

Rethinking teaching and teaching practice at university in a lifelong learning context

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Abstract The development visions of universities, the growing heterogeneity of learners at all levels and changes in higher education are increasing expectations of academics' professionalism and their teaching practices. Learning experiences and teaching practices at university influence further choices and support continuing life-long learning of university students. This paper presents research results from an empirical survey carried out at Tallinn University in Estonia. It investigates how students experience teaching and teaching practices and how academics experience their own teaching. Within a theoretical framework of adult learning principles, the emphasis is on the importance of and interrelations between teaching practices and the student learning process at university. Relevant data were collected from 235 students, who were asked to fill in a semi-structured questionnaire, and from 9 academic staff members, who were asked to submit reflection papers. The students and the academics in the sample came from three different disciplines: (1) mathematics/natural sciences; (2) educational sciences/teacher education; and (3) social sciences. The empirical data thus gathered were then analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The authors' findings indicate that while students experience current teaching practices as somewhat limited to a one-sided passing on of knowledge to learners, academic staff perceive their teaching as a collaborative process which helps their students' development. This discrepancy creates tension and thus calls for change.

Keywords Teaching and learning at university · Lifelong learning · Experiences of teaching · Teaching practices · Estonia

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Résumé Repenser l'enseignement et la pratique didactique à l'université dans un contexte d'apprentissage tout au long de la vie – Les visions du développement universitaire, l'hétérogénéité croissante des apprenants à tous les niveaux et les changements intervenus dans l'enseignement supérieur engendrent des attentes accrues envers le professionnalisme et les pratiques didactiques des universitaires. Les expériences d'apprentissage et les pratiques didactiques à l'université influencent les choix ultérieurs des étudiants et favorisent un apprentissage poursuivi la vie durant. Les auteures de cet article présentent les résultats d'une enquête empirique réalisée à l'université de Tallinn (Estonie) sur le ressenti des étudiants par rapport à l'enseignement et aux pratiques didactiques, et celui des universitaires par rapport à leur propre enseignement. À l'aide d'un cadre théorique sur les principes de l'apprentissage des adultes, l'accent a été mis sur l'importance des pratiques didactiques et des processus d'apprentissage des étudiants ainsi que sur leurs corrélations. Les données afférentes ont été collectées auprès de 235 étudiants devant compléter un questionnaire semi-structuré, et de neuf membres du personnel universitaire priés de soumettre un document de réflexion. Les étudiants et professeurs de l'échantillon appartiennent à trois disciplines : mathématiques et sciences naturelles, sciences éducatives et formation des enseignants, sciences sociales. Les données empiriques ainsi collectées ont fait l'objet d'une analyse à la fois qualitative et quantitative. Les conclusions des auteures indiquent que si les étudiants ressentent les pratiques didactiques courantes comme se limitant à une transmission partielle de connaissances, les professeurs perçoivent leur enseignement comme un processus concerté contribuant au développement de leurs étudiants. Cette divergence crée une tension et appelle par conséquent à une adaptation.

Резюме Переосмысление обучения и практик преподавания в университете в контексте непрерывного обучения – Развитие высшего образования, изменяющиеся представления о развитии университетов и гетерогенность студентов увеличивают ожидания к профессиональности преподавателей университетов и практикам преподавания. Опыт учения студентов и практики преподавания в университете поддерживают возможности непрерывного обучения и непрерывности учения на протяжении всей жизни. В статье излагаются результаты эмпирического исследования, которое проводилось в Таллиннском Университете (Эстония). Анализируется студенческий опыт о преподавании и преподавательских практиках, также обсуждается опыт преподавателей об их преподавательских практиках. Исследование опирается на теоретические представления об учении взрослых, в обобщении подчеркивается интеррелятивность между преподавательскими практиками и опытом учения студентов в университете. Эмпирические данные были собраны при помощи опроса студентов и рефлексивного анализа преподавательских практик. Опрос основывался на семи-структурированном вопроснике, на который ответили 235 студентов с трёх академических дисциплин: (1) математика и естественные науки; (2) образовательные науки; (3) социальные науки. Рефлексивный анализ преподавательских практик был собран у девяти преподавателей также с трёх академических дисциплин. Был проведен качественный и количественный анализ эмпирических данных. Результаты анализа свидетельствуют, что преподаватели представляют процесс преподавания как коллаборативный процесс, но по опыту студентов, преподавательские практики лимитируют возможности их учения в университете как активного, коллаборативного, социального и интерактивного процесса. Различия в опыте студентов и преподавателей о преподавании и о преподавательских практиках указывает на необходимость методологических и методических изменений в процессе обучения и в практиках преподавания в университете.

Introduction

Lifelong learning is a form of social behaviour; it is a continuous process and enhances educational, social and personal choices as well as personal and social relations. Higher education and universities provide the “groundwork” for lifelong learning (Field 2000), the “springboard” for entering the world of work (Knapper and Kropley 2000, p. 4) and a major transformational experience which offers learning opportunities in the best and broadest educational sense (Pollard 2003, p. 185).

Discussions on lifelong learning in higher education – and especially the social dimension of lifelong learning – were initially peripheral in the Bologna process¹ (Valk 2008, p. 7; Sursock and Smidt 2010). However, since higher education is inherently connected to learning and experience, learning has more recently become the focus of the Bologna process (Sursock and Smidt 2010). In the ongoing implementation of this European standardisation, the heterogeneity of learners’ age and social status is now acknowledged and reinforces the need for strategic change in university teaching, whereas change in teaching is in turn based on the value of learner-centered learning (Sursock and Smidt 2010).

Universities may be understood as creators and designers of a lifelong learning culture in society (Pollard 2003, p. 185). Tõnu Viik (2011), Professor of philosophy at Tallinn University, notes that in modern societies, universities as institutions are taken for granted, so that no one ever really raises the questions of what the *purpose* of a university is and what is *important* about a university, or why universities exist and why an increasing number of people want to study at a university. According to James Hartley (2009, pp. 96–97) students should leave higher education equipped with the ability and motivation to continue learning throughout their lives, i.e. possessing a wide variety of “transferable skills and sources and ... capacities” (ibid., p. 121): to set themselves personal and realistic goals, to apply and construct knowledge, to evaluate their own learning, to locate information from different sources, to communicate in groups, to use different learning strategies in different situations, and to be capable of independence, collaboration, self-assessment and deeper learning.

In Estonia, the significance of lifelong learning has not yet been clearly formulated in a higher education policy context. Thus, universities and their academic staff still need to develop a justified and conscious vision of learning and teaching, including strategies for supporting their function in university-level studies. Estonian higher education has been subject to several systemic changes in the past decade: a two-stage curricular system (3+2 years) was introduced, study opportunities were extended and access to university study programmes was widened.² The most significant consequent change is in the diversity of the student

¹ The Bologna process is a standardisation of higher education qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It is based on the *Bologna Declaration* (EHEA 1999) which was signed by Education Ministers from 29 European countries in 1999.

² The two-stage system set a nominal duration of three years for a Bachelor’s degree, followed by nominally two years for a Master’s degree. The extension of study opportunities included the option of

body in terms of age, cultural and social background, and learning and work experiences.

In Estonia, universities are variously discussed and written about (Jõgi and Karu 2012):

- as *part of the educational system*, where the quality of education, good quality teaching, and students' economic well-being and education allowances play an important role, as a result of which specific competencies and learning results are developed; moreover academics' high level of qualification and the indicators substantiating their qualification are significant;
- as *mass universities*, producing an unreasonable number of people with higher education, where academics and students, if they are lucky, meet through either their e-mail inboxes or in an e-learning environment; interaction is impersonal, and there is no cognitive interest in teaching and learning;
- as *educational institutions*, the aims of which are related to preparing a labour force to match the expectations or needs of employers and the labour market; and
- as *universities*, where one learns, researches and creates something new in a supportive and individual environment promoting teamwork and favouring criticism, and providing greater freedom and responsibility; in this variant, students are active and committed to studying. The teaching approaches chosen by academics support studying and create new opportunities for students to develop their knowledge, skills and ability to adapt, create and carry on learning continuously; important values are created which give rise to and support social processes and development.

The development visions of universities, the growing heterogeneity of learners at all levels, the variety of study activities at universities, and changes in the wider learning culture are increasing expectations of academic professionalism – through understanding the university and curricular context, students as adult learners, and through ongoing development of teaching skills and practices. Studies considering learners and learning in higher education (Halpern and Hakel 2002; Barnett 2003; James and Biesta 2003; Lindblom-Ylante et al. 2006; Postareff 2007; Parpala 2010; Repo 2010; Thunborg et al. 2011) highlight learners' autonomy, self-motivation and responsibility, and the need for learners to understand their learning and be active participants in the act of studying, which includes the processes of learning, self-evaluation, feedback, curriculum development and course planning.

Learning, including adult learning at higher education and university levels, has been researched in different contexts. A number of feedback and learner experience surveys have focused on learners' perceptions of teaching and approaches to learning (Chen and Hoshower 2003; Diseth 2007). Fewer studies have analysed learners' perceptions and experiences of learning and teaching at university in terms of a relationship.

Footnote 2 continued

completing Master's degrees at institutions of applied higher education. The widening of access opened up tertiary education to students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and mature students.

This paper is based on an empirical survey³ and focuses on how university teaching is experienced by students and by academic staff. We discuss the issues concerning university teaching and learning for the purpose of deepening understanding and reflecting the possibilities and limitations of teaching practice. University learning and teaching practices influence students' future choices and support continuous lifelong learning. Within the context of lifelong learning, we discuss the experience of teaching at university from a phenomenographic⁴ perspective. The experience of teaching – in terms of knowledge, meanings, attitudes and values – is constituted in the relationship between students and academic staff, and the social context (Martin et al. 2002, p. 104).

As a result of the significant changes in European and also in Estonian higher education during the past decade, we presume that changes must consequently also have occurred both in the learning experience of students and in the way academic staff understand teaching and approach teaching practices.

Being academics, researchers, and trainers of academics and adults ourselves, we value learning and teaching as an interrelational process, and rely on the principles of adult learning and social constructivism. We have experienced different meanings, values, opportunities, limits and perspectives concerning adult learning, as well as having studied adult learning, adult learners and academics' sense of identity (Jõgi et al. 2007, 2012; Karu 2008; Karu and Krabi 2012; Jõgi 2012, 2008); and we have asked many questions about learning and teaching concerning our own practice (Jõgi and Krabi 2011). We value teaching at university as a lifelong learning and development process.

Teaching at university

In higher education, the term “teaching” is often interpreted in the narrow sense of giving lectures to students. However, teaching and teaching practice at university is not simply about lecturing, mastering a set of skills or methods or techniques for giving lectures, or stimulating discussion or working with groups of students (Macfarlane 2004). The process of teaching at university as a process of creating conditions for learning is relational, as well as a “deeply personal and emotionally demanding activity [which] requires a monumental investment of self” (Seldin 1993). Teaching involves the creation and maintenance of caring, physical, cultural, intellectual, social and moral contexts which encourage student learning; teaching practice also involves an ethical dimension, recognising and dealing with the complex reality of adult student learning (Jõgi 2005). As Peter Knight (2002) argues, there is more to teaching than the mastery of content knowledge and teaching techniques.

³ Perceptions of students on changes in learning experience and teaching practice of university teachers (PRIMUS research grant 30.3-10/479; Jõgi et al. 2013b).

⁴ Phenomenography is a research methodology which empirically evaluates qualitative differences in people's experience of particular phenomena. The term is said to have been coined by Ference Marton in 1979 (for more information, see Marton 1981).

University teaching is based on the concept of adult learning and means supporting learning through complex social situations based on openness and trust – learning from experience and providing opportunities for relationships and interaction. A social constructivist approach to teaching challenges students through authentic assignments which require “active” participation in the learning process in order to select, interpret and apply knowledge to practical situations and to solve complex problems by means of real-life problem tasks, practical case studies or team-based assignments (Struyven et al. 2008).

However, teaching in a lifelong learning context is not only intellectual, it is also epistemological, ontological and relational so as to address the objectives and engage the energies of those being taught (Noddings 1995, p. 196). While being relational, the goals of teaching are primarily directed towards students’ personal, professional and social growth and learning (Fitzmaurice 2010) and are connected with curricular aims.

In a study analysing 440 Estonian university curricula between 2003 and 2007, Allan Kährik (2008, p. 90) points out that the curricular aims of Estonian universities reflect the relationship between the roles and relations of academics and students. The curricular aims were dominated by subject-related targets (in 404 curricula); students were mainly treated as objects to whom “knowledge was given” and seen as passive recipients. For example, one curriculum aimed to “create an opportunity to acquire basic knowledge about environmental problems and the possibilities of their regulation” (Environmental Management, Bachelor Studies, TU). If, however, the definition of the curricular aim is process-based (as was the case in 36 curricula), students are considered as active subjects. Example: “creating prerequisites for defining learning needs and continuing studies at Master’s level” (Environmental Management, Bachelor Studies, TU).⁵

Once we understand students as adult learners, who have diverse experiences, possibilities open up for broader learning, a richer learning environment and stimulating interactions at university. Therefore the framework of our study is built on the following theoretical principles (based on Mezirow 1996; Bloomer and Hodkinson 2000; Brookfield 2006; Jarvis 2011):

- Learning at university is part of social and continuous learning in life experience.
- Learning at university is a cognitive, personally transformative, social and interrelational process.
- Adults as learners have a variety of experiences, are usually aware of their responsibility and are orientated towards personal development.
- Learning builds on existing perceptions and frameworks of understanding and previous experience.
- Learning is enhanced in contexts where students as adult learners have supportive relationships, and a sense of ownership and control over the learning process.

⁵ Both these examples are from the curriculum of environmental management (Bachelor level) – discipline of science.

- Learning at university involves student–student and student–academic interactions, a process of communication, reflection and interrelational teaching–learning activities.
- Learning is the aim of teaching at university.

The main purpose of university teaching in a lifelong learning context is to create a social and interactive context which supports students' capacity for social, contextual, complex, multifaceted, self-regulative and reflexive learning in a "supercomplex" world (Barnett 2000); moreover it aims to build their capacity for knowledge construction, deep and critical thinking and reflection; promotes intrapersonal processes (self-awareness, autonomy, responsibility and self-regulation), and interpersonal processes (capacity for dialogue and social communication).

Methodology

The context of our study was Tallinn University (Tallinna Ülikool, TU), which has faced more significant institutional changes in the past ten years than any other university in Estonia. TU is the youngest public university in Estonia, it was formed through institutional structural reform by a merger of different research and educational institutions in 2005. TU is the third-largest university in Estonia, with 9,709 students and 561 researchers and academics in the study year 2011/2012 (TU 2012). Broken down by different disciplines (in all levels of study, including doctoral level), there were 2,977 students in social sciences (30%), 1,995 students in the field of education (20%) and 791 students in natural sciences (8%) (as of the 2011/2012 study).

Sample

We drew a non-probable, purposeful sample of 235 students from Tallinn University within three disciplines: 22.6% ($n = 53$) from educational sciences and teacher education, 23.4% ($n = 55$) from mathematics and natural sciences, and 54.1% ($n = 127$) from the field of social sciences. In terms of gender distribution, 80.9% were women ($n = 190$) and 19.1% men ($n = 45$). The age range was from 21 to 50 years ($M = 25.15$), with the majority of students being between 22 and 25 years old (81.1%) and only 18.9% older than 25. In terms of degree level, 63% of students were studying at Bachelor level ($n = 149$) and 37% ($n = 86$) at Master level.

Our sample of academic staff ($n = 9$) was also purposeful. Academics were from the same three different disciplines, and their teaching experience varied from 4 to 25 years.

Data collection

Data were collected by questionnaires from students and written reflection papers from academics. Data from students were collected by ÖPPE questionnaire (see Jõgi

et al. 2013).⁶ The aim of the survey was to collect data about students' learning and study experiences, including their perception of teaching and teaching practices at university (for more details see Jõgi et al. 2013).

Data from academics were collected through six open questions about teaching and learning at university. The aim of collecting data from academics was to describe and reflect teaching experiences at university in the three different disciplines.

In addition, we considered the Tallinn University development plan (2010–2014) (TU 2009) and curricular aims and learning outcomes from the three fields of study in order to provide context and analyse our collected data.

We analysed our empirical data qualitatively by using a phenomenographic approach and inductive analysis; our quantitative analysis of the statistical data from the questionnaire used statistical methods (SPSS).⁷

We then selected extracts from qualitative and quantitative/statistical data to illustrate how a particular category of meaning had been established (academics were labelled Academic 1–Academic 9, students were labelled Student 1–Student 235).

Academics' experiences of university teaching

Our qualitative analysis of the reflection papers revealed that academics' experiences of teaching fall into three sub-categories. Academic staff experienced university teaching as (1) a process; (2) an opportunity to support students' personality development, and (3) as being connected to the context of formal learning (Table 1).

The first sub-category describes academics' experience of university teaching as a social and cognitive process, a process of cooperative learning and a process supporting student learning to create conditions for critical understanding, argumentation of positions, discussion, constructing common knowledge and broadening experiences in order to grasp different possibilities, perspectives and meanings. Academic staff view teaching as creating conditions for learning to learn, developing methodological solutions and for connecting learning with practice.

[Academics] both teach and learn together with learners (Academic 3).

To some extent, tying [teaching] in with practice helps (Academic 2).

Year by year, I have increased the amount of personal feedback, but it is exhausting; however, I feel that it is one of the most effective ways of providing support (Academic 2).

⁶ The ÖPPE questionnaire was developed from *ePalo 2011 [student survey eFeedback 2011]* (YTY 2011) and the ETL project's *Experiences of Teaching and Learning Questionnaire* (ESRC 2002) and officially approved by the Department of Adult Education at Tallinn University. The ÖPPE questionnaire contains eight sections and consists of five blocks of general statements, two blocks of statements for evaluation, and eleven open-ended questions. The ÖPPE questionnaire can be used to collect data about various aspects of students' learning and study experiences: study process, students as learners, study load, generic skills, practice, and working during studies.

⁷ SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is a widely-used software programme.

Table 1 University teaching according to the experience of academic staff

Teaching is a process which is:

- planned together with students; a process of cooperative learning and cooperation;
- used to create conditions for critical understanding, discussion, constructing common knowledge;
- for broadening experience;
- for learning how to learn;
- for connecting learning with practice.

Teaching is an opportunity for supporting students' personality development.

Teaching is connected to the context of formal learning, which is based on the requirements and standards of learning.

University teaching is experienced as a formal learning process planned together with learners: by setting targets, defining learning outcomes, agreeing on responsibility and making other joint agreements, choosing a method, as well as assessing both the process and the result.

What is important [in teaching] is that there are targets set and outcomes defined for learning, that the learning process is planned in a way that is comprehensible for all parties, that methods are well considered, and that interim and end results of the process are assessed by all parties (Academic 1). I pointed out responsibility, which means that the teacher has to be responsible for the quality of his/her student's knowledge and skills, i.e. the grade received (Academic 2).

The second sub-category describes academics' experience of university teaching, which is also part of the process of a student's growth, as an opportunity to support the development of a personality – to ensure the development of an independent critical thinker and a responsible, creative lifelong learner with good communication skills and a willingness to cooperate. Teaching means ...

to introduce the possibilities of broadening knowledge and gaining experiences, the ways to reach them and the possibilities of understanding them. To encourage an open and yet critical mind, critical understanding of learning materials and argumentation of one's own positions (Academic 1).

to pass on some methods for learning things (Academic 2).

people who think independently, have good cooperation and communication skills and are, hopefully, creative and responsible, able to learn and take care of their continuous development (Academic 3).

The third sub-category describes academics' experience of university teaching as being connected to a context based on the requirements and standards of formal learning – taking account of the characteristics of the respective subject speciality, setting boundaries, achieving learning outcomes, taking responsibility for the quality of knowledge and skills, and giving feedback.

[Teaching means] creating conditions for successful achievement of learning outcomes (Academic 1).

Students' experiences of university teaching

Our qualitative analysis revealed that students experience university teaching through negation of what teaching is not, through expectations of what teaching should be, and through what teaching is for students. These three sub-categories describing students' experiences of teaching are presented in Table 2.

The first sub-category describes students' experience of university teaching through negation of what teaching *is not*: saying what is right, imposing viewpoints, a situation where academics are active and learners are passive.

Teaching at university should not be the so-called “project of the academics”, who give orders and “hang” [students] if needed. Also [academics are] not willing to compromise, and not taking into account students' proposals (Student 160).

Teaching is definitely something more than just reading the slides (Student 68).

Teaching is not a lecture where the lecturer speaks and a seminar where the lecturer asks (Student 8).

Teaching at university should not be a textbook recital or imposing one's viewpoints (Student 88).

The second sub-category describes students' experience of university teaching through expectations of what teaching *should be*. In their view, it should be cooperative, participative, interactive, discussion-based, and directed towards student reflection and development. Students expect to be regarded as adult learners and claim the right of having their proposals taken into account.

The university should provide an opportunity to understand and form their conceptions, become more aware and more professional in the field (Student 121).

Teaching should be a mutual cooperation, in which both parties know their responsibilities, tasks and goals (Student 134).

Teaching should be practical and provide the prerequisites for independent thinking and arriving at logical/analytical conclusions (Student 139).

The third sub-category describes students' experience of university teaching through what teaching *is*. For them, teaching is a creative and learning process of developing opportunities for orientation, cooperation, connections, clarification, illustrations and critical interactions. They perceive teaching as being inspiring, and as creating new values.

Table 2 University teaching as it is experienced by students

Teaching <i>is not</i> :	saying what is right; imposing viewpoints; active academics and passive learners
Teaching <i>should be</i> :	cooperative; interactive; directed towards student reflection and development
Teaching <i>is</i> :	creative; a learning process of developing opportunities for orientation; cooperation; connections and critical interactions; teaching is inspiring and creates new values

University teaching is a process where students need to acquire knowledge of something to accomplish in life (Student 124).

For me, the most important [feature of teaching] has been that I have been taught to think more broadly, to consider various parties, to be tolerant, open and well-educated (Student 157).

Teaching at university is an activity through which world views are formed, all of which are very closely related, but one must also be critical towards them all (Student 230).

Teaching is creating new values and contributing to the development of society (Student 73).

Understanding teaching through negation and expectations may indicate a need in students to find a more diverse and complex meaning for learning and teaching at university.

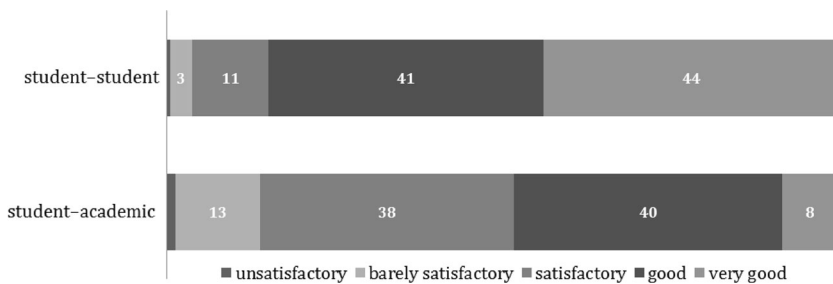


Fig. 1 Evaluative experiences of communication opportunities in a typical study situation (“yes” %)

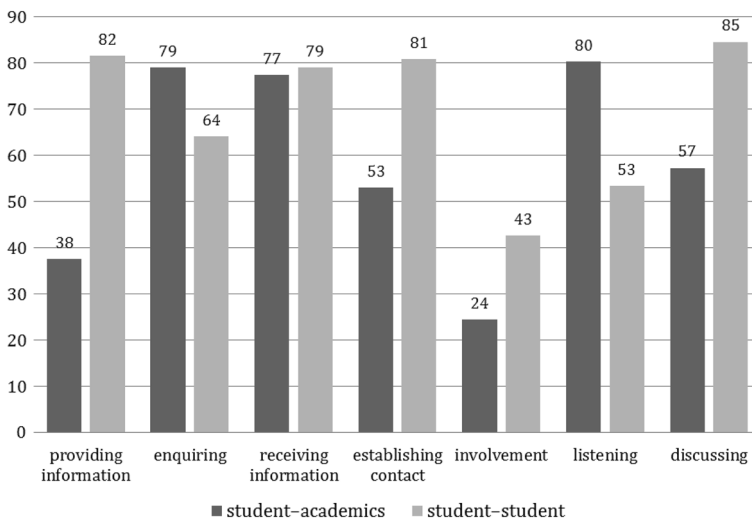


Fig. 2 Communication in a typical study situation (“yes” %)

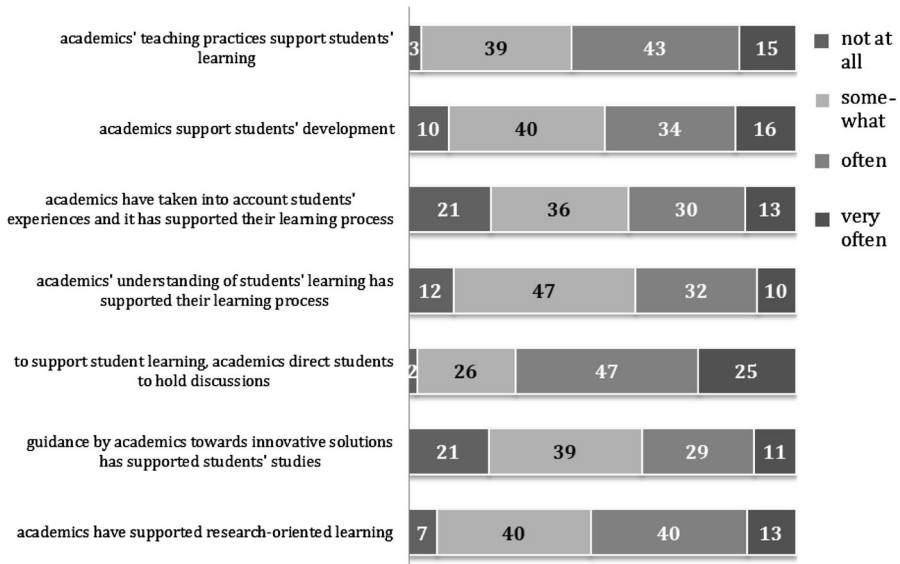


Fig. 3 Evaluative experiences of teaching practices (%)

Student experiences of teaching practices at university

Statistical analysis of our categorised frequency data (see Fig. 1) shows that in terms of interaction in a typical study situation, students are more satisfied with communication between students than with academics.

Indeed, there are differences in how communication and relationships are experienced in a typical study situation (Fig. 2). With academics, students experience listening, enquiring and receiving information as the prevailing activities. With fellow students, students experience discussion, information provision and the establishment of contact.

Students experience student–academic communication as being somewhat one-sided; they perceive academic staff as providing information with a lack of interactive communication. By contrast, student–student communication is experienced as being interactive.

Analysis shows that students like to be actively involved in the study processes (96% agree or strongly agree), but only 25% of students ($n = 235$) have experienced active involvement with academics. Discussions with other students during the study process (87% agree or strongly agree) help them to improve their comprehension; students support and help each other (90% agree or strongly agree). Student involvement, active participation and interactive discussion in the study process are prerequisites for higher level learning.

According to the results of our analysis (Fig. 3), teaching practices which support student learning and development processes – understanding students' learning, taking into account students' experiences, interaction–discussion, and research-

oriented learning – were evaluated as either significantly small or as not being present at all in student experiences.

Qualitative analysis results show that the variation in students' experiences of teaching practices is limited and mostly directed at the impartation and acquisition of knowledge. Results of our statistical analysis show that students experience a lack of academics' involvement in the study process in terms of supporting students' learning and development, a lack of acceptance of previous experiences, and a lack of interaction between academics and students in teaching practices.

Academic staff experience university teaching as a process, an opportunity to support students' personal development, and as being connected to the context of formal learning. Thus, a discrepancy between students' and academics' experiences and tensions in teaching practices becomes apparent.

Conclusion

How teaching is experienced depends on how it is put into practice at university. Our findings indicate four paradoxes and tensions in university teaching which have not been clearly identified and discussed in previous research on university teaching in a lifelong learning context.

The first paradox we found is that academic staff experienced teaching as a cooperative process which is defined together with learners, while students experienced teaching primarily as imparting and receiving knowledge, which results in passive learning/acquisition. Being a passive acquirer is quite a confusing role for adult learners; students expect to be regarded as adult learners and expect involvement with academics.

The second paradox is that academic staff experienced teaching as an opportunity for critical interaction and thinking, while students saw that their experiences, needs and proposals were not taken into account. Moreover, they felt that this was combined with a lack of social dimension and support for their personal growth and learning. According to the students' experiences, university teaching practices do not fully support students as adult learners. The key argument behind this statement is that teaching concentrates too much on what should be learned (information and knowledge), neglecting students as persons and adult learners.

The third paradox is that our findings reflect that while students' experience of lifelong, life-wide and life-deep learning⁸ at university is narrow, from a lifelong learning perspective, learning at university is a major transitional experience for students as adult learners, which offers opportunities for learning in the broadest sense.

The fourth paradox our findings revealed is that there are tensions between, on the one hand, understanding the idea of the university as creating opportunities to adapt, create and carry on continuous learning, while on the other hand both

⁸ Briefly, the concept of lifelong learning refers to learning across a timespan (cradle to grave), life-wide learning refers to learning spaces at a particular moment in time (simultaneous and parallel learning) and life-deep learning extends the concept beyond skills acquisition to include beliefs, values and personal growth.

students' and academics' experiences of teaching are focused on learning outcomes. The transition from limited teaching practices to practices supporting adult learning at university necessitates changes in the perception of the context of lifelong learning.

Our findings contribute to understanding the experiences of teaching and teaching practices at universities in a lifelong learning context and consequently open up possibilities for reconsideration and comparison. The limitations of this study lie in the small scope of data collected in one university among three study disciplines. We are aware that faculties and departments within universities have different teaching and learning cultures, which impact on both academics' and students' experiences and the relationships between them. Based on our findings, we raise critical questions about understanding learning as a social and continuous process for students, and as a teaching aim for academics, and teaching and learning as a personal, interrelational and transformational process at university.

Research results are important in the context of lifelong learning and changes in higher education with regard to the development of teaching practices and supporting adult learning at universities. Our findings enable academics and academic leaders to (re)conceptualise teaching and teaching practices at university, and to pose questions about them. Our research results provide some suggestions for academics, academic developers and academic leaders. For academics and academic developers, our recommendation is to reflect and discuss their own teaching practices, and to create reflection models enabling them to consider questions such as: what kind of learning is supported by (your) teaching practices, how are students taught as adult learners at (your) university, and what kind of perceptions are there about teaching practices and adult learning support at your university in a lifelong learning context? Teaching practices at university should enable students to experience university learning diversely, empower them to be adult learners – decision makers, responsible for their development, communicators and lifelong learners.

For academic leaders, our recommendation is to find ways and management models for future development concerning teaching practices in a range of study disciplines at your university.

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