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**Curriculum Development, Course Design,
Higher Education Didactics, Evaluation of Teaching**

Module 4.1

Report of the Evaluation Committee

by

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Submitted to

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1. Introduction

The aim of this essay is to provide a detailed report about the work of the evaluation committee in Module 4.1 'Curriculum Development, Course Design, Higher Education Didactics, Evaluation of Teaching', which took place in the week between 7th to 11th of May 2007.

The formation of an evaluation committee was based on a proposal of the professors responsible for the module, Professor Barbara M. Kehm and Professor Matthias Wessler. The committee was defined as a 'task force' which should support the quality of Module 4.1. Its precise task was to monitor the teaching and learning process, and contribute to enhance its quality wherever possible. The project was considered to be a practical exercise on quality assurance for the students, who voluntarily agreed to conduct the evaluation. Not only should the members of the committee define their own 'external' evaluation approach, but also focus on their own procedures, materials and outputs, and share their experiences and insights with the whole group. The original members were Shengyin Chen, Christian Noumi, Zarko Dragsic, and myself. This team started the evaluation exercise, and gave first insights in the workflow and provisional reflections of the committee in two short presentations during the module week. Due to internal problems in the group, the composition of the evaluation team slightly changed after that; and in the end, the final presenters of the evaluation findings, outcomes and recommendations on Friday the 11th of May 2007 were Carla Ramirez, Yuanyuan Yu, Christian Noumi, Zarko Dragsic and myself.

For the report, it was also required to include theoretical background from the existing literature on the topic of teaching evaluation. Therefore, the following chapter, '2. Background: General Remarks on the Evaluation of Teaching', covers the history and development of teaching evaluation in German-speaking countries; resistance, reasons and perspectives regarding this issue; and the problem of defining teaching quality, which is strongly related to the task of the evaluation committee of improving the quality of Module 4.1.

In the module, it was claimed several times, that students can be involved in changing the quality of teaching and learning at universities. They can be the major driving force to increase the quality, but they also might be the major brake or constraint for improvements. This evaluation report should serve as an example for the first case. It should bring about positive change, and enhance the quality of the evaluated module; and, at best, of other modules in the international Master Programme 'Higher Education'.

2. Background: General Remarks on the Evaluation of Teaching

2.1 History and Development

Likewise to many issues in higher education, the development and impact of teaching evaluation strongly varies in the international comparison throughout history. As an illustrative example for this variability, the different acceptance and use of teaching evaluation in the United States and the German-speaking part of Europe should be named in particular. Whilst the first standardised questionnaire for teaching evaluation was developed in the 1920s in the United States, the European German-speaking countries started to engage with the topic in the late 1960s at times of the student movements, and developed a first German standardised questionnaire in the 1970s. In the 1980s, when US-American researchers already had published around 1.000 relevant studies, the topic even started to loose most attraction for German-speaking higher education experts. It was predominantly due to the student, when evaluation of teaching became a relevant issue of discussion again at the beginning of the 1990s in countries like Germany and Austria (Spiel & Gössler 2001, p. 11; Rindermann 2001, p. 61).

Up to now, not only students detected the importance of evaluation of their courses and curricula, but the governments and university administrations of Germany and Austria saw the necessity of evaluation in a changing higher education area. Developments like mass higher education and increasing dropout rates challenged the higher education sector, and evaluation was more and more used for governmental control purposes in higher education institutions (Spiel & Gössler 2001, p. 10 & 12). It was related to performance contracts, university autonomy, and accountability, which was followed by a so-called "evaluation boom" (Spiel & Gössler 2001, p. 12). All at once, evaluation got in the centre of attention at universities; and the media, publishing their own evaluations and ratings, brought the issue into public discussion (Spiel & Gössler 2001, p. 12).

It can certainly be said, that the quality and the impact of teaching evaluation have been increasing throughout the numerous evaluation projects in German-speaking higher education institutions over the last years. Nonetheless, many projects are still characterised by "heterogeneity and actionism" (Spiel & Gössler 2001, p. 13). In many cases, too many methods and instruments are used to analyse and interpret too many specific instances. As a consequence, the 'big picture' is often neglected, and few changes can be achieved by most evaluation projects. Generally, it seems to be more clear how to evaluate, than why to evaluate higher education teaching (Spiel & Gössler 2001, p. 13).

2.2 Teaching Evaluation: Resistance, Reasons and Perspectives

Although the status of teaching evaluation gradually rises in German-speaking countries, it still is a difficult issue, and faces resistance, mainly from higher education teachers. In comparison with the United States, this resistance can be led back to the more demanding points of departure for countries like Germany or Austria; for example, due to the different structure of the US higher education system, the different conception of students as 'customers', and the general 'appreciation' of teaching as being coequal to research (Spiel & Gössler 2001, p. 11; Rindermann 2001, p. 62). Nevertheless, there are several other reasons for the reservation of higher education teachers towards the evaluation of teaching in German-speaking countries:

First, it is considered to be almost impossible to find common definitions for 'good teaching' and teaching evaluation. Many higher education teachers criticise the lack of an elaborated discussion of these issues. They argue, that the various understandings of 'good teaching' on the one, and the imprecise meaning of teaching evaluation on the other hand can not lead to acceptable results (Spiel & Gössler 2001, p. 10; Kromrey 2001, p. 21 & 47). Consequently, the objectivity of teaching quality is critically denied by many university teachers, because a 'service' like teaching is always influenced by personal interactions, and a matter of relativity and perspective. The definition of quality criteria and standards in advance is therefore called into question (Kromrey 2001, pp. 47-48).

Secondly, many higher education teachers doubt the "methodological quality" (Spiel & Gössler 2001, p. 12) of some evaluation projects. In particular, evaluations and ratings created and published by magazines, newspapers and online platforms are often criticised for their missing validity and reliability. It is claimed, that teaching evaluation in higher education institutions can only meet acceptance, if the procedure is conducted with academically sound methods and instruments (Spiel & Gössler 2001, p. 12).

Last, it is often claimed, that "students, even postgraduates, do not have the ability to judge the technical content of a programme" (Kerridge & Mathews 1998, p. 71). Since teaching evaluations are to a high extent based on questionnaire answers of students, it is simply questioned, if students are able to evaluate teaching quality; or if they are distracted by bias-variables and factors, which are not representative for the intended matter of the evaluation. I.e., the students' answers are seen to be affected by circumstances which are not related to the quality of teaching (Rindermann 2001, p. 68; Wolf et al. 2001, p. 91; Kerridge & Mathews 1998, p. 71).

Despite all the criticism, 'Why should teaching in higher education still be evaluated?' In general, the reasons for teaching evaluation in higher education depend on the needs and intentions of four parties: society, universities, teachers and students.

In the 'knowledge age', the transfer of relevant higher education knowledge to future "knowledge workers" (Gibbons 1994) is crucial for the further development and progress of modern societies. Knowledge is (one of) the most important factors for competition in an industrialised and high-technological world. Furthermore, the increasing costs for higher education, the rising internationalisation, and the demand for efficient and effective higher education institutions can be named as societal reasons for the evaluation of university teaching (Spiel & Gössler 2001, p. 9; Richter 1994, p. 6).

For universities, entrepreneurial structures, "output orientation" (Spiel & Gössler 2001, p. 9), and increasing autonomy push for more accountability. It is getting more and more important for higher education institutions to legitimise their plans and actions; in particular, since tuition fees have become common also at German-speaking universities. Furthermore, it is possible to distinguish between four general purposes: first of all, evaluation enables universities to gather knowledge about a specific matter, to facilitate planning and decision-making. Secondary, it allows them to gather information to control their "effectiveness, efficiency and acceptance" (Kromrey 2001, p. 16) in relation to the utilisation of their resources. Further, evaluation can influence the development processes of higher education teaching (Kromrey 2001, p. 16). Finally, above all, teaching evaluation can sharpen the quality concept at universities; it can help to institutionalise a common understanding of teaching quality (Rindermann 2001, p. 77). A clear concept about high quality teaching increases a university's reputation, and therefore its chances in the "national and international competition" (Landfried 1999, p. 23) for excellent students and junior researchers, and third-party funding.

Higher education teachers can use evaluations and student feedback to learn about their teaching style, and their image amongst students. They can enhance their strengths and try to decrease their weaknesses, and should be able to "test from time to time whether their current teaching still synchronises with the objectives of a given course" (Landfried 1999, p. 26). Since communication between teachers and students is often enhanced during this process, the concept of 'teaching quality' can become more transparent and understandable in class. In addition, teaching evaluations become progressively important for performance negotiations between university administrations and teachers. Therefore, good teaching, at best leading to good evaluation results, can both forward the careers of junior teaching staff, and increase the

reputation of renowned professors together with their research achievements (Rindermann 2001, p. 62).

Students should consider their time effort, financial interest, and professional perspective. The more 'bad teaching' lowers a student's interest in a study programme, and his or her study results, the higher is the possibility for an unintentionally extended study period. The same holds true for badly organised curricula and programme conditions. These two factors, bad didactics and bad organisation, are strongly related to the financial and material situation of students. The more time they loose, the more additional money they have to raise; an issue which becomes particularly crucial in relation to tuition fees. Despite that, teaching quality certainly has an impact on the students' work placement and careers. Only well prepared higher education graduates can reach the high standards which are demanded in many professional fields today (Richter 1994, p. 6). In this respect, Regine Marquardt (1999, p. 18) says, that "if higher education institutions are to be, among other things, places of academically based vocational training, the achievement of objectives can, in the final instance, only be measured against the professional success of students".

In the cases of the society and universities, those reasons are displayed, why most teaching evaluations are actually performed in higher education. Nevertheless, higher education teachers and students should be considered as the actual beneficiaries of the evaluation projects. Their reasons should answer the question, why evaluation of teaching needs to be a part of university planing and development?

If the acceptance of teaching evaluation, particularly amongst teachers, is low - i.e., if university teachers are not considerably integrated in the process - its outcome is not likely to be fruitful. To achieve the necessary acceptance, compromises which meet the expectations of all the involved stakeholders have to be made (Kromrey 2001, p. 37; Wolf et al. 2001, p. 106). Furthermore, a high methodological standard of the evaluation instruments, a manageable and facilitated work load, and trust in the competencies of the evaluators can foster the willingness of the teaching staff to contribute to valuable results. In this sense, it is crucial to stimulate the interests of teachers in evaluation; and therefore, not recommended for university administrations to pressure them, or rely on the power of law regulations (Wolf et al. 2001, p. 106).

In the worst case scenario, evaluation of teaching becomes an "end in itself" (Spiel & Gössler 2001, p. 17; Kromrey 2001, p. 35; Wolf 2001, p. 106). In general, change at universities is a slow and demanding process. Evaluation can only be a successful trigger for change, if its results are translated into follow-up measurements. Consequently, the amount of col-

lected data and the published report of an evaluation do not define its success and impact; but the following implementation activities, which are based on the assembled results and recommendations (Kromrey 2001, p. 50). The most important part of every evaluation project is consequently "the follow-up of evaluation: what is the real result of the evaluation effort, apart from the documents produced" (Teichmann & Busch 1999, p. 6)?

After all that said, it can be claimed, that a promising perspective for teaching evaluation could be a more extended integration of university teaching staff in the process. There is few doubt, that student feedback can be highly valuable for the improvement of teaching quality. At least, if we can assume, that teachers are convinced of the standards and conditions which led to the feedback. However, it is often argued, that student feedback alone can not have sustainable influence on the teaching behavior and methods. What is necessary, are interviews and counseling, didactical training sessions, and internal discussions of teachers and students at the beginning, during, and at the end of a module. In addition, a higher status of teaching within universities, and relevant gratification of the efforts of 'good teachers' would enhance the acceptance of teaching evaluation among the teaching staff (Rindermann 2001, p. 77-79).

In their article in the journal 'Active Learning in Higher Education', Christine S. Williams and Mark N. K. Saunders (2005) describe an interesting method to integrate university teachers in the common, so far quite student-centred evaluation of teaching quality. In their elaborated "Service Template Process within a process consultation framework" (Saunders & Williams 2005, p. 64), they try to find an alternative to traditional student feedback surveys. They argue that "constructs used to evaluate quality in higher education [...] need to capture the realities separately for students and lecturers" (Saunders & Williams 2005, p. 63). In their opinion, the preset constructs in most student feedback questionnaires do not represent the common quality perceptions and understandings of both teachers and students. Furthermore, student surveys often have poor response rates, and the implementation and use of the found results are hard to assure (Saunders & Williams 2005, p. 60-61). Accordingly, in the first step of the template process, students and lecturers get the possibility to independently define important elements of teaching and learning in a specific higher education course. After that, "gaps between perceptions and expectations" (Saunders & Williams 2005, p. 70) are searched and described. Subsequently, in the comparison of the teachers' and students' findings, it gets visible, what their different understandings and perceptions look like. This process is supported and consulted by a so-called "facilitator" (Saunders & Williams 2005, p. 70), who should assist in the creation, and assure the validity of the template. Finally, in a joint discussion be-

tween students and lecturers, the facilitator has the task to guide the participants towards rational considerations of the new information gathered, and their implementation. This person should not be directly involved in the evaluation, but take the role of a neutral presenter and analyst. The aim is to establish "new mutual understandings specific to" (Saunders & Williams 2005, p. 70) one higher education course. Although this process requires lots of effort and time, the authors say, that it can foster the interest of both teachers and students in teaching evaluation, and fertilise their interaction in class. The template process can illustrate the total situation of teaching and learning by integrating the two main actors of a course. It can facilitate "issues to be surfaced that may challenge the established modes of teaching and learning" (Saunders & Williams 2005, p. 70).

In the future, it will be more and more important to realise that student feedback surveys are not the only possibility to evaluate the quality of teaching in higher education institutions. Although, the use of further elaborated models, like the one described above, certainly requires more resources, all the stakeholders in higher education should be able to detect the possibilities of advanced evaluation procedures, and therefore of the control and securing of high quality teaching; for improvements and innovations in the rapidly developing 'knowledge society' (Spiel & Gössler 2001, p. 17; Rindermann 2001, p. 84).

2.3 What is 'Good Teaching'?

One of the most important questions in the discussion about evaluation in higher education is: 'How can teaching quality be defined?' A common agreement to this question would influence the acceptance of teaching evaluation to a great extent. As mentioned above, it is substantial that all the different stakeholders, and in particular the teaching staff of higher education institutions have trust and confidence in the evaluation of teaching. The understanding of quality and quality assurance should therefore "be based on a common conviction among all those involved" (Landfried 1999, p. 27).

Still and all, it is hard to find a common definition of quality, and as Kerridge and Mathews (1998, p. 73) claim, "there is no simple correct definition of quality"; quality is highly dependent on the perspective of the person or organisation describing it. In teaching, it is possible to say, that certain aspects or activities do not have a certain quality per se, but that quality is applied to these aspects and activities via a "multidimensional construct" (Kromrey 2001, p. 31), to assess and evaluate them in the end. Therefore, a relative definition of teaching quality seems to be the most plausible solution to handle its "dynamic dimension" (Wil-

denhain 1999, p. 15). Teaching quality should always be contextualized (Richter 1994, p. 8). It is variable and flexible.

In another approach, the definition of quality can be focused on one involved target group; particularly, if teaching in higher education is conceived as a 'service' in the literal sense. In this case, students, who are then defined as the 'customers' of a specific teaching service, would be a highly important target group to negotiate quality with (Kromrey 2001, 48 f.). Nevertheless, this would cause that the quality concept of the teaching service is optimised for students only. Additionally, if student are defined as 'customers', education can easily be mistaken as a material good, which should precisely meet their expectations and needs. As a consequence, in an exaggerated scenario, higher education institutions and teachers would make courses "easy, a minimum of assessment [would be] undertaken and all students would be given grade A's" (Kerridge & Mathews 1998, p. 73). In this scenario, it would be likely that teaching evaluation is downgraded to a customer survey of the wishes and needs of students; instead of being, in the best case, a reliable source of valuable results, recommendations and follow-ups for all the involved parties.

The crucial question to ask is now, if evaluation can measure the quality of teaching? After all that has been said about its dynamic, flexible and contextualized character, this can be put in doubt. And it is possible to argue, that measurements of teaching quality can only create a 'snapshot' of the actual quality situation. But this measurement and this 'snapshot' are not where teaching evaluation should stop. The measurement process is only a small step of the total evaluation project, because its overall aim is the integration of the measured quality data and information in a total framework of quality development (Kromrey 2001, p. 47). The data and information of evaluation projects should be translated into specific follow-up activities, leading to improvements and advantages for courses, curricula, universities, and society.

Nevertheless, to deliver valuable quality data and information, every teaching evaluation project is dependent on the precise definition and operationalisation of quality indicators and standards. For this purpose, evaluators are required to operate with sufficient theoretical background and high methodological approaches. Otherwise, it is likely that the evaluation analysis and results are limited to uncomplicated and easy to access aspects, instead of creating sound statements about quality and possibilities for improvement. Simple and superficial solutions can cause measurements of acceptance or satisfaction; but not of quality (Kromrey 2001, p. 31-33; Rindermann 2001, p. 66).

Teaching evaluation with the aim of quality development should be considered as an ongoing process. Besides the follow-up activities, its impact is generated by repetition and comparison of different outcomes over time (Kromrey 2001, p. 52).

3. Procedure and Methodology

Throughout the evaluation project, we tried to answer these questions: What influences the quality of the module 'Curriculum Development, Course Design, Higher Education Didactics, Evaluation of Teaching'? How is a successful teaching and learning process achieved in the module? And which elements of this process could be improved?

It was quite clear from the beginning that these questions can only be answered, if the evaluation committee observes the "total teaching-learning-situation" (Kromrey 2001, p. 51). Consequently, we tried to integrate as many factors in the evaluation exercise as possible; ranging from the organisation of the module and its objectives, to the didactical approaches of the teachers, and the teaching environment. To create as high a degree of balance and flexibility as possible, we used a multidimensional design for data collection, consisting of three major evaluation techniques: observation of the teaching situation in combination with regular presentations and feedback during the course, a student feedback questionnaire, and a qualitative interview with one of the responsible teachers of the module, Professor Barbara Kehm.

The evaluation project can be considered as formative, internal, and mostly qualitative. Its formative character is due to the presentations and feedback possibilities during the module week, which constantly updated the teaching staff about the students' perceptions of the teaching situation, and the analyses of the evaluation committee. The teaching staff had the possibility for changes and "improvements of the ongoing activities" (Rindermann 2001, p. 61). Furthermore, the qualitative approach of the project allowed the evaluation committee to focus to a high extent on observations, interaction and communication; which was considerably facilitated by the internal nature of the exercise. As students in the module, the members of the evaluation committee had enough time to gather all the necessary information for their analysis and recommendations (Kromrey 2001, p. 25). We were able to ask our fellow students for their feedback and opinion, and to distribute our questionnaire to them in the subsequent module of the programme. Moreover, we were able to prepare, schedule and administer the interview with Professor Kehm, to assemble a different perspective on the module and

several general aspects of the MAHE programme; without the usual time pressure, evaluators would often face in an external evaluation project.

For our student feedback questionnaire, we reassembled and modified different questions of a class teaching feedback form and a critical incident questionnaire of the Oxford Learning Institute at the University of Oxford (University of Oxford n.d.). In the first part of this instrument, we integrated questions about the reading material, class discussions, the module objectives, the relevance of the module to understand the overall topic, and two open questions about left over concerns and comments. Furthermore, we added two questions concerning the excursion to Witzenhausen to part 1, because we conceived this field trip as a highly characteristic element of the module. In part 2, five open questions were posed, to give an overview about the students' engagement, and helpful, confusing or surprising actions in class. We distributed the questionnaire to all the students, who took part in the module. From these 18 students, 14 submitted an answered questionnaire to us.

A (graphical) overview of the answers to the questionnaire and the question guide for the interview with Professor Kehm can be found in the annexes 1 and 2.

4. Analysis and Results

In the literature, four elements are often considered as crucial for teaching and course evaluation: "didactics, structure, organisation, atmosphere and engagement (enthusiasm) of the teacher (Wolf et al. 2001, p. 94). In this part, I integrated these four elements into three major subchapters, to present the analysis and results of the evaluation committee:

4.1 Objectives, Teaching and Didactics

At an early stage of the evaluation process, the evaluation committee focused on the analysis of the objectives of the module. These objectives were:

1. Support students to deepen their knowledge on three core issues:
 - a. Basics of teaching and learning in higher education,
 - b. Curriculum development and course design,
 - c. Evaluation and quality assurance in teaching and learning.
2. To involve students in reflective learning experiences in order to strengthen their learning competencies.

The first objective is content related, and describes three major learning outcomes in terms of theory, concept and subject knowledge. The second objective outlines the non-content related goal of the module. In the opinion of the evaluation committee, the second, non-content related objective was covered to a higher extend than the first one. This opinion was supported by the questionnaire answers of three students, when they were asked to describe, what they think the objectives of the module were. They answered, that major objectives of the module were to *stimulate all the class members to be more engaged in the discussion*, and to raise the *awareness for 'new' learning and teaching methods by trying to get the students involved*. Another student underlined, that *creative thinking about teaching, pedagogy and the role of teachers in learning advancement* was fostered. Nevertheless, most respondents to this specific question answered according to the first, content related module goal. The majority replied, that the objectives of the module were to *understand the theoretical background* and concepts of curriculum design, learning and teaching, evaluation, curriculum development and course design; or they defined the objectives of the module as increasing the knowledge about the relation between teaching and learning, the *learning process*, and *learning theories*. We received five missing or unclear answers to the question. These students did not name objectives, which might lead to the assumption that the given objectives were either not clear to them, or not important for their personal learning process. Inasmuch as the evaluation committee detected a major strength in the fulfilment of the second objective in our teaching observation, we encounter a discrepancy between this impression and the questionnaire answers of the students. Nevertheless, we claim that the students were involved in a self-reflective way, and were able to learn about their roles and behavior in class; i.e., the goal to foster their self-awareness as 'reflective learners' was clearly reached in many of the teaching sessions.

When the students were asked, how well they say the module aims were fulfilled, the majority of them opted for 'reasonably' (5), 'fairly well' (4), or 'very well' (1). Only two students chose the category 'fairly poorly'. This result can be considered as beneficial for positive quality statements, if we consider that quality can partly be "determined by the optimum achievement of the objectives" (Marquardt 1999, p. 18) of a module. Even so, it is interesting to mention in this respect, that the student ratings in the following question, in which the students were asked about the usefulness of the module to understand what curriculum development and course design are all about, were rather low. In the understanding of the evaluation committee, the usefulness of the module is strongly related to the deepening of the knowledge about curriculum design and course design, which was expressed in the first module objective, which was redefined by the majority of students as shown above. Still and all, half of the

respondents rated the usefulness as 'not very useful' (6), or even 'not at all useful' (1). For the others, it was either 'OK' (4), or at most 'fairly useful' (2). This might lead to the assumption that the first rating of the fulfilment of the module objectives has to be put into perspective. If the students would have been truly satisfied with the fulfilment of the module goals, the overall usefulness of the module should have been rated higher.

This discrepancy could be related to the students' answers to open questions concerning the discussed material, or some of their further comments. Respondents wanted to learn more about the *motivation of learning, leadership, criteria of good teaching, the precise process of evaluation, theoretical elements of curriculum development and change, and how to bring creation of knowledge and constructivism in the modern curriculum*. These 'knowledge gaps' might be one reason, why the usefulness of the module, and therefore the fulfilment of the first objective, was not sufficiently appreciated by the respondents of the questionnaire.

The teachers' perspective on the module objectives and the resulting learning outcomes were discussed in the interview with Professor Barbara Kehm. Professor Kehm stated, that in teaching, one objective might often be better achieved than another one. The teaching objectives are always dependent on the goals, professors want to achieve in a specific module. But the achievement of these goals is not easy to realise, because the feeling that an objective was met, or that a certain teaching style led to the desired results is strongly dependent on the interaction with the students. That makes it a highly individual and subjective issue. Even if the professor is convinced that a module was successful, students might have a controversial opinion. Moreover, Professor Kehm claimed, that the expected learning outcomes are also hard to define. The general goal of the MAHE programme is to provide modules on a broad variety of topics. Students should get a wide idea about the field of higher education. They should receive the necessary learning material, but specialise themselves on their own. Therefore, one of the expectations of the professors of the module was to foster self-governed learning, and the capacity and ability to specialise on a certain topic; like it was partly described in the second objective. The teaching in class might not always give an in-depth view about a topic, but it certainly can give an idea, how researchers think about it. Nevertheless, a professor can never know which piece of knowledge is missing for different students; in particular, facing a highly heterogeneous class like in the MAHE programme. In many cases, there might be more learning outcomes than expected, or predefined by the module objectives; and in the end, the best way to measure them, is to analyse the professional success of the MAHE graduates on the labour market.

With regards to teaching in principle, didactics play a very crucial role (either in primary, secondary, higher and further education) and the content is not always the most important issue.

This statement of a respondent to our questionnaire should once more highlight the perceived importance of the non-content related objective of the module, and lead to the analysis of the teaching mode and didactics during the module week.

Traditionally, a frontal teaching mode was the common way to deliver knowledge in higher education. The teacher was conceived as 'sage on the stage', who should fill his or her students - the 'empty vessels' - with the relevant knowledge. In modern teaching though, the role of the teacher is changing to 'the guide on the side'. Through the teaching observations and various conversations with the students, the evaluation committee agreed, that this modern approach was predominant throughout the module. The majority of the students appreciated the teachers' role in the sessions. They felt integrated and supported. They were a part of the teaching process, which clearly implied their participation and interaction with their colleagues and the teaching staff.

In the questionnaire, we asked the students about the competencies of the professors as facilitators and moderators in the class discussion. The ratings were very high. The majority of the respondents chose 'very well' (7) or 'fairly well' (3). Only three of them opted for 'reasonably', and one for 'fairly poorly'. These results can additionally contribute to the presumption described above, that a highly interactive and participative teaching mode was achieved in the module. As one of our respondents said, *the professors' ability to bring students and their minds to class was appreciable*. Nonetheless, it was also mentioned, that the two professors of the module had quite different styles of teaching and facilitating the discussion. But this was seen positively by most of the students. They argued, that the frequent change of the teaching staff during the module is useful for their learning process. The possibility to experience different teaching styles was highly valued.

In her interview with the evaluation committee, Professor Kehm indicated that teaching mode and style in a specific MAHE module are always dependent on the individuality of the teachers. Every teacher tries to deal with problems in a different manner. Moreover, she claimed, that it is very important to consider the cultural differences in the MAHE group. For example, it is not sure, how some students perceive a high degree of interaction or visualisations in class. In this respect, diversity of teaching, with careful reflection of the used teaching mode, is a key issue for all the modules.

Further, students criticised the lack of a conceptual framework in the module. Some of them were not sure, how to integrate the different theories and concepts in the total subject framework. They found it difficult to define, where in the subject of higher education, topics like curriculum design or evaluation are situated in the research discussion. Moreover, some students claimed, that it was a demanding task to find the proper relation between the announced topics of the different sessions, and the concepts discussed in class. In this relation, it was also said, that it was problematic to *connect the various topics with each other*. Students would have appreciated 'topic conclusions' by the teaching staff, to round off, or complete their learning experiences.

Nevertheless, the teaching staff responded, that this problem might be grounded in the general nature of a Master programme. Students should be able to collect all the different theory and concept pieces, and construct their individual total concept or framework. They claimed, that the conceptual framework always depends on the vision, a student, teacher, or researcher has on a specific topic.

According to the observations of the evaluation committee, another important aspect of the module was the introduction of a cultivated 'discussion culture' to the students. The professors claimed, that although students and teaching staff might have various conceptions of participation, grading, learning outcomes and many other aspects, well organised and open-minded discussions can facilitate the understanding among and between the different parties, and contribute to acceptable and reasonable solutions and outcomes in the end. As a result, the participants of the module learned to listen to their colleagues, and to respect attitudes and viewpoints which are different from theirs.

The questionnaire answers of the students, concerning the usefulness of the class discussions and the small-group discussion, point to a high level of satisfaction in both cases. The majority of the students claimed, that the class discussions were either 'very useful' (4), 'fairly useful' (6), or at least 'OK' (3). The results for the small-group discussion were similar. For this question, the majority opted for 'very useful' (3), 'fairly useful' (4), or 'OK' (5). In the opinion of the evaluation committee, these results can be clearly related to the good atmosphere during the discussions, which was strongly influenced by the professors' ability to foster the concept of 'discussion culture' throughout the module week.

As Professor Kehm stated in our interview, the adjustment or backup strategy for every MAHE module is a clarifying discussion with the students. Discussions are certainly the best

way to solve problems and misunderstandings, and are always more important than the content of a session; i.e., a solution for a crucial issue is more important than continuing with a topic.

A specific highlight of the module was the field trip to the University of Witzenhausen, which was highly valued by the participating students. Of the eleven participants, who responded to our questionnaire, eight claimed, that they got 'quite a lot' out of the field trip, and three even got 'a great deal' out of it. None of them chose one of the options 'a bit', 'not very much', or 'very little'. In the open question about the greatest single thing of the field trip, students highlighted the possibility of a comparative analysis between the University of Kassel and the University of Witzenhausen, concerning general aspects - including the mensa or the classrooms - and the *qualities of different learning environments*. It was claimed that the changed learning environment helped to discover a *contrastive perspective about education and situation-based learning*, and that it improved the *general learning atmosphere* in the module. One respondent even stated, that after coming back from the module, everybody seemed to be more *relaxed and friendly*, and that the willingness to participate in the module was strongly increased among the students. Moreover, the *practical approach* of the field trip was highly appreciated by some students. Particularly the evaluation exercise and the small group work allowed the students to find applications for their theoretical knowledge, and to interact with their colleagues. A scenario which *offered a new way to learning*. Nonetheless, it was criticised, that the *time for the evaluation exercise was too limited*, and that it was a bit absurd that the members of the UNISTAFF programme, which is located in Witzenhausen, went to Kassel at the day of the field trip; so that the participating students did not have the possibility to meet them.

4.2 Planning, Organisation and Environment

In the interview, Professor Kehm informed the evaluation committee about the planning phase for the MAHE modules. She stated, that in general, the planning of all the MAHE modules was related to the criteria, the evaluation agency set for the accreditation process of the study programme. Particularly, the distribution of the 120 Master course credits to the three examination forms - the 13 modules (78 credits), the internship (12 credits), and the master thesis (30 credits) - was crucial for the final planning phase of the programme. Consequently, the evaluation agency was responsible for the formal issues of planning and course design.

According to Professor Kehm, one of the most important and also problematic issues for the planning of MAHE modules is the choice of the 'right' teachers. In this respect, the major question is 'Who could do what?'. Since the internal teaching resources of the International

Centre for Higher Education Research (INCHER) are limited, external teachers have to be hired, to cover specific topics. The problem is, as Professor Kehm stated, that the required experts for certain topics are difficult to find, because they are often lacking the sufficient English language competencies. Although their knowledge base in the subject would be feasible for teaching specific courses, they could only teach in German, which is not practicable for an international Master programme. Another issue is that a senior researcher recently left the centre. Consequently, additional elective modules, like 'Students in an International Perspective' or 'E-Learning, New Media and Communication Technology', could not be offered so far. The change of this situation is one of the crucial future objectives for the MAHE programme.

A further severe problem, which was described by Professor Kehm, is the overlapping of contents in certain modules. In this respect, the communication between the teachers participating in the module planning needs to be enhanced.

A critical organisational issue for all the MAHE modules is related to the class reading materials. In case of the evaluated module, the students mentioned, that they received the course materials too late. Moreover, due to the closely staggered module dates in the summer semester, the students claimed, that they did not have enough time to read most of the distributed texts, and to prepare for the module. Particularly, this situation was said to be caused by the time pressure in the modules 'Survey Methodology I' and 'Survey Methodology II', which were conceived as highly demanding by most of the participants.

When asked in the questionnaire, how useful the class reading list was found by the students, four of fourteen respondents answered, that they did not read the material before the module. Nevertheless, the majority of the participants, who read it, opted for 'fairly useful' (4) or 'OK' (5). Only one of the students chose the category 'not very useful', and none of them said that the reading material was 'very useful'. In the next question, the students were asked to what extent they were able to engage with the abstract readings prior to the module. Half of the respondents answered with 'fairly poorly', which might point to the important role of the teachers in the module, to explain the various theories and concepts, and to clarify open questions. Looking at the answers to the final question concerning this topic, the teachers' role to support the students in relating the readings with the contents taught seemed to be achieved. None of the respondents chose the categories 'not very easy', or 'very difficult' for this question. The prevalent answer was 'OK' (8), and two students even opted for 'fairly easy'.

The environmental circumstances for the module were also criticised by many students. They said that the classroom was too small, and due to its location near a highly frequented road, it was too loud. Additionally, the technical equipment of the classroom was criticised by some participants; there was no projector installed, for example.

4.3 Engagement and Atmosphere

In the opinion of the evaluation committee, the engagement of the students was very high throughout the module. Asked for the point at which they felt most engaged with what was happening, students named the *creative exercises, the work groups, the class discussion and debates, and the practical experience at the field trip to Witzenhausen*. Aspects which made participants feel distanced and decreased their engagement were the *theoretical overload in some sessions, and the repetition of topics which were already discussed in other modules*.

The high grade of engagement and the good atmosphere in class can be related to the participative teaching approach in the module. The teachers had the ability to integrate and motivate the students in the teaching and learning process. During the week, a key-phrase was 'Step out of your comfort zone'; the professors tried to facilitate the open discussion, and could break the *emotional hesitation to speak* of some of our classmates. Nevertheless, as one of the respondents to our questionnaire noted: *The continuing pressure on the students by calling on them to 'getting involved' and 'sharing concerns' did also stir up some negative group dynamics*. This development reached its climax in a personal conflict between two students in class, which was selected by many students as the one thing in the module, weakening their engagement and comfort the most.

Steven Meyers and his colleagues argue that "interpersonal conflicts in college classrooms are common, disruptive, and significantly affect how faculty and students feel about a particular course" (Meyers et al. 2006, p. 180). The conflict in the evaluated course certainly influenced the atmosphere in class. As it was described in Meyers' article, it derived from a combination of "competing interests between people [...], perceived injustices in which individuals feel that the benefits they derive from a situation are not proportional to their effort and work [...] and misperceptions about another person's intentions" (Meyers et al. 2006, p. 180). Professor Wessler, who was the teacher in the session of the conflict, tried to mediate between the two parties; and although the conflict could not be successfully solved in class, the students appreciated his effort to find a solution. For students, it was *interesting to see, how the Professor tried to solve confrontations up and personal*, and they were impressed by his *positive approach to the unexpected situation coming up in the classroom*. Nonetheless, it was

also stated, that *it would have been more professional to have the 'conflict' discussed outside the classroom. The exhibition of personal problems between classmates in front of all the group did not contribute to solve the problem.*

Another affirming and helpful action, which contributed to the engagement and positive atmosphere in class, was claimed to be the optimistic, flexible and proactive attitude of Professor Wessler, who was able and prepared to *respond to the needs of the class, and to change his initial plans and objectives regarding the progress of the module.* His caring and guiding teaching style, and his openness to change were highly valued by the students.

5. Recommendations

The evaluation committee divided the recommendations for the module 'Curriculum Development, Course Design, Higher Education Didactics, Evaluation of Teaching' into three fields: organisational issues, methods and approaches, and examination and assessment.

5.1 Organisational Issues

a. Course Materials

- The reading materials should be delivered at least two weeks before a module.
- It would be helpful, if handouts and PowerPoint presentations could be sent to the students the week before a module. The students would have the chance to prepare for each session in advance. Furthermore, they could save all these materials on their computers, and decide, if they want to add information to the Word or PowerPoint files, or print out the documents, to take notes in class.
- Due to time pressure and workload, it is understandable, that students can not read all the materials upfront. Nevertheless, there is few doubt that the course readings can enhance the understanding of the theories and concepts discussed in class, and contribute to solve the mentioned problem to see the conceptual framework for a specific topic.

Therefore, it can be claimed, that a summary of the literature sources could be highly supportive for the students. These summaries could be created by working groups or individual students one week before a module. The aim would be to create short handouts (1-2 pages)

for every text, to make its basic idea available for all the students. Core reading texts for specific sessions could even be presented in class.

b. Scheduling of the Module

It seems to be quite difficult to find a proper recommendation for the timing of the modules over the year. First, the scheduling of the modules is highly dependent on the time plans and obligations of the teachers. Second, it is hard to say, if closely staggered module dates, e.g., two modules within one month, are too demanding for the students of the MAHE programme. On the one hand, a positive effect of closely scheduled modules could be an enhanced coherence and interaction amongst the MAHE students; they would have the possibility to form working groups, to deal with the high work amount and time pressure. On the other hand, in relation to the extensive reading lists and the required time for essay writing after each module, the timeframe might better be reconsidered.

Nonetheless, as Professor Kehm mentioned in the interview with the evaluation committee, it is almost impossible to define a fitting estimation of the workload for the whole study group. In every group, there are 'fast' and 'slow' writers; and the learning strategies and additional obligations of students, like work or family, are distinctly divergent in the heterogeneous MAHE group. Most of the MAHE students have different learning experiences and backgrounds, and not all of them can be considered full-time students. Consequently, dealing with diversity is one of the major issues of the whole International Master Programme 'Higher Education'.

c. Classroom

In the ideal case, the MAHE group should have an own classroom, which is big enough, technically equipped, and situated in a quiet environment. This classroom should also be available between the modules, as a meeting point for study and work groups.

In this respect, Professor Wessler recommended to raise the awareness about the MAHE programme at the University of Kassel. University representatives should realise the importance and usefulness of an international Master programme, which is concerned with higher education research and management. His idea was to organise a meeting between student representatives of the programme and the president of the university. Students should start to 'fight for their rights', and see their impact on the internationalisation concept and reputation for a small higher education institution like Kassel University.

5.2 Methods and Approaches

a. Handout Improvement

A compilation of key-words and definitions for every session could be helpful to foster the students' understanding of the different topics and concepts of a module.

The creation of such a list could also be a task for students, when they are working on the summaries of the course materials, as suggested above. This would make a good input for discussions in class; even, or particularly, if the students' emphases on certain key-concepts and definitions are different from the ones of the teaching staff.

b. Field Trips and Excursions

More field trips or excursions could improve the learning experiences and the group coherence of the MAHE students. The students would have the possibility to 'translate' their theoretical knowledge into practical applications, like it happened during the survey exercise, group work, and presentation at the field trip to Witzenhausen. Moreover, as described above, a change of environment can positively influence the motivation of the students, and the atmosphere in class.

c. Guest Speakers and Lecturers

The majority of the students enjoyed the changing teaching modes and styles, the different teachers brought to the evaluated module. Nevertheless, the communication between the different lecturers should be enhanced, to prevent repetition and overlapping topics.

5.3 Examination and Assessment

a. Examination System

The evaluation committee sees the opportunity to extend the examination system of the module. Since the amount of practical work and experiences (field trip, group works, presentations) is high in this module, it would be beneficial to introduce more assessment possibilities. Considering the diversity of the MAHE group, the different talents, backgrounds, and experiences of the students could be highlighted by a heterogeneous examination system. Conversely, some students could feel intimidated; particularly, since the regular examination form is essay writing.

Nonetheless, in our opinion, assessed presentations, group works and group reports should not be intimidating for Master students. The students should rather conceive them as exercises for

their later career, where public presentations and team work might be highly important skills. Moreover, extended assessment criteria would enhance the feeling of the students, that efforts during the module week can be beneficial for their grades.

b. Essay Assessment

There should be clearly transparent criteria for the essay assessment. As a consequence, students would have more guidance for their essay writing, and might be able to systematically improve their writing competencies.

6. Conclusion and Lessons Learned

In this section, I would like to come back to the questions, the evaluation committee tried to answer throughout the evaluation project in the module¹.

In our opinion, the aspect which influenced the quality of the module the most was the teaching styles of the professors. According to the second module objective, students were motivated to develop a self-reflecting learning style, and to increase their self-awareness regarding their role and behavior in class. Self-governed learning and the capacity to independently specialise on a certain topic were fostered by the teachers of the module.

Another major quality issue to consider is the heterogeneity and diversity of the MAHE group. The class consists of students from a wide variety of countries; all of them having different learning experiences and backgrounds; and all of them having different expectations and interests in the programme. Therefore, the quality of the module was influenced by the handling of this diversity and the 'cultural differences' in class. Teachers had to adjust their teaching modes, and - as experienced in the evaluated module - had to be prepared for conflicts and misunderstanding to a higher extent than it might have been the case for a more heterogeneous student group. As Helmut Kromrey (2001, p. 55) claims, "although heterogeneity makes teaching more difficult, it can also be used as a didactical principle in a positive and conscious way."

The successful teaching and learning process was achieved to a high extent by the 'guide on the side' teaching principle. The students felt integrated and supported through the teachers' roles and teaching styles. They were part of the teaching process in a highly interactive and

¹ See Chapter '3. Procedure and Methodology'

participative learning environment. Furthermore, the respectful 'discussion culture', which led to tolerant and open-minded interactions in most sessions, enhanced the engagement and atmosphere in class. We were taught to 'step out of our comfort zone'.

A further important element for the successful learning process was the field trip to the University of Witzenhausen. The practical experience together with the environmental change, the group work, and the group presentation increased the students' interest in the module, along with their involvement and commitment.

The third question asked by the evaluation committee was: 'Which elements of the module could be improved?' In this respect, it should again be mentioned that students stated to have some 'knowledge gaps' after the module. For example, some of them wanted to learn more about the motivation of learning, leadership, criteria of good teaching, or the precise process of evaluation. Nonetheless, as Professor Kehm claimed in our interview, there is always room for specialisation for the participants of the MAHE programme. The modules should give students a good overview about the concepts, and lead them the direction to their own learning emphases. A similar argumentation is also valid for the criticism of a lacking conceptual framework in the module. Although, what might be improved according to all this, is the communication between the teachers in the planning phase of the module contents. Thereby, the overlapping of contents could be prevented. Furthermore, to enhance the possibilities for specialisation, the introduction of elective modules seems to be highly necessary.

The other suggestions for improvement can be found in the recommendation section of this essay.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned, that the MAHE programme already offers many possibility for course evaluation. On the last day of every module, students are involved in feedback and winding-up sessions; they are asked for their opinions and recommendations, and teachers gather information for change and improvement. Nevertheless, it seems important that the students become more aware of their crucial role in the evaluation process. Since MAHE is a consecutive programme, its students have the possibility to found an evaluation committee every year, to monitor and improve the quality of module 4.1, and probably of other modules; but most importantly, students have the chance to share their analyses and recommendations in follow-up presentations with the new group. This might help to establish a students' quality assurance system. Consequently, the involvement of students in evaluation and quality improvement can be fostered; connected with the practical experiences of being part of an evaluation committee, and of presenting the results in follow-up sessions.

Everyone should keep on with his or her motivation, involvement and enthusiasm, which might have been raised during this module, and should try the best to complement critical comments by concrete actions for the future improvement of the next modules or the course in the next generation. (Student's questionnaire answer)

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