Introduction of a Representational System

Plenary sessions provide opportunities for teachers to introduce students to a disciplinary representational system, which offers an overview of relevant academic concepts, approaches and procedures. A representational system is a cluster of tools that can mediate different types of ideas and principles, opening up opportunities for knowledge exploration in educational settings. In both empirical cases, the teachers, in their own ways, attempted to integrate and relate disciplinary knowledge and professional practice. This commonality allows us to analytically explore how the students were challenged to recontextualise abstract disciplinary knowledge in their fields for professional use. Both empirical cases illustrate how the responsible teachers sought to bridge the gap between theory and practice through the pedagogical arrangements these plenary sessions represented. These arrangements, therefore, can be considered to be specific cultural tools in themselves, created for the purpose of engaging students in recontextualising processes. These teaching tools thus create specific learning spaces allowing students to drawn from abstract notions to professional situations. This recontextualisation entails the combining of different disciplinary principles, attuned for in these teaching templates. In this sense, the teaching sessions are in themselves mediating resources that create practical nuances and transitional meanings for the students. In both cases, this was visible through the students' and teachers' discourses directly addressing practical enactment and criteria regarded as valid professional norms and standards (Nerland 2012).

Modelling

The observed plenary sessions also served as modelling opportunities for the involved teachers. In both cases, the teachers introduced the students to a string of teaching activities and work-related elements involving transitional challenges. In the management case, the teacher attempted to recontextualise disciplinary knowledge through extensive use of practical examples and frequent invitations for the students to participate in buzz groups and plenary discussions. The students were here often challenged to discuss dilemmas and take stances on different issues relevant to professional life. In the law case, the students participated in moot court simulations, closely related to lectures in criminal law and human rights legislations. Moreover, written assignments further challenged the students to pull these different knowledge resources together not only in realistic courtroom settings but also in written statements. In the described plenary session, the students' dialogue served a multiple purpose of clarification and elaboration, but also recontextualisation of disciplinary concepts and principles into procedural handling. Here, the modelling aspect surfaced in both the teacher's assessment and the teacher's decision to allow the students to influence on the final assessment.

Experimenting with Relevant Tools

In both cases, cultural tools were created in realistic settings to make sense of current cultural practices. Based on our theoretical approach, such tools have special importance to bridging the gap between theory and practice and preparing students to transition from educational to professional settings. The students were here offered opportunities to rearticulate, reshape and adapt content and disciplinary meanings to professional contexts. The experimental setting on the plenary sessions do here combine the opportunity to explore disciplinary principles discursively within this teaching template in a way which supports the development of the students active engagement in meaning making. This recontextualisation setting should foster opportunities for students to create practical nuances and transitional meanings, including discourses on professional enactment incorporating practical criteria for valid norms and standards of professional work. In the law case, the students and the teacher accomplished precisely these gaols through their collaboration.

Attending to our second research question, *what potential plenary sessions hold for recontextualisation of knowledge by the involved students* our analysis, suggests that the observed arrangements offered many possibilities to support processes of restructuring, repositioning and recontextualisation. In different ways, the students were challenged to debate the clusters of tools to which they were introduced in different parts of their programme. Our two cases thereby illustrate how content knowledge and teaching arrangements can be merged into fruitful learning designs with high potential to support recontextualisation. We see this, for instance, in the

detailed planning of teaching in both cases that still allowed for student involvement in interesting ways. In the management case, the teacher attended to this by writing the points the students made in the plenary discussions as bullet points on the blackboard and elaborated on them thoroughly as a point of departure for her lecture. Moreover, the plenary session after the moot court in the law case demonstrated how the students' comments and contributions influenced the teacher's view on the assignment and how the students made sense of their written statements based on the moot court. Both cases show the possibility to externalise students' conceptualisations and turn them into tools that can be acted on in educational settings.

In summary, plenary sessions can serve as an arena for introducing students to a variety of academic approaches by allowing them to explore and experiment with knowledge resources provided in these settings. Overall, the plenary session as a pedagogical arrangement can be, if used in a considerate way, stand as important arenas for quality work in higher education due to their range of opportunities for interplay among different types of knowledge, dialogic engagement and collective reflection. In addition, plenary sessions are important arenas for students to meet peers, receive assignment instructions and engage in elaborations and explanations.

The two empirical cases in this chapter demonstrate this in how teachers and students engaged during plenary-teaching arrangements. A striking reflection in this relation is how these settings represented a dynamic between the different layers of knowledge; between disciplinary concepts and collective elaboration; as a driver for the student's participation and reflection processes. This dynamic interplay between disciplinary resources and collective elaboration appears to be essential for creating potentialities for recontextualisation. While we have presented two ways of combining such layers, a range of other combinations is surely possible. Based on our analysis, we therefore argue that there is good reason to further explore these opportunities and to avoid simplistic conclusions defining large plenary-classroom arrangements as an outdated pedagogy.

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Chapter 9
What Counts as Quality Feedback? Disciplinary Differences in Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of Feedback

Rachelle Esterhazy, Trine Fossland, and Odd-Rune Stalheim

Introduction

One of the main strands of the current discourse on quality in higher education focusses on ways to ensure the quality of the feedback students receive. The assumption that feedback has a powerful effect on student learning and motivation is supported by a large body of research and is generally accepted among educational practitioners (Evans 2013; Hattie and Timperley 2007; Shute 2008). As such, quality feedback is typically considered essential to quality in higher education. Those engaged with 'quality work' are consequently required to understand what quality feedback entails and how it can be achieved in practice. As to what quality feedback looks like in practice, however, there is little agreement. Several empirical studies have shown that the perception of what counts as quality feedback can vary greatly between different course participants, including both students and teachers (Adcroft 2011; Carless 2006; Poulos and Mahony 2008). Most of these studies have focussed only on the general perception of feedback, without referring to the concrete course context. As Evans (2013, p. 77) notes, even when studies are situated in a certain discipline, the 'importance of the domain and relevance of specific types of feedback are often not developed and the context not sufficiently explained'.

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Other research has shown that the context is essential for how course participants perceive teaching and learning in higher education and what kinds of practices they engage in (Huber and Morreale 2002; Prosser and Trigwell 1999). This idea is related to the notion of 'quality of teaching and learning' being deeply embedded in the discourses and practices of the discipline and its respective teaching-learning environment (Wittek and Habib 2013).

Hence, we need to take into account the characteristics of the specific teaching-learning environment when studying perceptions of quality feedback. To this end, this chapter draws on data from case studies of three higher education courses to examine the following questions: (1) *What do different students and teachers (i.e. course participants) perceive as quality feedback in their courses?* (2) *What elements of the teaching-learning environment do course participants emphasise as central to quality feedback in their courses?*

The cases used to address these questions are part of a larger project called Quality in Norwegian Higher Education.[1] The primary data sources are interviews with students and teachers; observational data of the course contexts also provides supplementary insights into the course elements that students and teachers emphasise as important.

In the remainder of this chapter, we first provide a review of the empirical literature on perceptions of quality feedback, followed by a presentation of our analytical perspective based on Yang and Carless's (2013) work. Second, we present each case's findings, which then serve as the basis for our discussion across all cases. The chapter concludes by elaborating on how our study contributes to the understanding of quality feedback in higher education and how this understanding is relevant for 'quality work' at the course level.

Previous Research on the Perception of Quality Feedback

The growing concern among practitioners and policy-makers about the quality of feedback in higher education has contributed to an increased focus on the way both students and teachers perceive feedback. While some studies have indicated that perceptions of feedback tend to be relatively similar among students and teachers (e.g. Dawson et al. 2018a; Dunworth and Sanchez 2016), others have shown considerable divergence both within and between these groups (e.g. Carless 2006; Poulos and Mahony 2008). These findings paint a complex picture that makes it difficult to draw a clear conclusion about what students and teachers generally perceive as quality feedback, which relates to the common challenge of reconciling findings from research conducted in different higher education disciplines and environments.

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[1] www.qnhe.no; see report for further information on the project's aims, methodology, and case descriptions (Nerland and Prøitz 2018).

It is important to find ways of accounting for the discipline-specific teaching-learning environment the feedback takes place in to make sense of how and why different course participants might agree or disagree on what quality feedback is. One interesting approach stems from recent work in which feedback is re-conceptualised as a *set of processes by which information about the quality of a student performance is generated, made meaning of, and acted upon* (Boud and Molloy 2013; Esterhazy 2018). From this view, feedback is achieved in interaction between students, teachers, and the teaching-learning environment. Which forms of feedback will eventually emerge in a course is therefore influenced by the respective discipline and its established pedagogical practices that have developed over time (Ajjawi et al. 2017; Esterhazy 2018; Yang and Carless 2013). We can conclude from this idea that students' and teachers' perceptions of quality feedback are deeply embedded in the discourses and practices of their discipline. Following this conceptualisation of feedback, we can understand quality feedback as a context-dependent phenomenon that can only be perceived in close interrelation with the teaching-learning environment.

Reviewing the empirical research on feedback perceptions from this perspective yields a number of interesting findings that support the idea that the teaching-learning environment plays an often implicit, but nonetheless central, role in the perceptions of quality feedback. One insight from the literature is the importance of the *structural aspects* of the course environment for the way feedback quality is perceived. For example, students and teachers acknowledge the importance of timing and access to resources as being relevant for productive feedback (Price et al. 2010). In general, teachers seem to refer more often to structural elements such as timing, task sequence, and modes of feedback when describing quality feedback (Dawson et al. 2018a).

Several studies have also shown the significance of *relationships and emotions* for the perception of quality feedback. Generally, people perceive feedback as being good when it promotes confidence, increases motivation, and builds positive relationships (Dunworth and Sanchez 2016; Pokorny and Pickford 2010; Price et al. 2010). Several studies have shown that students differ greatly in their emotional response to feedback, which then influences how good they perceive it to be (Carless 2006; Poulos and Mahony 2008; Ryan and Henderson 2017).

Finally, several studies have shown that the *disciplinary content* of the specific course is relevant for the perception of feedback quality. Both teachers and students appreciate feedback that clarifies task requirements, positions students within their disciplinary environment, and inducts them into the demands of the course (Dunworth and Sanchez 2016; Poulos and Mahony 2008). It appears, however, that teachers tend to think that good feedback serves to engage students with the knowledge content of the course, while students judge the quality of feedback more according to how well it has communicated the tutor's requirements in order to receive a good grade (Orsmond and Merry 2011). This situation is related to other findings that have shown that students tend to judge feedback quality on the content of the feedback comments and how they relate to the knowledge and learning

challenges relevant to their discipline (Dawson et al. 2018a; Poulos and Mahony 2008; Price et al. 2010).

In summary, the literature supports the idea that the teaching-learning environment and its structural, relational-affective, and epistemic dimensions matter to perceptions of quality feedback. This review has also revealed, however, that despite these discipline-specific characteristics, most studies portray quality feedback as a phenomenon that can be studied independently of the disciplinary context. This chapter contributes to the field by exploring and discussing course participants' perceptions of quality feedback in three different disciplinary contexts and by drawing special attention to the dimensions of the specific teaching-learning environments relevant for feedback quality.

Analytical Perspective

Our analytical perspective is based on a recent study by Yang and Carless (2013), who proposed a normative model that helps to identify which elements of a disciplinary course context are most relevant to promoting those dialogic feedback practices that help students to develop the ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning. According to this model, every teaching-learning environment can be described according to three closely inter-related dimensions that shape the way the feedback process emerges in a particular course in a discipline.[2]

First, the discipline consists of the resources, procedures, and rules that influence the structure from which feedback interactions can emerge (the *structural dimension*). Second, the discipline is characterised by a typical distribution of responsibilities and social conventions, which in turn influence the typical relations between students and teachers and the emotions involved during feedback interactions (the *relational-affective dimension*). Finally, the discipline is made up of different types of knowledge content that course participants must engage with in a course, thereby influencing the knowledge that is shared within feedback interactions (the *epistemic dimension*).

Yang and Carless's (2013) perspective provides a promising approach to studying the way teachers and students perceive quality feedback as embedded in the respective teaching-learning environment. The following section presents our methodological approach and outlines how we have analysed our empirical material according to Yang and Carless's (2013) three dimensions.

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[2] We employ a slightly adapted version of these dimensions in this chapter.

Empirical Context and Data

Case Study Design

This chapter draws on three case studies of courses in different disciplines in Norway: (a) an undergraduate course in biology, based on portfolio assessment; (b) a graduate course in law, using moot courts; and (c) an undergraduate course in nursing, using simulation as part of clinical practice. The three cases were selected for the following reasons: first, they included feedback as a central element of their course design; second, they provided insight into both professional (in the law and nursing cases) and non-professional (the biology case) disciplines; finally, they employed types of pedagogical approaches common to the respective disciplines.

Course Contexts

The biology course was a 21-week-long portfolio-based course module on ecology at a large research-intensive university in Norway. A total of 27 students were enrolled in the course, taught by one main teacher and four co-teachers. The goal of the course was to provide an introduction to basic ecological theory and to develop students' ability to think and write scientifically. The majority of the 266 hours of workload (based on 10 ECTS) involved student-organised activities, such as reading the syllabus or working on different assignments, both individually and in groups. Only 10% of the planned workload involved teacher-led activities such as lectures, tutorials, and feedback sessions. The portfolio tasks entailed nine written assignments, one oral presentation, and one peer review. During the semester, the assignments were presented successively as students were provided with different deadlines for voluntarily submitted drafts for formative feedback. Students could also attend oral feedback sessions with their teachers to discuss the written feedback they had received on their drafts. After the final deadline was reached, an average grade was calculated for each student based on all submitted portfolio tasks.

The nursing course was an obligatory 10-week practice course module in 'supervised clinical practice in medical nursing' within a part-time bachelor's programme in nursing at a university college in Norway. Eleven students were enrolled in the course, which was taught by two teachers. The aim of the course was to develop students' knowledge about factors that influence basic needs in acutely and chronically ill patients and to enable students to reflect on their personal and professional development. The course had two fundamental elements (300 hours total): a supervised clinical practice in a hospital with an individual assignment, and one pedagogical presentation with simulations replicating an acute-care situation with a patient dummy. During practice, the students spent a total of 2 days at the simulation lab for simulation and pedagogical presentation. They wrote mandatory reflection papers at the end of each day of practice at the hospital. The students were

encouraged to work together in groups on challenges they experienced during their practicum. The simulation included a set time allotted for preparation before the case and feedback and debriefing afterwards. The simulation was performed in the context of a reflection seminar, where the simulation was explicitly connected to reflection as an activity. The seminar was framed as a retreat, where participants could pause from their busy hospital practicum and work on experiences in a different setting, with other inputs and more room for thinking about the relations between actions and the philosophical and theoretical foundations of the practicum. The students were asked to reflect on (a) the simulation, (b) their student presentations, and (c) how, halfway through the period, they had experienced the practicum. In addition to the ongoing feedback provided during the simulation in the form of comments and gestures, it was also provided in the form of oral debriefing sessions immediately after the simulations, where the teacher provided immediate feedback on the students' performance. While the debriefing was primarily directed towards those students who had performed the simulation, it also included the other group participants. The students also received immediate ad-hoc feedback during practice, short written comments on their reflection papers and daily plans, and oral feedback within formal evaluation sessions with their main teacher. The course was graded on a pass/fail basis.

The law course was a 12-week-long work-related (15 ECTS credits) course module in criminal law at a research-intensive university in Norway. The course included 99 fourth-year students and was taught by four main teachers. The aim was to introduce students to fundamental principles of criminal justice issues and to encourage them to critically apply and analyse these notions in relation to the contemporary social and political context. The majority of the workload was related to two fundamental elements (lectures and seminars) in addition to working with the syllabus and different assignments, both individually and in groups. The course included several instructional activities ranging from online lectures, teacher-led lectures, and diverse seminars (a writing seminar and procedural seminars/moot courts). In the moot courts, the students signed up to act as counsellors or prosecutors in a simulated court. The sessions also included the students' teachers and one professional state prosecutor, both of whom acted as judges. The participating students primarily received peer feedback during the preparation phase and direct feedback from everyone involved in the moot court, as well as debriefing feedback from the teachers and judge. The students received feedback on their reasoning and use of the available materials as well as on their enactment of various situations. The remainder of the students, who participated as audience members, had to write the final judgement following the hearing. When receiving feedback in the following feedback lectures, all students could take part in the feedback sessions from their various viewpoints of involvement. During the semester, the students were successively presented with voluntary assignments and could receive formative feedback from their teachers and peers; they also attended oral seminars that included opportunities for immediate feedback on their reasoning. Each student had to have one oral presentation approved by the teacher during the semester.

Table 9.1 Main characteristics and data collected from the three courses

	Biology course	Nursing course	Law course
Number of teachers	5	2	4
Number of students	28	11	99
Course period	20 weeks	10 weeks	12 weeks
Number of interviewees	3 student group interviews (N = 9); 2 teacher interviews (N = 2)	2 student group interviews (N = 10); 3 teacher interviews (N = 3)	3 student group interviews (N = 11); 2 teacher group interviews (N = 4)
Main feedback features	Portfolio assessment with nine written assignments Written feedback comments by teachers on drafts Face-to-face feedback sessions with teachers Opportunity to resubmit drafts after feedback Peer feedback on one assignment	Written feedback on reflection papers Written feedback on daily plans Individual halfway-point feedback Constant ongoing oral feedback during practicum at the hospital. Debriefing after simulation Oral feedback on presentation	Teachers' written feedback comments on drafts Face-to-face feedback sessions with teachers in seminars Opportunity to visit the teachers' offices for direct individual or group-based feedback on queries Collective feedback on submitted work in lectures Peer feedback on assignments (formal and informal peer feedback in group work)
Teaching and learning activities	Group work Lectures Tutorials	Simulation Presentations Regular practice	Lectures Seminars Procedural seminars

Table 9.1 provides an overview of the main characteristics and data collected from the different cases. Further details on the three case studies may be found in the project report (Nerland and Prøitz 2018).

Data and Analytical Strategy

The primary data sources include pre- and post-course interviews with teachers and post-course interviews with student groups collected in each case. This data was supplemented by course documents and observations of course activities. We analysed the interview data in two steps using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). First, we identified excerpts in the interviews where students or teachers had mentioned feedback either explicitly or implicitly (e.g. referring to interactions in which students obtained knowledge about the quality of their work or how to improve it). The aim was not to provide a comprehensive description of all feedback interactions that took place in each case (and how students and teachers evaluated these interactions); instead, the excerpts were summarised to identify typical

interactions that students and teachers recognised and acknowledged as quality feedback in their courses.

Second, we used the three dimensions adapted from Yang and Carless's (2013) work to identify elements of the teaching-learning environment that interviewees emphasised as important for quality feedback in their descriptions. For each case, we focussed on the differences/similarities in the elements of the teaching-learning environment that the respective students and teachers had highlighted when describing quality feedback in their courses. These findings were then integrated to address the overarching question of what role the teaching-learning environment played for understanding what counted as quality feedback among students and teachers.

Findings

Biology Case

When asked to identify feedback situations in their course, the biology students generally talked about the written feedback comments they received on their drafts and the oral feedback sessions as a supportive element of this written feedback. The teacher used a wider definition of feedback and also referred to tutorials and lectures as opportunities for students to seek feedback on their assignments.

The students and teachers had slightly different opinions on which structural elements were important for quality feedback. For the structure and timing of the portfolio tasks, the teacher believed that quality feedback entailed creating opportunities for revising assignments after having received feedback comments. He explained that the 'key rationale for including feedback and the opportunity for [students] to respond to it is that that's … where the learning happens'. Students understood the intention of having early deadlines to engage them in continuous work from the beginning of the semester. Nonetheless, they experienced a breach in trust when feedback emphasised weaknesses and gaps in their drafts that would not have existed had they submitted the drafts later. The structural and relational-affective aspects of the environment were closely intertwined and together influenced the experience of quality feedback. Another important structural aspect for quality feedback was the way it activated relevant resources. The textbook used in the course structured most assignments, but the teacher and students alike perceived it as being rather general and lacking in detail, which gave the students difficulties in using it to address certain tasks. The students hence perceived the feedback as limiting when the teacher emphasised that they should use the textbook more in their assignments. As one student explained, 'I think it's okay to ask us to use the textbook when it's clear where in the textbook he wants us to find information'. The implication is that, for students, quality feedback entailed activating relevant and useful resources.

Several relational-affective aspects mattered for the students' and teachers' perceptions of feedback quality. For the students, quality feedback primarily implied positive emotions. One student reported on her frustration upon receiving critical comments: 'I stopped sending [the assignment drafts] in because I didn't want assignments that would make me feel bad'. For the teacher, good feedback sometimes also required students to engage with 'painful' activities such as revising their work. He described quality feedback interactions as those in which students did not take feedback as personal criticism but were able to 'absorb comments and make use of them'. For him, good-quality feedback interactions therefore required a trustful environment that would make it less threatening both for students and teachers to expose their work and expectations. While the students tended to agree, they nonetheless reported that having to discuss their work face-to-face with the teacher was emotionally taxing. Consequently, both students and teachers saw the teacher-organised peer review as a good way to engage with feedback in a safe environment. The teacher noted of the peer review that it 'was a really positive experience. … If I did anything else differently [in the future], I'd give them more than one [chance] to review'.

The students and teachers had different views about the knowledge that should be shared within feedback interactions. The students mostly discussed written comments and appreciated those that provided information about the quality and content of their assignments rather than technical elements such as spelling or formatting. They also thought that comments should provide specific information about how they could improve their work. The teacher was more concerned with the 'right level of difficulty, [which is] where they struggle a bit'. He explained that knowledge shared in feedback should neither be too trivial nor too demanding. For him, good comments should never provide the correct answers but should instead generate realistic challenges that will invite students to meet within their groups.

The students and the teacher disagreed about whether good formative feedback should entail assessment, such as in the form of grades. The students desired clear and tangible indications of the quality of their work; one student suggested the teacher could say: 'As it stands right now, this is a B, but if you fix this, this, and this, it would be an A'. The teacher, in contrast, believed that good formative feedback should never indicate grades. He argued that this system was 'important to build up trust, so that [the students] will actually try things in the first draft version and not worry about it being part of their final grading'.

Overall, the students and the teacher in the biology course had similar understandings of quality feedback but emphasised different characteristics as being most important. For the students, quality feedback was characterised by (a) relevant content of the comments, (b) clear linkages to relevant resources, (c) positive emotions and an unthreatening environment, and (d) good timing in providing the comments. For the teacher, quality feedback entailed (a) a trustful and transparent environment where students could safely explore ideas; (b) dialogue between teachers and students, as in an authentic science context; (c) feedback comments that challenged and motivated students to work; and (d) the engagement of students who could tolerate critique and make use of feedback comments.

Nursing Case

The students and teachers in the nursing case emphasised that feedback in the simulation activity differed from regular written feedback, in the sense that a teacher continuously provided feedback during the activity and that students experienced immediate responses to their actions. When asked about the quality of the feedback, the students and teachers alike stressed that the feedback should be supportive and constructive in order to avoid mistakes during the simulation, be consistent with theory, provide guidelines for future assignments, and prepare them for their professional lives.

Regarding which structural dimensions influenced the feedback provided in the course, both teachers and students emphasised that a clear and well-organised activity structure and explicit aims concerning the theoretical knowledge and feedback were essential for the students to succeed in the simulation activity. During the debriefing, the students appreciated supportive comments and proper acknowledgment from their teacher for their actions and judgements through comments such as 'I think you did very well!' and 'That was a very good observation!' The students expressed great satisfaction with the debriefing and the structure of feedback and said it allowed them to reflect on their actions and on issues regarding best practice.

During the regular practicum at the hospital, the students were obliged to produce daily plans for their nursing duties and to corroborate those plans with their supervisor's comments. As a final exercise, they wrote daily reflections, comments, experiences, and afterthoughts according to the plans. They all accentuated this writing as a critical element of their feedback experience. The responses they received on these reflections were crucial for adjusting their practice and actions. They had various opinions about the quality of the responses they received. Some students felt the feedback to be somewhat overloaded by reflections and wished that their investments in writing had been more proportionate to the amount of feedback the teachers and supervisors had provided. Even though they acknowledged the teachers' and supervisors' efforts and the time-consuming workload the feedback entailed, most students desired more detailed and constructive feedback on their performances. As one student said, 'Feedback like "Good" doesn't say much about my performance and doesn't give me further directions to improve my skills'. Since most of the feedback tended to be oral, informal, and arbitrary throughout the practice period, some students expressed a wish for written feedback at the end of the course that would say something about their performance in practice and with a close orientation towards their future professional work. One student said that written feedback 'could confirm your skills in practice, and be something nice to bring along when you're looking for a job. That would be great feedback to students'.

The teachers were aware of these opinions but emphasised that the evaluation meetings they had with each student near the end of the course were sufficient. Despite the desire for more written feedback, the students expressed satisfaction with the context of the reflective seminar arranged in connection with the simulation. They perceived such seminars as providing more space for afterthoughts,

critical questions, and rethinking than the daily practice and feedback in the regular practice in the hospital allowed.

The relation-affective aspects played a major role for the students in the simulation activity. The students emphasised that the simulation activity was a stressful and vulnerability-inducing situation that they hence worked hard to prepare for. If they did something wrong and the teacher needed to assist them, they felt exposed before the other students. The teacher was aware of this situation and noted that 'I, as a former leader, have tried to practice providing praise frequently and [providing] the not-so-positive feedback in a more private setting'. The teachers told of students making mistakes during the simulation activity, which caused the patient dummy to 'die' and distressed the students. The teachers elaborated on these situations as an important factor in the amount of feedback to provide during an activity. The teachers regularly discussed the extent to which they should interfere (if at all) and provide feedback to students who did something wrong, or if they should let them fail and discuss the matter later. They worried about their students' vulnerability during the simulation and the cautious feedback they needed to provide while observing their capacity to face challenges and to reflect on site and during the situation. The teachers underscored the care they had to show for their students as they provided gentle guidance and feedback when students seemed bewildered or missed something 'obvious' in the nursing procedure. Despite the emotionally taxing simulations, the students thought the fact that they were only acting was affirming. They understood that mistakes caused no harm but were instead welcome points of reflection and critique due to the affirming caregiving they received from the teacher during the activity.

For the epistemic aspect of feedback, the students emphasised the importance of being prepared for the simulation activity and of having sufficient theoretical knowledge and procedural competencies about the case to be able to translate and apply the feedback they received into practice. As one student said, 'If you don't know your theory, you'll fail in the simulation and you'll need a lot of ongoing feedback during the activity, which makes you more vulnerable'. The questions and feedback during the simulation helped the students to develop their theoretical knowledge related to different procedures in their professional work. The other students in the adjacent room appreciated the opportunity to discuss, reflect, and learn through the ongoing situation and to assess the performing students. One teacher highlighted the importance of how the students applied the feedback to develop their own practice: 'What I emphasise is not the mistakes they make in the clinic lab but their ability to spot what was incorrect and what they have to do to get it right [the next time] … I think that how they receive the feedback is a much more important factor than what they know right there and then'.

Overall, the students and teachers emphasised that simulation, as an activity, requires conscious and attentive feedback due to the exposed nature of the context. The students emphasised that quality feedback in the nursing course was characterised by: (a) teachers paying attention to the affective and relational aspects when providing feedback; (b) a need to feel taken care of during the exposed situations during simulations; (c) the importance of dialogues and the variety of instruction,

questioning, and reflection within the activities; and (d) more constructive, profound, and detailed feedback on their written reflections and performances throughout the course.

The teachers emphasised the following as important elements for quality feedback: (a) the sensitivity expressed during feedback situations, (b) the timing and balance of when to interrupt with feedback during simulations, and (c) the assurance that students would be prepared and would have sufficient theoretical competencies.

Law Case

The students and the teachers in the law case primarily referred to features of quality feedback within three different parts of the study contexts: the *oral feedback* provided in seminars on the students' written assignments, the *triple feedback* situations during the moot court sessions, and the *peer feedback* in small, informal, closed peer groups formed by the students themselves. Even though all interviewees pointed to the same types of feedback, their perceptions of feedback quality differed, both between students and teachers as well as among the student groups.

The students and teachers alike indicated that the structure of the realistic physical surroundings and the work-oriented rules of procedure and collaboration were important for their perceptions of quality feedback. In one of the assessments related to the moot court, the students had 48 hours to prepare for the moot court exercise (double the time professional lawyers typically have to prepare for similar situations). The ambitious students appreciated the realistic timeframe as a part of the requirements that structured their preparation for the different feedback interactions that lay ahead. One of the students expressed his perception of quality feedback: 'We had realistic case documents and had to do an overview ourselves. It was exiting to get a challenge where we could think, "This is what it's like in professional life"'.

The students and teachers expressed slightly different opinions about how different structural elements (such as resources, tools, procedures, and rules) mattered for feedback quality. In the seminars, for instance, the students pointed to quality in the way the teachers modelled reasoning in a systematic, step-by-step approach during the students' assessment tasks while simultaneously commenting on each step. The students appreciated this approach; one noted that 'We want to learn how the teacher does this. He's the skilled one; we need to know how he's thinking and doing his reasoning in relation to the challenges we're given'. For the students, feedback quality related more specifically to 'doing the discipline', to use the common parlance in the field; they called for feedback on procedural and other knowledge from the teachers that could make such knowledge explicit. The students differed from their teachers, who saw quality feedback as a contribution to encourage students' participation and to influence the knowledge construction shared within the feedback

interactions. The teachers related quality feedback to activating knowledge forms and the students' reflections on 'theory in action'.

Not all the important relational-affective aspects were perceived as positive emotions. Those students who performed in the moot court said that they went 'all in' during the role-play and described themselves as deeply stressed as well as emotional and personally involved; they wanted to experience realistic challenges. But several of the students wanted more specific, structured, and concrete feedback to develop their understanding. One student expressed his perception of the feedback after the moot court: 'They were too kind [in their feedback]. There was no concrete, in-depth feedback about what we really did and could've done better'.

Another important relational-affective aspect of quality feedback was the peer feedback and the close relations that framed the diverse feedback activities within their peer groups. The group members challenged and cared for each other and provided immediate and honest feedback; they also provided continuous feedback over time so they could all make progress together. As one student noted, 'We're sitting near each other in the library to read individually, but we're also discussing and giving each other feedback all the time.… We're close to each other, so we have each other available. We also use Facebook chats during our ongoing discussions, like "What do you think about that" or "What does this mean" and so on'. The students described this supportive, but also challenging, feedback as being crucial, particularly when the challenges were too difficult or people struggled with motivational issues.

Both the students and the teachers perceived the epistemic content of the feedback interactions as essential for the quality of the feedback within the course. The authentic cases that students received feedback on before, during, and after the moot court sessions challenged the students to use their textbooks and all relevant available material. As one teacher explained, 'The students are challenged to reflect on theory "in action" in relation to the realistic feedback situations they were provided with, which also involved teachers acting as judges as well as the prominent public prosecutor we invited for the course, who also provided feedback after the session was finished'. The students especially appreciated feedback from the people whom the students referred to as 'professionals' who represented work-related experience from 'the outside world'. One student said, 'I was a bit excited when I stood before the state prosecutor, but I enjoyed it; it was fun'. The students appreciated feedback that was relevant to real life. As another student said, 'I wanted more feedback on the procedures and how I behaved. Should I have been more or less aggressive, or formulated my actions differently, or should I have built up my answers differently, and so on'. We also found that those students who were very committed to working hard and who collaborated intensely with peer groups tended to appreciate more complex feedback situations, while those who put in less effort perceived 'quality feedback' in a much more narrow and teacher-led fashion.

To summarise, the students and teachers in the law case shared many similar understandings of quality feedback, but our findings are also characterised by the fact that the law students were experienced fourth-year students. The students emphasised quality feedback in relation to (a) 'doing the discipline', (b) work

relevance and real-life challenges, and (c) their close, long-term peer groups. Their outlook differed from that of the teachers, who related quality feedback as being closer to (a) the knowledge construction shared in the course; (b) independent and work-related actions, as well as the students' participation and reflections on 'theory in action'; and (c) the timing and connections between the diverse feedback activities to challenge the students to see the broader societal picture.

Discussion

This chapter has examined what course participants in different teaching-learning environments perceive to be quality feedback and how that perception is related to the structural, epistemic, and relational-affective elements of the course environment. Our analysis shows that students and teachers across all cases perceived quality feedback to have certain common features. First, they considered feedback to be of high quality when it was *relevant for student learning*: feedback that helped students to understand in detail what was good and what should be improved, and how to identify mistakes for themselves in their respective fields of nursing, biology, and law. They also perceived feedback to be relevant to student learning when it focussed on future professional life and challenged students' own thinking and reasoning.

Second, the participants perceived quality feedback to be *embedded in the knowledge domain* of the respective course. They mentioned that good feedback modelled the ways of thinking and writing in the knowledge domain, was consistent with theory, and activated relevant and authentic resources. The implication is that the participants perceived those feedback exchanges that occurred in an authentic setting and resembled later situations in professional life as being high quality in all three cases.

Finally, the participants saw quality feedback as that which evoked a *feeling of safety*, especially for those students with less experience. They mentioned that good feedback entailed trustful relationships in which students felt safe to explore their ideas. For these relationships to develop, courses had to offer structures in which students could reflect upon their actions, revise their work after the feedback interactions, or collaborate and reflect together within their informal peer groups. For the students to perceive feedback as safe, it also had to be fair and considerate of students' vulnerability and dignity.

These brief summaries of what counts as quality feedback from the course participants' perspectives show that similar themes are woven throughout all three cases. A closer look, however, reveals that certain elements in the teaching-learning environment were highlighted more predominantly in some of the courses and by some of the participant groups. For example, the affective-relational aspect of sheltering students from negative emotions during feedback exchanges was particularly pronounced in the nursing case. Those students perceived that learning from feedback was most effective when they felt secure and safe in the situation. In the biology and law cases, the students judged the quality of feedback not as much according

to the positive emotions it evoked; rather, they tolerated that they might experience resistance and challenging feelings and did not think this posed a problem for quality, especially among the better-prepared students. In the law case, the powerful emotions were first and foremost related to the direct feedback in the moot court settings, where only a select group of students engaged in the challenging performance and feedback situations. These findings add to our increasingly differentiated understanding of the significance of relationships and emotions for the perception of quality feedback (Dunworth and Sanchez 2016; Poulos and Mahony 2008; Ryan and Henderson 2017).

Another example relates to the structural dimension of the teaching-learning environment and the way tasks and relevant resources were arranged within the course. In those courses that required students to engage with textual resources on their own (such as biology and law), the students tended to judge the feedback quality according to the extent to which the feedback directed them to relevant text resources and information to improve their assignments. This aspect was less visible in the nursing case, where the purpose of feedback was more focussed on helping students to become better in nursing rather than improving their assignments. While previous research has also found structural aspects to be important (e.g. Dawson et al. 2018a; Price et al. 2010), our study provides concrete, context-specific examples of how structure relates to perceived quality feedback.

Our final example relates to the epistemic dimension of the environment: the relation between perceived quality and the way feedback corrects mistakes or stimulates one's own thinking. The cases differed in their assessment requirements of what students needed to know and do in order to pass the course. The nursing case required the students to *demonstrate and reflect* on their knowledge in practice, while the law and biology students had to *critically explore and apply* knowledge in written assignments (and, in the law case, during the moot court). Accordingly, the perceived quality of feedback was linked to the different knowledge practices (i.e. demonstrate, reflect, explore, and apply) required in the courses and how feedback interactions helped students to engage in this work. Expanding on previous studies that have suggested the relevance of disciplinary knowledge for the perception of feedback (e.g. Dunworth and Sanchez 2016; Poulos and Mahony 2008), these findings provide a more specific illustration of how feedback perception is related to the epistemic dimension of different contexts.

In addition to the differences between the course environments, we also found interesting variations in the way the different participant groups in the cases perceived the quality of feedback.

The biology case showed differences between some students highlighting the importance of feedback making them feel good, while other students and the course teacher thought that good feedback needed to be challenging. In the law course, students who took active roles during the moot court perceived quality feedback differently from those who observed. Those who played active roles viewed good feedback as honest and challenging towards their arguments and performance, while the observing students drew on different criteria to judge the quality of the feedback interactions they observed. This situation could be related to their being

less personally involved or being among the academically weaker students, and therefore choosing to acquire their course credits through a less exposing task than playing an active role in the moot court. The nursing case generally showed a more coherent picture; the students and teachers tended to agree on what they perceived as quality feedback.

While previous studies have mostly focussed on revealing differences between students and teachers in perceiving feedback (Carless 2006; Dawson et al. 2018a; Mulliner and Tucker 2015), our findings also provide insight into the potential reasons that might be central to the different perceptions of the students in the three cases. Even though the students generally agreed on many aspects of quality, the students in the different courses seemed to operate with different criteria when referring to quality feedback. These criteria emerged from the concrete design and organisation of the courses but were also related to their wider understandings of what they saw as appropriate within their disciplinary context (Ajjawi et al. 2017; Esterhazy 2018). For example, the law students were generally engaged in more competitive practices and therefore appreciated more challenging feedback, as long as it yielded learning benefits. The law students appeared to view the availability of quality feedback as a limited commodity in law education that they needed to compete for. They had to be prepared and brave enough to participate in the moot court if they wanted to be rewarded with feedback on their own performance, while the observing students only had access to feedback by proxy (i.e. not on their own performance, but only on the performance of their peers) during these situations.

The nursing students, in comparison, were more interested in maintaining a safe, positive atmosphere within the feedback interactions. They saw good feedback as being more related to safeguarding the students' well-being and ensuring that they could master difficult situations in their future professional lives.

Finally, the biology case was somewhere in the middle, with students understanding the benefits of challenging feedback for their learning while also expressing the need to have feedback that would make them feel good. These insights are in line with theoretical ideas that the perceived quality of teaching and learning in higher education is always embedded within the discourses and practices of the discipline (Wittek and Habib 2013).

Conclusions

In this chapter we have shown how different perceptions of quality feedback can only be understood in the context of specific teaching-learning environments. What people perceived as quality feedback in each course was closely intertwined with the way students and teachers perceived these structural, relational-affective, and epistemic characteristics of the respective courses. These findings are in line with previous research that has highlighted the importance of how students and teachers perceive their teaching-learning environments (Prosser and Trigwell 1999).

Similarly to previous research, we also found that students and teachers differed in their perceptions of feedback (Orsmond and Merry 2011; Yang and Carless 2013). The students in our study generally identified quality feedback either as that which made them feel good or that which made them understand and improve their learning. While the students judged feedback quality based on their personal experience, the teachers seemed to identify quality feedback more from a normative standpoint. That is, they had certain ideas about what their feedback practices should ideally look like and what outcomes they should lead to. These ideas usually provided the basis for their perception of what counted as quality feedback. Sometimes, however, the teachers also seemed to judge quality in relation to their emotions, such as when they reported feeling good when their students learned something in a productive feedback interaction.

Conceptually, our study has illustrated an empirical application of Yang and Carless's (2013) proposed conceptual perspective. Their original work proposed a normative model to help identify those elements of a disciplinary course context that are most relevant for promoting dialogic feedback practices and self-regulated learning. In our study, we have refrained from taking a normative stance and have used the three dimensions of structure, epistemic, and relational-affective as analytical notions to analyse the interview data. We also shifted our focus away from the cognitive aspects highlighted in the original perspective and more towards a perspective that emphasises the relational and epistemic dimension in the environment. Instead of stressing how the context influences the ways in which students self-regulate and process feedback information, we argue that it is more relevant to study the way course participants perceive the epistemic relations in their courses and how the knowledge content they work with influences what counts as quality feedback to them.

To make students recognise – and engage with – quality feedback in a course thus entails careful considerations of the epistemic relations between tasks, assessment forms, and activities generated within a given course design. We hence should view designing for teaching-learning environments in which students may perceive and use quality feedback as a central activity in 'quality work' related to a course or study programme.

Finally, the differences we found between the cases in our study provide an important argument that we need to account better for contextual factors when studying and evaluating feedback quality. We argue that, in a course evaluation with negative ratings on feedback, one should not merely assume that certain generic measures can be applied to any course to improve the feedback quality. Examples of such generic measures might include increasing the quantity of written feedback comments or introducing new and purportedly promising digital feedback formats such as video or automatic feedback (Dawson et al. 2018b). Our findings suggest that the effectiveness of these different feedback formats depends on the structural, relational and epistemic dimensions of the concrete teaching-learning environment. For example, introducing automatic feedback comments is not likely to increase the perceived quality of feedback – that is, the student ratings – in contexts where students place the most value on a safe atmosphere and being seen as human beings.

This insight teaches us an important lesson about what we need to consider when working with quality in higher education. The examples used in our study relate to feedback quality, but the quality of other educational practices is often perceived in relation to the teaching-learning environment. This situation has implications about whether student ratings can be comparable between contexts and how much knowledge we can gain from simple Likert scales used to measure student satisfaction with a particular element of the course (e.g. lectures or assessment).

This idea can also be extended to the normative discourse about quality in higher education. Taking the example of feedback, there is a widespread understanding that there is one ideal way of giving students feedback (Boud and Molloy 2013). While many will argue that we have not yet found that ideal way, the field is in general agreement that quality feedback can be measured objectively and is implementable in any course. Based on our analysis and discussion, we argue that this way of thinking about the quality of educational practices is problematic. The use of generic ratings has several important limitations and may not be useful for everyday quality work, which requires solutions to local and often very context-specific challenges. Rather, we should invest more time in developing tools for evaluating and assuring quality feedback (and other educational practices) that will go beyond simple student satisfaction ratings and will provide teachers with more context-specific insights into their students' experiences.

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Chapter 10
Quality Work: Reflections and Refinements

Mari Elken and Bjørn Stensaker

Introduction

While studies of quality are rooted in different perspectives and focus on different levels of higher education (i.e., globally, regionally, nationally, and institutionally), in the current book, we have mainly analysed activities and practices within higher education institutions that address the quality of its educational provision in a broad sense, what we have labelled 'quality work' (Elken and Stensaker 2018, see also Chap. 1, in this volume). The concept 'quality work' brings together different expectations and dimensions of quality in higher education, which have been analysed in a rather fragmented and de-coupled manner in previous studies. The 'quality work' concept provides an umbrella for discussing how, in higher education, quality is produced through formal organisational structures, explicit quality enhancement activities, and informal, routine work that is sometimes not associated with quality enhancement processes. Thus, the book provides a discussion of the connection points between the academic, managerial, and administrative aspects of quality.

In the conceptualisation provided in Chap. 1, 'quality work' can take place in various parts of the organisation and be embedded in different tasks and responsibilities. Such an argument could, of course, seem to suggest that everything is 'quality work', and therefore, nothing is. As outlined in the first chapter, the core of the argument in this book about 'quality work' is processes and practices. Instead of defining the various facets of quality or measuring the outputs, an emphasis on practices suggests a detailed analysis of how various actors within higher education

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institutions work with quality, however they define it. It is rather well established that various stakeholders define quality differently (Dicker et al. 2018), and one can argue that these definitions may be further conditioned by different national, organisational, professional, and disciplinary concepts. With this in mind, the variety of ways to define quality was a starting point for analysis in this book. Different definitions of quality may activate different practices and processes, but all of these represent quality work within higher education institutions.

As we have argued in this book, this emphasis on 'work' can bring something new to the figure in discussions of quality in higher education. If we consider the key findings of existing studies of quality in higher education institutions, plenty of evidence suggests that much of the existing 'work' undertaken has become too managerial, bureaucratic, burdensome, centralistic and formalised and that current activities are neither efficient nor effective. Our interest in 'quality work' also provides a starting point to unpacking why the high hopes related to established concepts, such as quality assurance, quality management, and quality culture (Bollaert 2014; Manatos et al. 2017), seem to have trouble materialising in practice.

As suggested in the introduction to this book, we believe that part of the problem is rooted in the agreement that quality is a fuzzy concept, and attempts to define the concept have generally concluded that quality is relative and multifaceted (Harvey and Green 1993). Therefore, when specific approaches to analysis of quality are implemented (e.g., management or culture), they address only part of this multidimensionality, and most discussions tend to become focused on which aspects of quality are 'in' or 'out' of the discussion. Research on quality in higher education reflects the same pattern to some degree, in this manner limiting the cumulative potential of various analysis. While there are ample studies acknowledging multidimensionality, there are fewer consistent concepts emphasising how this multiplicity is addressed within institutions in a more comprehensive manner.

Instead of a competing concept, 'quality work' should be understood as a complementary and more overarching concept aimed at filling in the missing links, activities, and practices conducted in the planning, organisation, and delivery of education in higher education. The aim is to address how actors within higher education institutions navigate this complex landscape. Thus, while a 'quality work' perspective would acknowledge potential tensions and contestations in definitions, it nevertheless emphasises the manner in which such dilemmas are continuously addressed by various actor groups within higher education institutions. In short, as outlined in this book, the emphasis is on attempting to integrate studies of quality in a way that acknowledges that when external stakeholders and expectations meet internal interests and ways of organising, it leads to organisational complexity, which we need to understand more fully. This complexity consists of a web of roles and responsibilities, as well as individual actors, working with quality to address these continuously in their work. To more fully understand the work that is undertaken, we also need to keep in mind the wider web, as practices remain interconnected.

As a starting point for the empirical investigations of 'quality work', we also sketched out some expectations as to what properties 'quality work' could have. In the introductory chapter (see also Elken and Stensaker 2018), we summarised these properties as including (i) intentionality, where change and continuity are continuously weighed. Furthermore, we also expect that (ii) work often involves finding a balance between different expectations, including those of co-workers, and that (iii) much of work concerns the processes involved in identifying relevant solutions, leading to (iv) open-ended outcomes that, in practice, can take the form of (v) pragmatic solutions to the challenges being faced. We also suggested that for individuals to work this way, they need (vi) some autonomy in how tasks are solved and the means to engage in this process. While these dimensions delineate characteristics of 'work' in higher education institutions, it is also important to point out that this represents a framework for discussion rather than a comprehensive theoretical framework. A 'quality work' perspective, then, implies that it requires additional theoretical concepts to unpack specific practices, whether found in studies of organisations and institutions or in pedagogical theories. A 'quality work' perspective argues that to more fully understand quality in higher education, we need to consider these practices interconnected.

The chapters in the book reveal the wide variety in the types of work, actors, and processes that have quality enhancement as their objective. They bring in a range of combinations with theoretical perspectives and approaches. Thus, while the chapters do not take an explicit starting point in the dimensions of 'quality work', they shed light on how 'quality work' comprises a range of activities in higher education. This includes, for example, managerial systems and leadership, how the use of digital tools affect 'quality work', and how specific teaching and assessment practices condition 'quality work'. The various chapters have also employed a range of specific theoretical concepts relevant to these activities.

In this final chapter, we discuss the contributions from the chapters in a more structured way with these dimensions in mind. The chapters in the book have shown how quality work may be both an integrating and disintegrating activity. We looked for areas where different individual and organisational intentions, interests, and logics can be expected to collide, as well as areas where tensions have been found. However, we also identified actions taken to find solutions to problems and test new practices, including individuals having or taking autonomy to negotiate and find these practical solutions.

To assist us in this discussion, we take, as a point of departure, the figure identifying some of the key dimensions and dilemmas framing 'quality work' (see also Chap. 1), where a distinction is made between the formal and informal, as well as between the generic and specific side of organisational practices, rules, and routines (Fig. 10.1).
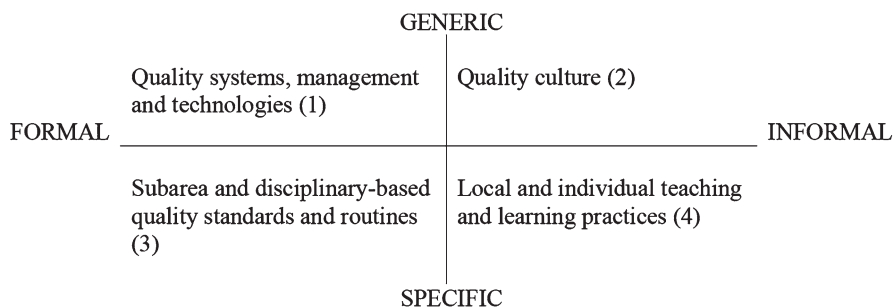
GENERIC

Quality systems, management and technologies (1)	Quality culture (2)

FORMAL ———————————————————————————— INFORMAL

Subarea and disciplinary-based quality standards and routines (3)	Local and individual teaching and learning practices (4)

SPECIFIC

Fig. 10.1 Dimensions and dilemmas in 'quality work' in higher education

Work Dilemmas and How They Are Handled

One dilemma appearing in different chapters of the book is how more generic systems and overarching standards can create tensions in different subareas and within specific disciplines having to adapt to these systems and standards. The chapters of this book show how this dilemma is valid for both for organisational and pedagogical dimensions of higher education institutions, and the contributions in this book touch upon both core dimensions of work dilemmas: generic vs specific and formal vs informal. In the next few paragraphs, we summarise some of these dilemmas and identify shared themes in the chapters of the book.

From an organisational perspective, dilemmas arising from processes of standardisation and differentiation are at the core of the systems developed within institutions to manage the formal structures of quality management. Balancing external accountability demands with the needs of various internal actors was one of the themes in Chap. 2 by Elken et al. They find not only structural variation but also variation in the purpose and core logic of these systems. The chapter presents several cases where a balance between various interests and expectations has not been found. For example, emphasising standardisation too strongly does not necessarily produce efficiency and can, instead, overload the quality system. In terms of 'quality work', this suggests that when quality systems become too generic and formalised, they effectively limit the scope of individual actors' searches for relevant and pragmatic solutions. The space to work with quality in a more open-ended manner becomes reduced, while the expected gains of efficiency also remain unachieved. While many of internal quality systems were established to cater to external managerial demands, the chapter also identifies attempts to connect formalised processes with strategic processes within organisations and at least an awareness of these being potentially disconnected from the pedagogical practices. The question that emerges is whether such disconnectedness is an issue and whether a stronger link to pedagogical practices is desirable. The findings suggest that constructing formal quality systems capable of catering to a wide variety of educational practices would likely result in a substantial increase in organisational complexity. Thus, while the decoupling of formal quality systems and educational practices is sometimes presented as an issue, this may also be a way to manage organisational efficiency.

While the quality systems observed in this book are maturing, they are also subjected to major change processes. Tensions between standardisation and specialisation become particularly amplified in situations where higher education institutions undergo reorganisation processes, such as when mergers between institutions create the need to establish a new, overarching quality assurance system at the institutional level. This disrupts well-functioning procedures and established routines related to quality assurance in the organisation being exposed to the merger (see Elken et al., Chap. 2, in this volume). While one could argue that merger processes always disrupt the organisations involved, the example reflects the importance of formal structures in influencing the working conditions of both academic and administrative staff (Whitchurch 2012). As illustrated in the example, a completely new QA system implied that, in reality, much of the traditional and informal 'work' taking place as part of the existing system were replaced by much more formalised processes, and the establishment of specific routines and procedures were perceived by participants as leaving little room for local discretion. Existing 'work' then became captured by formal structures, leaving less room for what some would label the 'living autonomy' of staff (Maassen et al. 2017).

The concept of 'quality work' is not exclusively linked to academic staff. Those with managerial responsibilities are also putting in a lot of 'work' in their job, and those holding management positions may be restrained by formal requirements and external standards. This is clearly visible in the comparative analysis of study programme leaders in Norway and Denmark (see Aamodt et al., Chap. 3, in this volume). A starting point for the analysis conducted in this chapter is that the way external quality assurance systems are designed impacts the 'work' taking place within higher education institutions. The empirical material examined two similar but different national quality assurance systems. A key finding in the chapter was that Danish study programme leaders tended to have much more formalised titles and job descriptions, and they were much more receptive to external demands and issues on the national policy agenda than their Norwegian counterparts. Specifically, the conditions for 'work' conducted by the study programme leaders were much more structured and proactive in Denmark than in Norway. An interesting question is whether the relatively weak study programme leadership identified in the Norwegian context should be interpreted as positive or negative for the work put into quality? In other words, is weak management a good thing as it allows for more 'work' to be done by staff?

Several studies have identified the trend towards more formalised and rationalised higher education institutions (Ramirez and Christensen 2013), and one could argue that more management, in principle, would restrict the facilitation of institutional entrepreneurship (Garud et al. 2007). However, having too much autonomy locally and too few frames to guide the work that goes on does not always seem to enhance entrepreneurial behaviour as it could also lead to the fragmentation and what seems to be somewhat de-coupled practices in the Norwegian case. As suggested in the properties identified as constituting 'quality work', the necessity of balancing different expectations is seen as a key ingredient of the process. If the expectations are weakly articulated, it may also be equally difficult to enter into any negotiation processes. This exemplifies a possible dialectical relationship between 'quality management' and 'quality work', hinting at their reciprocal relationship

and the complementary nature of the 'quality work' concept. Without some degree of management, little meaningful work may be taking place.

In modern higher education institutions, 'quality work' may take many forms and involve quite different tasks within institutions, depending on which processes and mechanisms are currently considered particularly important in developing high-quality education. Currently, considerably energy is put into technology and in creating technology-rich environments for student learning, as addressed in the chapter written by Fossland and Tømte (see Chap. 4). This chapter also identifies dilemmas arising between national policy ambitions for a more digitalised higher education sector and the local needs identified by those having more hands-on responsibility for specific educational offerings. The mismatch identified in this chapter underscores the different values and norms fuelling many of the tensions currently found in higher education institutions around the world (Deem et al. 2008; Douglass 2016). Technology development is still quite special in that few are openly critical towards the need to modernise educational delivery, although a considerable body of research has identified the many cultural challenges involved when attempting to realise the potential of technological advancement in specific teaching and learning practices (Lillejord et al. 2018). Technology represents not only a new theme for quality work but also a new way to conduct work. For many, it represents extra work because substantial investments in personal time need to be made to develop and implement new technology-based learning environments. As noted by Fossland and Tømte in this book, some people may not be willing to engage in or undertake this work, leaving the field to individual champions and enthusiasts. Technology is, thus, also challenging a key property of how 'quality work' has been defined and understood: individuals as problem-solvers and innovators. While change, to a large extent, is highly dependent on such enthusiasts, the problem of how to instigate more profound organisational change remains. This is, perhaps, a good example of the assumption that 'quality work' should not be perceived as a stand-alone activity; it is both a complementary concept and a complementary activity. While it emphasises individual actors' contributions, there is also a networked aspect of these practices if specific changes are to be achieved in the whole organisation.

What, then, are the ways in which 'quality work' can be integrated and transformed into a more collective and coherent activity? As illustrated in many of the contributions in the current book, various activities within higher education institutions can be seen as characterised by fragmentation, de-coupling, and 'patchwork'. In this book, Prøitz et al. (see Chap. 5) address this problem when they examine how programme planning can be transformed into a more integrated and aligned activity (see also, Biggs and Tang 2011). In Prøitz et al.'s chapter, a distinction is made between alignment as both a theoretical and practical construct. In short, planning as a purely theoretical activity is extremely challenging for those with the responsibility to develop plans and those who are exposed to them. Interestingly, various activities, such as 'role play', seem to be seen by students as an eye-opener for how different parts of the curriculum may be connected and where different forms of knowledge and skills coalesce. The importance of this kind of activity is also echoed by Nerland in her contribution (see Chap. 6), where she discusses how student-centred learning environments can be facilitated and nurtured. For the concept of

'quality work', these examples are illuminating in that the value of practice is supported, as well as for coordination. While role-play and similar collective activities may challenge the individual orientation, which is attached to the work conceptualisation, they also emphasise the notion of practices as networked and interconnected. Coordination can be achieved through training and being exposed to 'authentic learning activities'. Both Prøitz et al. and Nerland address pedagogical design challenges in their chapters, and their examples are highly relevant to how 'quality work' could become more coordinated in the organisational dimension. Having intentionality (plans) is insufficient; it has to be exposed to experience (practice) if consistency is to be achieved. The networked aspect of 'quality work' is, thus, again emphasised.

The practical integration challenges related to 'quality work' are also a key issue in Damsa and Wittek's contribution to the book (see Chap. 7). Their starting point for addressing this issue is that group work is a highly effective form of learning, although the impact is conditioned by a number of factors related to how the group work takes place. The challenge is identifying these factors and planning for how group work should take place, again hinting at the need for careful planning and ideas about how 'work' could be designed. As the authors note, too much planning can have a negative effect on student participation and engagement in group work. Planning as a way of structuring and predetermining activities limits the teacher's ability to be responsive and creative.

The teacher is, of course, the key actor in the planning and facilitation process (see, e.g., Hattie 2015), but the role of students should not be underestimated as they need to develop reflective skills and competencies for handling unexpected situations and unforeseen collaboration challenges that may appear as the group work unfolds. As described by Nerland (Chap. 6), there is a fine balance to be struck between providing careful structures framing the work to be completed by students and the danger of killing student engagement if they perceive there is little room for pursuing personal interests and exploring the positive group dynamics that can develop in the process (Ashwin 2012). If we relate this finding to our conceptualisation of 'quality work', it hints at the potential benefits of allowing open-ended outcomes of the 'work' that takes place. Allowing for open-ended outcomes may still be a challenge for those in charge of planning in an era when specifying learning outcomes has become a commonplace and, in many instances, a mandatory activity in higher education (Aamodt et al. 2018; Prøitz 2010; Prøitz et al. 2017). Reflection on the discussions of internal quality systems and the delicate balance between standardisation and differentiation reveals that the dilemmas share a concern for finding a relevant balance between the formal and informal, as well as the generic and specific.

The concept of 'quality work' can also be linked to cultural dimensions of educational delivery and the relationship between taken-for-granted values and norms and the mundane work viewed as manifestations and expressions of these values and norms. As illustrated by de Lange et al. (Chap. 8, in this volume), lectures to large groups, which are labelled plenary sessions, are perhaps one of the most traditional and typical activities taking place in higher education institutions. Such plenary sessions can be seen as cultural tools informing students about the kind of

work conducted in specific knowledge areas (Becher and Trowler 2001). When students are active in these sessions, they are engaged in a sort of 'silent socialisation' process, where they acquire knowledge about disciplinary epistemics through practical interactions. While plenary sessions could be seen as the most trivial kind of work conducted in higher education, the modernisation of these activities, where students are pushed from being passive recipients of knowledge to playing a more active role as co-constructors of knowledge, creates arenas for more collective reflections. Thus, the 'work' being performed is also a kind of cultural work where historically-based cultural codes are adapted to a contemporary setting (Hwang and Colyvas 2011).

The links between 'quality work' and culture can also be said to be present, as Esterhazy et al. discuss in Chap. 9, when feedback to students is designed in ways that facilitate student learning effectively. One of their key points is that feedback should not be perceived as a distinct activity, but an ongoing and dialectical process between students and between students and their teachers (Boud and Molloy 2013; Esterhazy 2018). A specific challenge with respect to feedback is that the actors involved may have different perceptions of what kind of 'work' is actually being performed. While teachers may think they are providing feedback to students, it is not given that students agree that they are receiving valuable feedback, or even think that they are taking part in a feedback process (Esterhazy and Damşa 2017). As such, the work conducted by students and teachers needs to be decoded, and the 'trivial work' conducted by students and teachers in their daily interactions needs to be reflected upon in a systematic way. This case illustrates the relevance of the concept of 'work', as cultural beliefs, values, and norms can be translated into acts that are not recognisable by those participating.

The book has considered both the organisational and pedagogical dimension of quality work. The discussion, here, indicates that when analysed as specific practices of 'quality work', the emerging dilemmas also share a number of characteristics. Concerns about finding the appropriate balance between activities being planned or open-ended and ideas that are generic or locally translated and adapted are at the core of the empirical examples provided in this book.

Quality Work: Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

The concept of 'quality work' is, as emphasised in the introduction, heavily inspired by institutional perspectives and the more 'work'-oriented developments that have taken place during the last decade (Lawrence et al. 2009, 2011, 2013). One of the ways the current book has been inspired by institutional interest in 'work' is that we have approached quality improvement in higher education in a more coherent way by attempting to provide a context in which pedagogical and organisational dimensions of the process are brought together. However, the starting points for 'institutional' and 'quality' work were quite different. While the institutional work

perspective was an attempt to add micro-level dynamics to a theoretical perspective having too much focus on macro-level developments (Lawrence et al. 2009), the quality work perspective was an attempt to identify a missing link between managerial and cultural perspectives of how quality in higher education could be understood and enhanced (Elken and Stensaker 2018). A shared aim of both is to incorporate the notion of practice to emphasise more dynamic, processual, and interconnected aspects of social reality.

However, these different starting points have, perhaps, generated insights that we think are also relevant to the institutional work perspective. The first insight brought forward in several chapters in this book is that there is a collective side to 'quality work' that is important. While individual and, sometimes, entrepreneurial 'work' characteristics are heavily emphasised by some studies of institutional work, the findings in this book suggest strongly that a considerable amount of work can be collectively organised and even be extremely beneficial when organised in this way. This collective dimension, thus, goes beyond the embedded agency of individual actors (Hwang and Colyvas 2011) and, instead, represents a collaborative and networked aspect of individual behaviour. Such collective organising of work can be either highly dependent on planning and design or a reflection of cultural values and norms. The fact that much of this collective work cannot be planned in too much detail without damaging engagement by those involved may also be relevant to understanding how change takes place in highly institutionalised settings, one of the key theoretical puzzles within institutional theory (Scott 2008).

Specifically, the findings in the book add insights into the specifics of micro-level translation processes, which have gained increased prominence in institutional theory (Frølich et al. 2013). This micro-focus also suggests an emphasis on attempting to explain variation rather than focusing solely on homogeneity. Moreover, this interest also reflects recent attempts at connecting neo-institutional perspectives and practice theory more effectively. Whereas practice theory emphasises the material embodiment of specific actions (Schatzki 2001), the institutional perspective focuses on the institutional rationality of action. In our analysis of quality work, individual practices remain an important aspect of 'work', yet the level of analysis of 'quality work' also implies there are an aggregate dimension and a collaborative aspect of individual practices.

Several contributions in the current book have also offered insights that could be helpful in drilling further into the 'work' concept. For example, the careful analysis of student participation challenges in 'work' processes offered by Nerland (Chap. 6) could be highly relevant to understanding how various work processes unfold. Nerland's identification of the cognitive, social, affective, and organisational dimensions impacting student participation in their learning environment may also be applicable to other work settings involving a diverse range of actors. Of special interest is the social and affective dimensions identified and how various factors, such as motivation and anxiety, need to be taken into account when explaining how different kinds of 'work' are conducted. While these dimensions are increasingly at the forefront of research targeting students' experiences and modes of participation in higher education (e.g. Lawson and Lawson 2013), they have yet to be included as

key factors affecting quality work. A key challenge in quality management approaches has often been to engage staff in procedures prescribed in the systems designed to improve quality at the institutional level (Manatos et al. 2017). Unpacking more of the characteristics that trigger staff to engage in their work would probably contribute to managerial approaches to quality that are more impactful than existing ones (Leiber et al. 2015).

From a policy and practice perspective, the 'quality work' concept has several insights to offer that could inform future policy initiatives. One such insight is the danger of installing too detailed and specific rules and regulations in higher education. As regulatory tools are becoming increasingly popular within the field of higher education, in both the organisational and pedagogical area, our analysis has demonstrated the dangers involved in putting too much faith in planning and detailed designs of quality assurance systems. As external quality assurance agencies are increasingly using legal requirements as a starting point for their evaluation and accreditation processes, special care should be taken as too much weight can be given to the governance of quality (Massaro 2010). While proponents of more cultural approaches to quality would probably agree with the latter point (Mårtensson et al. 2014), the 'quality work' concept also hints that 'having' a quality culture is also insufficient. Individuals may have very different perceptions of how cultural values and norms should be put into practice and, as several chapters in the current book illustrate, only when collective work is undertaken can these different manifestations come to the fore.

While current perspectives of learning and teaching have informed many of the identified insights, including how students can become more involved, integrated, and engaged in their learning environments, the 'quality work' perspective also hints at applying some of the same principles to the organisational approaches surrounding educational delivery. For example, the use of 'role play' seems to provide students with insights that enable them to link theory and practice in insightful ways. This begs the question of why similar approaches should not be used in planning educational offerings. While various concepts, such as constructive alignment (Biggs and Tang 2011) and visible learning (Hattie 2015), have become increasingly popular in the field of pedagogy, the 'quality work' perspective can be said to expand these concepts to include the organisational context surrounding educational delivery (Elken and Stensaker 2018). As educational delivery involves a range of actors with managerial, administrative, professional, and academic responsibilities, a collaborative approach to quality also requires sufficient knowledge. While pedagogical training courses usually focus on giving academic staff specific pedagogical insights and tools, it is also necessary to have sufficient arenas for competence enhancement across various roles and functions. Perhaps the use of 'role play' and similar techniques, as ways to gain insight into the challenges that may be faced when plans are to be put into practice, could also represent valuable training for those responsible for offering carefully aligned educational designs that work. In this way, 'quality work' could represent a much-needed bridge between organisational and pedagogical perspectives, as it offers a neutral vocabulary enabling the exchange of views, interests, and experiences between different disciplines, knowledge areas, and professional responsibilities. In an era when societal interest in

higher education is significant and external requirements are being felt by many as imposing restrictions on the traditional autonomy of the sector, 'quality work' can be considered a concept that echoes the ambitions of Selznick (1957), where (higher education) institutions become instruments for realising human ambitions and intentions rather than instruments of social control.

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