

# Demonstrating and Evaluating Teaching Proficiency

*Advice for applicants, expert advisers, and teaching staff  
appointments boards at SLU*

Jan Stockfors

Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet

Rapportserie från  
Universitetspedagogiskt centrum

Pedagogisk rapport nr 2, november 2011

Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet  
*Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences*

Universitetspedagogiskt centrum  
*Centre for Educational Development*  
<http://upc.slu.se>

Pedagogisk rapport nr 2, november 2011  
*Pedagogical Report no. 2 November 2011*  
ISBN 978-91-576-9056-2

Författare (*Author*): Jan Stockfors  
Omslag (*Cover*): Peter Lindberg  
Tryck (*Print*): SLU Repro Ultuna

# Foreword

---

In 2008 SLU's Board of first and second cycle Education (GUR) (Rådet för utbildning på grund- och avancerad nivå), commissioned the University Centre for Educational Development (UPC) (Universitetspedagogiskt centrum) to, in collaboration with the different faculties of the university, clarify how evaluation of teaching skills is performed in the recruitment process at SLU, and to formulate new criteria for such skills for SLU's appointment regulations. The task also included providing clarified instructions for the applicants, and composing supportive material for those who need to demonstrate or assess teaching skills. A suggestion for new criteria was worked out together with GUR and the teaching staff appointments boards at SLU's four faculties, and presented in April 2010. In December 2010 it was decided by SLU's university board to introduce the new criteria for teaching skills into the appointment regulations in accordance with these suggestions.

The aim of this report is to briefly offer advice and support to those who need to demonstrate their teaching skills or are in some way involved in the process of evaluating that proficiency. The report is also intended to clarify and offer a short background to the criteria for teaching skills which, since January 2011, have been written into the appointment regulations for SLU.

Valuable comments on the content in this report have been offered by Cecilia Almlöv, Peter Aspengren and Roger Pettersson (all at the Centre for Educational Development, UPC), Magdalena Fagerberg (secretary of the teaching staff appointments board of the NL-faculty), Ingrid Hemström (secretary of the teaching staff appointments board of the VH-faculty) and Thomas Kätterer (Professor at the Department of Soil and Environment).

Uppsala, January 2011

Jan stockfors



# Contents

Foreword	1
Introduction	5
1. Teaching proficiency – a short background	7
2. Documenting teaching skills – the teaching portfolio	15
3. Requesting or writing a testimonial of teaching skills	21
4. Evaluating teaching proficiency	25
References	37



# Introduction

---

What does teaching proficiency actually mean? How should we define it and what does it comprise? How can we assess it in a meaningful way? Many questions arise when we discuss teaching skills within academia. In contrast to scientific proficiency, teaching proficiency has long lacked a tradition in its documentation or assessment. There are many teachers within SLU and other universities who feel rather uncertain when required to demonstrate their teaching skills or assess that of others. This report aims to provide support for those who in some way must demonstrate their own teaching skills or those who must assess the teaching proficiency of others. The first chapter, 'Teaching proficiency – a short background', contains a short description of the present situation in Sweden with regard to evaluating this proficiency and provides a brief historical overview. Chapter 2, 'Documenting teaching skills – the teaching portfolio', is aimed primarily at those who are in the process of seeking an academic position and it examines some basic ideas concerning teaching portfolios and the documentation of teaching skills. Chapter 3, 'Requesting or writing a testimonial of teaching skills', is aimed at applicants and certificate compilers as well as those assessing the certified skills, and deals with central questions with regard to the formulation and evaluation of certificates. Certificates of various sorts comprise an important demonstration of merit for an applicant, but it is not always obvious how to express oneself so that it serves as a clear indicator of teaching skills. Chapter 4, 'Evaluating teaching proficiency', is primarily aimed at assessors, to serve as an aid when interpreting and working with the criteria for teaching skills as formulated in the appointment procedures at SLU.





# 1. Teaching proficiency – a short background

---

Proficiency in academic instruction has been counted as one of the professional skills of university faculty as long as we have had universities. At the end of the 19th century it was possible to discuss such proficiency in terms of the ability to ‘perform instruction and carry out examination’, but there were no stated criteria for the assessment of this ability, and proficiency in instruction was treated as a part of scientific proficiency. Since the beginning of the 20th century however it has been a requirement, in the appointment of academic posts, that the advising expert should assess the instructional skills of the applicant. As a result of the rising flood of students to universities during the 20th century, the teaching expertise of university staff has come more and more into focus; as also the demands for teaching proficiency for university teaching staff.

In the latter part of the 20th century the perception of the teacher’s role changed from a transfer of knowledge or facts, to a need for the teacher to primarily create the prerequisites for effective student learning. Many now talk of a paradigm shift within the world of education (cf. e.g. Barr and Tagg, 1995) where the role of the educational institution has moved from providing instruction to producing learning. Measuring a teacher’s skill by an ability to ‘transmit instruction’ or to merely lecture, has been successively replaced by the broader demands of ‘teaching proficiency’.

From the basis of university teaching research, and in line with current educational policies, the 1989 Swedish Higher Education Commission made an attempt to limit and clarify the term ‘teaching proficiency’ and defined it as ‘proficiency in planning, performing and evaluating teaching’. The Commission also indicated other factors that should be included in its assessment, including whether the teacher could ‘motivate his teaching methods and reflect on them in the light of relevant educational theory and systemized experience’. With the new Higher Education Act which came into force in 1993, teaching skills became a requirement for appointment to the posts of professor or lecturer, and in the present ordinance text from 1998 it is stated that ‘as much care

shall be given to assessing teaching proficiency as to assessing scientific proficiency' (SFS 1998:1003, SFS 1993:100).

At the same time, a new requirement for appointing lecturers and instructors was introduced, stating that they must have 'completed a higher education teacher- training program or in some other way have obtained equivalent knowledge'.

Today most Swedish universities judge teaching skills on the basis of distinctive criteria which are specified in the university appointment regulations or in a document attached to these regulations. The underlying concept behind the Higher Education Commission in 1989 permeates the criteria adopted by many universities and university colleges. The fundamental delimitations which were made in that report also coincide well with the criteria for teaching skills at those universities which have further developed its formulation. Today there is a growing agreement between departments of educational development at Swedish universities, concerning what knowledge, skills and attitudes should be included in an assessment of teaching proficiency. At the same time there are different ways of describing this proficiency and formulating the criteria. The definition and description of teaching skills which Swedish educational institutions apply are also well in line with international research on teaching and learning in higher education.

1. Encourages contacts between students and faculty
2. Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students
3. Uses active learning techniques
4. Gives prompt feedback
5. Emphasizes time on task
6. Communicates high expectations
7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning

Table 1. Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education (Chickering och Gamson, 1987).

Several researchers have attempted to summarize the basics of good teaching practice. A widely distributed international description is the ‘seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education’, made by Chickering and Gamson (1987) (table 1).

1. Good teachers are also good learners; for example, they learn through their own reading, by participating in a variety of professional development activities, by listening to their students, by sharing ideas with their colleagues, and by reflecting on classroom interactions and students’ achievements. Good teaching is therefore dynamic, reflective and constantly evolving
2. Good teachers display enthusiasm for their subject, and a desire to share it with their students
3. Good teachers recognise the importance of context, and adapt their teaching accordingly; they know how to modify their teaching strategies according to the particular students, subject matter, and learning environment
4. Good teachers encourage deep learning approaches, rather than surface approaches’ and are concerned with developing their students’ critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and problem-approach behaviors
5. Good teachers demonstrate an ability to transform and extend knowledge’ rather than merely transmitting it; they draw on their knowledge of their subject, their knowledge of their learners, and their general pedagogical knowledge to transform the concepts of the discipline into terms that are understandable to their students
6. Good teachers set clear goals, use valid and appropriate assessment methods, and provide high quality feedback to their students
7. Good teachers show respect for their students; they are interested in both their professional and their personal growth, encourage their independence, and sustain high expectations of them

Table 2. Paul Ramsden et al. (1995) conducted a thorough survey of the current research into what constituted good teaching. The result is summarized in seven important factors for efficient teaching.

Another thorough survey of research on teaching in higher education was carried out by Paul Ramsden et al. (1995) who also produced seven basic principles (table 2) (Ramsden has later reduced these to six principles; cf. Ramsden, 2003).

Ernest Boyer (1990) introduced a completely different basis for the discussion on teaching skills and pedagogical development which became increasingly significant over time. Boyer started from the role of teaching within academia, and came to the conclusion that education should be approached in the same way that research was, and created the concept of 'scholarship of teaching'. Like research, good teaching acquires new knowledge and the teacher must have a scholarly approach to teaching and learning. Continuing Boyer's line of thought Glassick et al. (1997) worked out an initial method to evaluate a scholarly approach in teaching as well as research. The perspective of teaching skills has been broadened with time from instructional competence – that which the teacher does in the classroom – to include other factors which affect student learning; the teacher's ability to support students' learning, and the contribution of the former to pedagogical development on the whole.

Keith Trigwell (2001) presented a model of the teaching and learning situation using four aspects which may be used to judge teaching proficiency. Trigwell based his work on research into what comprises good teaching (Ramsden 1995), as well as concepts of 'scholarship' (Boyer 1990, Glassick et al. 1997) and work on teaching portfolios by Graham Gibbs (1992) and Peter Seldin (cf. e.g. Seldin 1997). Trigwell puts student learning in the centre and the model includes dimensions that, on different levels, are important for student learning. Trigwell's model makes a four-fold division of the qualities that constitutes good teaching and structures these four aspects as layers according to how direct each one is experienced by the students (fig. 1). All four are important for good teaching and all dimensions must be included when evaluating teaching skills.

The dimension closest to the student is what the teacher does in the classroom and the teaching strategies she uses. On the next level lies the teacher's planning: what she considers important or difficult for

the student to learn, how she chooses to assess the students learning outcomes and how she evaluates the student's and her own work. The third level comprises the teacher's own knowledge, conceptions and attitudes. Beyond these three dimensions of teaching skills stands the context and framework within which the teaching is carried out. Teaching skills requires that the teacher is conscious of and works actively at all these levels, and that the teachers work in the different areas clearly relate to one another and comprise a whole.

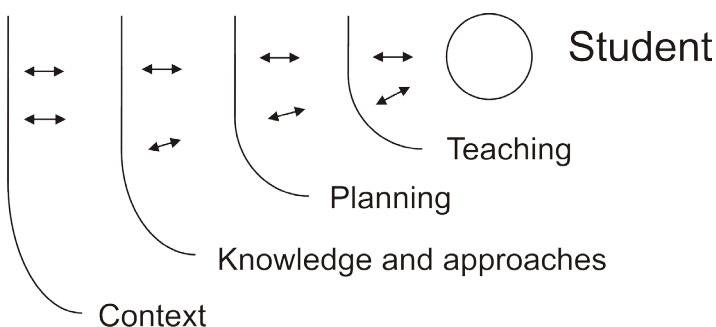


Figure 1. Five qualitative dimensions of teaching which influence student learning (after Trigwell, 2001).

How can we distinguish between different levels of teaching skills? The development of relatively new teachers may be described by three views on what is most important for learning. Teachers tend to hold these views at different stages in their early teaching career. The teachers view on what is most important normally moves progressively from (1) who the student is, to (2) the teacher's activities, and finally to (3) what the student does (fig. 2) (cf. e.g. Biggs and Tang 2007, p. 16 ff. or Pettersen 2010 p. 32).

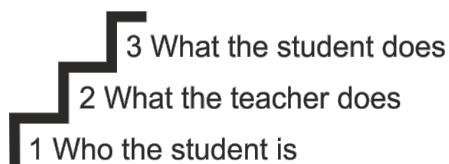


Figure 2. Three theories on what is most important for students' learning (after Biggs and Tang 2007)

The stages in development described by Biggs and others, are based on three theories of what is most important for students' education : (1) learning is primarily determined by the students' personal characteristics: some are gifted and some are not; (2) learning is primarily determined by what the teacher does: how she teaches; (3) learning is a result of the learning activities the students engage in, and is determined by the students' previous experiences and the learning environment they find themselves in. Theories 1 and 2 are more often held by relatively new teachers, while those with longer experience concur in the third more complex theory.

For proficient teachers there is also a progression. One model for the proficient teacher's development has been provided by Carolin Kreber (2002). Kreber describes three levels of teacher proficiency (fig. 3), in which she names the first two as 'excellent' and 'expert', respectively, and the third, where teaching has become a scholarly activity, she terms 'scholarship of teaching and learning'.

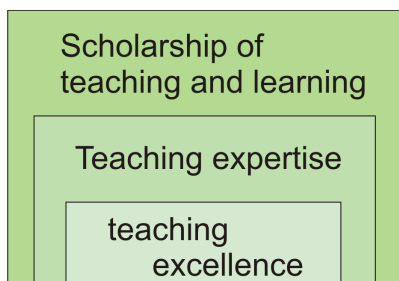


Figure 3. A view of the progression of teaching skills in three levels (after Kreber 2002).

The excellent teacher is proficient in the classroom and her teaching is experienced as effective by colleagues and students. The expert teacher is an excellent teacher who in addition to proficiency in the classroom also has theoretical knowledge about teaching and learning. The expert teacher can combine her knowledge of the subject being taught with both theoretical and practical knowledge of teaching. In this way the expert teacher continuously develops improved methods of supporting student learning while she at the same time is able to adapt her teaching to changes in circumstances. Where the excellent teacher must test her way by using experience alone, the expert teacher can choose to

change direction on the basis of a combination of pedagogical research, knowledge of her subject and teaching experience. Kreber's third stage, called 'scholarship of teaching and learning', signifies that the teacher is an excellent expert teacher who in addition shares her knowledge and promotes the general development of teaching in her subject. A teacher on the third level exposes her pedagogical practice for collegiate review by publishing articles on teaching and learning in peer-reviewed journals, gives presentations at conferences on teaching and learning and contributes in various ways to the debate on teaching and learning, both at her own workplace and beyond.

*Further information (in Swedish) on the history of teaching skills and pedagogical qualifications in Sweden can be found in 'Pedagogisk skicklighet och pedagogiska meriter - historik och praktik' by Roivo-Johansson and Tingbjörn (2001).*

*A good overview (in Swedish) of research on teaching skills can be found in 'Att bedöma pedagogisk skicklighet – går det?' by Birgitta Giertz (2003).*





## 2. Documenting teaching skills – the teaching portfolio

---

Teaching proficiency concerns the quality of a teacher's educational work. A common problem when making a university teaching appointment, is a lack of evidence concerning the quality of the applicants teaching activities. One way for teachers to document their teaching skills and demonstrate the quality of their work is to use a teaching portfolio. The teaching portfolio is equivalent to the portfolio that architects or photographers, for instance, assemble. The portfolio is a broad collection of material which illustrates the owner's proficiency in her field. A portfolio normally does not contain all professional creations, but consists of a carefully chosen selection of material which collectively offers as complete a picture as possible of her expertise. In a similar manner, a teacher can collect and present her teaching qualifications in a teaching portfolio.

The concept and method for creating a teaching portfolio was developed in Canada, the USA and Great Britain, and the original aim was to find a format for a good basis on which to assess a teacher's teaching skills, for example, in connection with a new appointment, tenure decisions or rise in salary.

When considering teaching qualification it is usual to distinguish between two types of portfolio: the personal teaching portfolio which is a rather extensive documentation of a teacher's work together with reflections over her teaching practice; and a specific portfolio which is assembled for a special purpose, such as applying for a new position. The personal portfolio is both a tool for developing one's own teaching practice and view of learning, and a source from which to take material for creating a specific portfolio. A portfolio that is assembled for a specific purpose, such as a job application, needs to be adapted to the relevant job specifications, and to the stated criteria that it will be judged by.

A teaching portfolio is based mainly on a teacher's reflections of her

own teaching activities – termed self-reflection or self-assessment. The portfolio also contains different types of documentation from the teacher's practical work and other material that can illustrate her personal competence and support the arguments in the self-reflection statement. Examples of such material and documents are course evaluations, certificates and testimonials of teaching activity and proficiency, auscultation reports, course syllabi, assessment strategies, documented learning activities and course material produced (e.g. textbooks, videos or interactive exercises).

When composing this record, a number of positive effects of creating a teaching portfolio soon become apparent. Evaluating one's own pedagogical work and collecting material which demonstrates teaching skills leads a teacher to reflect over her pedagogical practice, and what teaching proficiency means. The work of creating a teaching portfolio thus becomes a tool for the development of one's own teaching skills and proficiency. When a teacher reflects over her own pedagogical experience she discovers her strengths and weaknesses, notices in which areas she must develop as a teacher, and observes which aspects of her teaching are of high quality and which need to be changed.

## **What serves as evidence of teaching proficiency?**

The starting point in evaluating proficiency is the teacher's self-reflection. A skilled teacher not only knows what she teaches and how she works, she is also conscious of why she does it in the way she does, and has analysed and reflected over the results of her pedagogical work. In conclusion it is these four questions – what I teach, how I teach, why I teach the way I do, and what results do I achieve – that are central to a pedagogical self-reflection.

The concept of a 'teaching philosophy' almost always turns up in connection with teaching portfolios and applications for academic positions. In Sweden the more traditional term 'pedagogisk grundsyn' (pedagogical standpoint) is used while most other countries speak of a 'teaching philosophy'. We all have a basic personal standpoint on what

knowledge is, what limits exist for what is possible to know, how learning happens, what is important to know within our subject, and how we should teach. Basically these are all philosophical questions and our personal views on these topics can be called our teaching philosophy. This and the teacher's view of learning is important as it is the basis for many of the decisions teachers must make, but also because it influences the students' approach to learning and their strategy of study (cf. e.g., Trigwell et al. 1999). But it is not the actual expression in words of the teaching philosophy which is of greatest importance for judging teaching proficiency – a well-structured philosophy can be formulated citing the literature. What is of greatest importance is how it is expressed in one's teaching. The teaching philosophy the students see in plain action is what influences their learning strategies and how they come to grips with the subject.

When evaluating a teacher's portfolio the self-reflecting element is intended to show that the teacher has a scholarly approach to teaching and learning. This means that the choices a teacher makes with regard to method, structure and content of a course are based on that which research on teaching and learning and one's own and others' experience has shown to be effective for promoting student learning. One's own practice must be justified from educational theory or from well-considered experience, and in the self-reflection it must be clearly demonstrated that one's teaching philosophy pervades one's practice.

Pedagogical self-reflection should penetrate all aspects of the teacher's role (cf e.g. fig. 1 or SLU's criteria for teaching skills, p.26). Self-reflection should also trace the development of one's own role as a teacher over time. Therefore merit associated with that growth should also be included. An example might be the effect in one's own teaching of participation in a course in teaching methods. Mere participation in a higher education course on teaching praxis does not demonstrate teaching skills. A description of the significance of the course for the teacher's own development is necessary, to show how one has expanded one's vision as a teacher, and how that in turn influenced student learning. It is, in other words, the reflection linking a course to one's own teaching practice that demonstrates teaching skills, and not the course

certificate in itself.

The entries in an application concerning pedagogical self-reflection must be certified as far as possible by relevant documents, and preferably by testimonials from persons who are familiar with one's teaching. Therefore, a portfolio for a job application must contain items such as certificates of courses taken in teaching methodology, one's student course evaluations, and testimonials from course leaders, directors of study or heads of departments.

*If you want to read more about teaching portfolios, see e.g. 'The Teaching Portfolio' by Peter Seldin (1997), 'Pedagogisk meritportfölj - och plötsligt var jag meriterad!' by Karin Apelgren and Birgitta Giertz (2001) or 'Att bedöma pedagogisk skicklighet' by Birgitta Giertz (2003) (the latter two are in Swedish).*

## **Advice to those creating a personal portfolio**

- Reflect and write down a self-evaluation of all the qualifications you place in the portfolio. Motivate your strategies and the choices you have made.
- Record your qualifications as soon after the event as possible – it is easy to forget valuable details.
- Request testimonials from those persons who know your work when appropriate. Certificates written later on are rarely as good and have lower merit value.
- Update your portfolio regularly. Clear out qualifications that no longer seem relevant. Reflect on what you lack in your portfolio and work at getting those qualifications. Revise your philosophy-of-teaching statement and update any developments in your views. Reflect on how your teaching practice is related to your teaching philosophy.
- Ensure that you document your qualifications continuously. Chronological gaps can make an evaluator wonder what you did during that period.
- Include negative experiences and how they have affected your teaching praxis. You can later decide if they are of use in a portfolio for possible future appointments.
- Save qualifications from your whole period as a teacher, and when you throw out old files, ensure that you keep relevant material which covers your life in that career, and which can form a basis for overviewing and reporting on your own development.
- Make use of your colleagues. Discuss each other's' portfolios and gain support and inspiration from each other.

## **Advice for creating a portfolio for a job-application or promotion**

- Read the position specifications carefully. What teacher profile is being sought? Ensure that you include all your qualifications that suit the advertised profile.
- Check that your self-reflection as far as possible includes the whole body of knowledge that is described in the criteria by which your teaching skills will be assessed.
- Support all possible areas of your self-reflection with documents that verify your statements (certificates, testimonials, evaluations, reports, teaching material, etc.)
- Accept help from others. There are most likely colleagues or others of your acquaintance who can offer valuable comments on what you write.
- Formulate your ideas clearly. Adapt your writing to your target group which can be an appointments board, expert advisors, or pedagogical experts.

## **Advice to evaluators**

- Is there sufficient material to make assessment possible? Should the applicant be given the opportunity of sending additional information?
- Does the applicant live up to the basic requirements for the appointment? Is she qualified for the post?
- Does the applicant support what is written in the self-reflection in the portfolio by documentation (e.g. course evaluations, certificates, testimonials and other documents)?

### 3. Requesting or writing a testimonial of teaching skills

---

A testimonial of proficiency in different situations is important to confirm key aspects of the self-reflection made by a teacher. Testimonials of a quantitative nature are uncomplicated – they merely require confirmation that a person has completed a certain activity. But when proficiency is to be certified it is not so obvious how the testimony should be written. It is not sufficient to merely write that someone is a proficient teacher – such a statement tells very little to an expert advisor for a recruitment to a university post. Proficient in relation to what? What criteria for teaching skills is the statement based upon? A brief attestation that someone has ‘made great contributions’, ‘is very skilled’, ‘leading’ or ‘highly respected’, are weak indicators of proficiency.

For a testimonial to be useful when evaluating teaching skills it needs to describe what the subject has done, how the referee has assessed the quality of the subject’s work, and on what grounds the referee has made his statement. If it is the teaching of a course which is being attested, then it must be clear whether the testimonial is based on the participation of the referee in that course, or on what colleagues and students have expressed, or on something else. It must also be clear what was praiseworthy and what was less so in the performance of the subject, and why the referee considers this to be the case. The testimonial must clearly state what qualities form the basis of the assessment.

Example: a director of studies testifies to a teacher’s contribution to development

‘According to the course leader, Kalle Andersson has developed the section of the course on carbon turnover from a series of lectures to a case study. This section of the course that previously was highly criticised by students, now gets the highest score in course evaluations. Teachers of subsequent parts of the course have also clearly noted that the students show far more useful knowledge after this change in the course.

Example: A former doctoral student testifies to his supervisor's pedagogical contributions.

'Kalle Andersson was a great support while working on my dissertation. Kalle was always available to answer my questions and especially shared his great network within this research field.'

or

'Lisa Andersson was a great support throughout the whole period of my post-graduate studies. She helped me to learn how to work through the difficulties that arose, and in our discussions could turn impossible hindrances into interesting challenges, which I could then attack with a certain amount of enthusiasm.'

### **Advice to those who request a testimonial**

- Inform your referees of the need to justify their arguments and clearly state all underlying evidence used in the assessment.
- Inform your referees of what you consider well done and wish to be included in the testimonial. The referee might not be able to testify everything you wish, but you avoid the risk of your referees forgetting something of value which they could have attested.

### **Advice to those writing a testimonial**

- Verify all your statements and clarify the basis on which you have made them.
- Testify only to what you can stand by.
- Gather more information if you need a clearer picture of what the testimonial concerns.



### **Advice to evaluators**

- What does the testimonial really say?
- Are the statements in the testimonial well-justified?
- Has the referee had sufficient grounds on which to build the testimonial?



## 4. Evaluating teaching proficiency

---

For teaching skills to be evaluated, a teacher needs to present her teaching qualifications. It is important from the start to distinguish between teaching qualifications and teaching proficiency. Teaching qualification describes what the teacher has done, while teaching proficiency relates to the quality of teaching i.e. how the teaching has been done and why. In other words what is being judged is the effectiveness of the teacher. It is thus impossible to argue that a teacher is not suitably proficient as a teacher because she has 'taught too little at undergraduate level', or that someone is a proficient supervisor because of having supervised a large number of doctoral students. Postgraduates can go all the way to a degree regardless of good or bad supervision. It is the quality of the supervision not the production of doctors that is being judged.

The starting point for evaluating teaching skills is therefore the teacher's own self-reflection describing how she approaches the task of supporting students' learning, motivating her practice through reference to reflected experience or research on teaching and learning. Teaching proficiency concerns the standard of the work performed, and so the self-reflection which will be evaluated must be based on real examples from the teacher's own practice. Whatever the teacher brings up in her self-reflection should preferably be verified by other documents, such as course evaluations, assessment of students, or course material the teacher him/herself produced.

So what do we mean by teaching proficiency? What should an evaluator be able to read from a teacher's self-reflection? To provide a common framework for different evaluators making assessments of different applicants, it is necessary to define the range of skills and competencies that are included in the assessment, i.e. specified assessment criteria are required.

These criteria must also be interpreted in a similar manner by different evaluators. In Sweden a tradition is being established whereby different

experienced evaluators produce similar judgements from a well-written self-reflection and portfolio. In 2004 the board for higher education tested the judgements of several assessors on the same set of portfolios and the results showed very little differences between assessors (cf. Giertz, 2005).

## **Demonstrating and evaluating teaching skills using SLU's criteria**

In the appointment procedures for SLU 'teaching skills' is defined by ten criteria, grouped into three thematic areas. When evaluating teaching skills in connection with an appointment or a promotion, each applicant must initially be assessed against all of these criteria. From these assessments a summative judgement of the applicants teaching skills can be made and a ranking of applicants established.

The criteria and thematic areas which define teaching skills in 'Appointment Procedures for SLU' are:

### **1 A conscious focus on student learning**

- 1a. Creates good conditions for learning
- 1b. Develops good teacher – student relations
- 1c. Has broad knowledge of learning processes, learning activities and examination

### **2 A scholarly and reflective approach**

- 2a. Teaching practice integrated with teaching philosophy
- 2b. Clear development of the pedagogical practice over time
- 2c. Examines the students' learning in own practice
- 2d. Relates own practice to reflected experience and scholarly literature on teaching and learning

### **3 Puts own teaching practice into a wider context**

- 3a. Is aware of own teaching and courses' role within a programme, for the university, for teaching within the subject field, and for society

- and professional life.
- 3b. Promotes pedagogical development and pedagogical dialogue within the department, educational programme, university or other relevant contexts.
  - 3c. Has broad and up-to-date knowledge in the field being taught

## **A conscious focus on student learning,**

### **Criteria group 1**

A proficient teacher places the students' learning in the centre of her practice. A proficient teacher has the students' active knowledge construction in focus when planning and conducting a course. The teacher's role is to create the best possible conditions for student learning and to actively support and facilitate this learning (cf. e.g. Biggs and Tang 2007). This means not just planning and carrying through teaching and examination in a correct and effective manner, but also creating a good teaching environment and to take the students' overall study situation into account. The proficient teacher takes advantage of students' previous knowledge and experiences and sees students as responsible for their own learning process. A teacher's choice of strategies and her approach to teaching and learning has an influence on students' approaches to their studies and their choices of learning strategies (cf. e.g. Trigwell et al. 1999). For this reason a teacher's attitude towards knowledge, learning and the students is central to pave the ground for effective learning.

#### **1a. Creates good conditions for learning**

A teacher offers good learning opportunities to her students by contributing to a good teaching environment, by expressing interest and engagement in the subject being taught, by activating the students and giving them opportunities to interact and support one another's learning. She also provides effective examination that assesses how well expected learning outcomes are met, and helps students to undertake activities which are relevant for meeting the learning outcomes of the course in question.

**1b. Develops good teacher – student relations**

A proficient teacher shows consideration and respect for her students and their learning, by establishing a well-functioning dialogue with the students, revealing high expectations for their achievements, and encouraging collaboration and interaction between them.

**1c. Has broad knowledge of learning processes, learning activities and examination**

An important basis for ensuring effective learning is the teacher's understanding of the learning processes. Assessment must be planned so that it measures how well learning outcomes are met, while also serving as a learning opportunity for the students. Learning activities within a course must in their turn prepare the students for assessment and must be planned so that the students spend their time on tasks that are relevant for meeting the aims of the course. To enable this, and to have the ability to adapt teaching and assessment to changing conditions, the teacher must be familiar with alternative strategies for assessment, as well as for building learning activities that support student learning.

**Advice to those who wish to demonstrate teaching skills**

In your self-assessment (self-reflection) describe your strategies for giving the students best possible prerequisites for acquiring the knowledge expected. Present practical examples of how you do this in your work, and seek support from documents such as evaluation by students (course evaluations, minute paper, etc.), auscultation reports, or testimonials from persons with knowledge of how you work.

## **Advice to evaluators of teaching skills**

- Is the applicant's account of her own teaching based on actual examples?
- Does the applicant use methods that are relevant to the aims of her teaching?
- Does the applicant motivate her way of teaching and choice of methodology from the impact on student learning?
- Does the applicants' description of her teaching methods and their relation to student learning, coincide with the description provided by colleagues, heads of staff or students?

## **A scholarly and reflective approach, Criteria group 2**

Having a scholarly approach to teaching and learning means using the same attitude and way of thinking and analysing problems as in research. The proficient teacher is interested in how her own teaching works and is fuelled by curiosity about how her students learn. Examining students' learning within one's own teaching practice is an important part of a teachers work, and she constantly reassess and question her teaching methods and assessment strategies. The teacher is constantly developing in her role as a teacher and ways of teaching. The choice of teaching and assessment methods is based on knowledge from research into teaching and learning in combination with self- reflection and experience. The proficient teacher has a clear and well-structured view of knowledge, teaching and learning, she has formulated a personal teaching philosophy, and her practical teaching is well-founded in that philosophy.

### **2a. Teaching practice integrated with teaching philosophy**

All teachers have a basic standpoint or philosophy about what knowledge is, how learning happens and what distinguishes good teaching. To be credible work effectively and give the students the support they need, the teacher's own practice must coincide with

her basic values and views concerning knowledge and learning. Teaching practice and philosophy must go hand in hand and the teacher must therefore be able to present clear examples of how she works and relate these examples to her philosophy. In order to develop her own practice and philosophy, a teacher needs to reflect on her philosophy and put it in relation to how she works. A structured and well-worked out reflection requires that the teacher is able to formulate her teaching philosophy in writing.

**2b. Clear development of the pedagogical practice over time**

Teaching proficiency requires continuous development and improvement of teaching practice. Proficiency is not a static condition to be reached once and for all, but is a continuous process of development. The teacher's job is to support the students' learning to the best of her abilities, and to this end the teacher must follow scholarly developments in the field of teaching and learning. The teacher's own teaching must be adapted to new experiences and advances in this field. A growing base of knowledge and experience changes one's teaching philosophy and so this too must be adjusted accordingly. It is therefore important that a teacher who wants to show teaching proficiency is able to present a development over time of her teaching.

**2c. Examines the students' learning in the own practice**

Student learning is the aim of all teaching. To enable the teacher to assess whether her teaching functions as planned, and to have the opportunity to make improvements, she must constantly review her teaching and assess the students' learning. An understanding of the students' learning process can be obtained by working directly with the students, by attentively listening to them in dialogue and by continuously reflecting on their achievements. The students' examination results and course evaluations form other important tools for assessing student learning. A proficient teacher has a clear view of what is difficult or troublesome for the students and of the common causes of student failure at examinations. She has a conscious strategy for using student evaluations and assessments in developing her teaching strategies. Pedagogical projects and minor



scholarly studies may be further ways of investigating students' learning and developing one's teaching.

**2d. Relates own practice to reflected experience or scholarly literature on teaching and learning**

There is always a reason behind our choice of teaching strategy. It may be based on what we have seen someone else do, or based on local tradition, on teacher training, or on one's own or other's experiences. The proficient teacher is conscious of why she works the way she does. She can motivate her choices from pedagogical scholarship, research or well-reflected experience, and is able to discuss alternative approaches.

## **Advice to those who wish to demonstrate teaching skills**

Criteria group 2 involves confidence in your own strategies and a scholarly approach to teaching and learning. This means that in your self-reflection you must be able to derive your working methods from your knowledge of pedagogics and feedback from students, as well as reflections on your own and others' experiences. Your experience is reflected if you analyse your practice in a scholarly manner and draw conclusions as to what worked well and what needs further development.

- When you describe your philosophy, make it simple. Write only what you can support.
- Make sure that theoretical claims are related to accounts of what you actually do in practice
- Describe and motivate important developments in your teaching.
- Do not be afraid to describe negative experiences. A negative experience which has led to change and development is normally an indication of teaching skills.
- Account for how you evaluate and develop your teaching; your use of student evaluations and your assessment of your students' achievements.

## **Advice to evaluators of teaching skills**

- Does the applicant provide clear examples from her own practice?
- Are statements on what constitutes good teaching reflected in the way the applicant actually works?
- Is it possible to trace change over time in the applicant's teaching practice?
- Is there a clear connection between theory and practice? Does the applicant motivate the practice which is described?
- Does the applicant explain how she evaluates, and acquires a clear view of, the students' learning in her teaching?

## **Puts own teaching practice into a wider context , Criteria group 3**

No teaching is isolated from the world we live in. A proficient teacher sets her teaching in relation to the world and current conditions. This means that a teacher must, for example, know and understand the role of her own teaching in the education of students, work according to the laws and regulations which encompass her own teaching and have good and current knowledge of the subject she teaches. The proficient teacher sees herself and her own teaching as a part of a greater context, partakes in pedagogical discourse on various levels and works actively with pedagogical development.

### **3a. Is aware of own teaching and courses' role within a programme, for the university, for teaching within the subject field, and for society and professional life**

The ability to set all course content into a context is important both for learning per se and for the students' motivation. To be able to plan effective and relevant education a teacher must recognize the role of her own course or course section within a programme, course, or block of courses. Both course content and teaching

methods must be adapted to the backgrounds and educational aims of the students. The ability to relate one's teaching to the students' previous knowledge and interests, and also with professional life and the needs of society, offers the teacher further opportunities to support and motivate her students.

**3b. Promotes pedagogical development and pedagogical dialogue within the department, educational programme, university or other relevant contexts**

To maintain good quality within research and education there must be a continuous development of the participants' competence, ideas, perspective, structures and methods. A professional university teacher should contribute to pedagogical developments even outside her own practice. This can for example involve initiating pedagogical projects in one's department, promoting the improvement of courses and programmes, publishing articles in the field of teaching and learning in higher education or otherwise contributing to the pedagogical debate on various levels.

**3c. Has broad and up-to-date knowledge in the field being taught**

It is important that the teacher has a broad knowledge base in the subject being taught. In order to accommodate one's teaching to students of different backgrounds and to prepare the students for the options which exist for continued study and professional life, the teacher must be familiar with the development within her field and have a broad competence in her discipline.

## **Advice to those who wish to demonstrate teaching skills**

Criteria-group 3 mainly concerns the raising of teachers' horizons from their own narrow fields of knowledge, and relating one's teaching to the students' lives and goals; the university's ambitions in providing this education; and society in general.

- Motivate the content and methodology of your teaching from your students' situations and their goals.
- Show that you relate your subject to neighbouring disciplines and to other areas of knowledge and interest that your students possess.
- Put your view of your teaching in relation to the wider context.

## **Advice to evaluators of teaching skills**

- What does broad and current knowledge mean for the appointment in question?
- Does the applicant show initiative and a desire to develop and improve courses and programmes, or teaching in a broader perspective?
- Does the applicant illustrate an understanding of the contexts within which her own courses or course sections belong, and of the role the courses or course sections play for student development within a programme or course?



## References

- Apelgren, K. & Giertz, B. (2001). *Pedagogisk meritportfölj - och plötsligt var jag meriterad*. Uppsala universitet, Enheten för utveckling och utvärdering. (Rep. No. 27).
- Barr, R. B. & Tagg, J. (1995). From teaching to learning - A new paradigm for undergraduate education. *Change*, 27, 12-25.
- Boyer, E. L. 1990. *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. The Carnegie Foundation.
- Biggs, J. & Tang, C. (2007). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. (third ed.) Open University Press.
- Chickering, A. W. & Gamson, Z. F. (1987). Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. *American Association of Higher Education Bulletin*, March 1987, 2-6.
- Gibbs, G. (1992). *Creating a Teaching Portfolio*. Bristol. Technical Education Services.
- Giertz, B. (2003). *Att bedöma pedagogisk skicklighet*. UPI, Uppsala universitet (rapport 2).
- Giertz, B. (2005). *Sammanställning av erfarenheter från försöksverksamhet med bedömning av pedagogiska meritportföljer våren/sommaren 2004*. Rådet för högre utbildning.
- Classic, C. E., Taylor Huber, M., & Meroff, G. I. (1997). *Scholarship Assessed - Evaluation of the professoriate*. Jossey-Bass.
- Kreber, C. 2002. Teaching excellence, Teaching Expertise and the Scholarship of Teaching. *Innovative Higher Education*, Vol. 27, No. 1.
- Pettersen, R. C., 2008, *Kvalitetslärande i högre utbildning : introduktion till problem- och praktikbaserad didaktik*. Lund: Studentlitteratur AB.
- Ramsden, P., Margetson, D. Martin, E. & Clarke, S. (1995) *Recognizing and rewarding good teaching in Australian higher education*. Committee for

the Advancement of University Teaching, Canberra.

Ramsden, P. (2003). *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*.  
RoutledgeFalmer.

Rovio-Johansson, A. & Tingbjörn, G. (2010). *Pedagogisk skicklighet och pedagogiska meriter - historik och praktik*. Högskoleverket. (Rep. No. 2001:18R).

Seldin , P. (1997). *The Teaching Portfolio*. Anker Publishing Company.

SFS 1998:1003. *Förordning om ändring i Högskoleförordningen (1993:100)*.

SFS 1993.100. *Högskoleförordning*.

SOU 1992:1. *Frihet Ansvar Kompetens. Grundutbildningens villkor i högskolan*. Utbildningsdepartementet.

Trigwell, K. Prosser, M. and Waterhouse F. 1999. Relations between teachers' approaches to teaching and students' approaches to learning. *Higher Education* 37: 57-70.

Trigwell, K. 2001. Judging University Teaching. *The International Journal for Academic Development*. Vol. 6, No. 1, 65-73.



