

How can we become pedagogically skilled together?

Materials for leading a workshop series on pedagogical expertise



According to the Swedish Higher Education Ordinance, everyone appointed to senior lecturer or professor at Swedish higher education institutions must demonstrate pedagogical expertise. At Örebro University, this also applies to lecturers. But what exactly is pedagogical expertise? There is no fixed, agreed-upon national definition, and far from all universities and higher education institutions have defined what the concept means. Örebro University is among those lacking a definition.

What does it mean to be pedagogically skilled? And how can we develop our pedagogical expertise together? The following training materials offer you and your workgroup a structure to reflect upon and strengthen your pedagogical skills. Through a workshop series, participants will have the opportunity to explore this concept as a group and consider how you, collectively, can develop your teaching practices.

Structure

The workshop series is conducted in groups – a teaching team, a programme council, a subject group, or a division – and consists of two or three steps. The group's collective work on developing their pedagogical expertise is led by a course coordinator, programme coordinator, subject coordinator, head of division, or another pedagogical leader.

The three steps may be conducted at different times. A simple implementation may combine steps 1 and 2 into a 2 x 45-minute workshop, followed by the group taking on step 3 as a 1 x 45 or 2 x 45-minute workshop. If time is limited, the group may focus solely on step 1 or steps 1 and 2.

Since ensuring collegial development is the focus of these workshops, the emphasis is on dialogue and collaboration. The workshop series includes supplementary materials on the Higher Education Pedagogics Centre's website, including texts and videos on pedagogical expertise.

If steps 1 and 2 are conducted with a longer interval, ask participants to review the supplementary materials before proceeding with step 2. If steps 1 and 2 are conducted as a single workshop of 2 x 45 minutes, it is more suitable for participants to delve into the supplementary materials between steps 2 and 3.

What does pedagogical expertise mean to us?

Step 1

In the first step, participants should become more aware of their understanding of pedagogical expertise, compare their understanding with others' perspectives, and agree on aspects and dimensions they all find essential and wish to continue working on.

In step 1 (45 min.), participants reflect on pedagogical expertise and reach a consensus on concrete aspects or dimensions of the concept they believe should characterise the group's teaching practices and wish to work on further.

- Begin step 1 with an introduction to the concept of pedagogical expertise, perhaps by watching the video *What does pedagogical expertise mean to you?* as a group.

Estimated time: 10 min.

- Then, let each participant come up with one or two words describing a pedagogically skilled teacher. Suggested words can be written on Post-its and pasted on a shared board as a word cloud or in a digital response tool (such as Mentimeter or Wooclap), which can generate a word cloud.

Estimated time: 10 min.

- Pair up participants and let them select two words from the word cloud to discuss their meaning and consider how these words can be more evident in teaching.

Suggested discussion questions:

- How are these words expressed in the teacher's interaction with students?
How do the words influence the learning activities and assessments?
- How do the words relate to one another? Are they at odds with each other, are they complementary, or do they enhance one another?

Estimated time: 15 min.

- Finally, the group selects one or more words they want to focus on to improve their pedagogical expertise in the future.

Estimated time: 10 min.

In a 2023, 72 teachers at Örebro University were asked to choose a word they felt captured pedagogical expertise. The most typical qualities identified were dedicated, knowledgeable, responsive, communicative, flexible, structured, and reflective. When Örebro University students submitted 511 nominations for the university's and student union's pedagogical award that same year, the most common qualities they highlighted were dedicated, knowledgeable, responsive, helpful, caring, friendly, and personal.

How can we, as a group, develop our pedagogical expertise?

Step 2

In the second step, participants address the aspects and dimensions of pedagogical expertise they find essential as a group. Collectively, they propose activities that will enhance their pedagogical expertise and can positively impact teaching practices in the long term.

During the second step (45 min.), participants delve deeper into the selected words and specifically propose ways to improve as a teaching team, subject group, programme council, or division. The aim is to identify a series of activities that can be implemented to strengthen the group's pedagogical expertise, preferably considering the new opportunities facing higher education currently (e.g., changes in reading culture, rapid development of generative AI, increased diversity among students, or tighter financial constraints).

- Begin step 2 by highlighting the words the group chose to focus on. Relate the words to and reflect on how they align with Örebro University's educational philosophy.

Estimated time: 5 min.

- In smaller groups, discuss how the selected words can be transformed into activities that develop shared pedagogical expertise.

For instance, if creativity is identified as a key dimension, they can answer the question, *How can we become more creative?* Responses should be examples of activities that leverage new opportunities or address challenges – activities that impact teaching and assessment and stimulate and support student learning.

If responsiveness is instead seen as a vital expression of pedagogical expertise, the group should collectively answer the question, *How can we become more responsive?*

Having the group document their discussions on rolling whiteboards or flip charts will make it easier for participants to review the various proposed activities during the concluding discussion.

Estimated time: 30 min.

- Conclude step 2 by summarising and seeking agreement on which activities the whole group would like to implement in the future. The suggestions documented above (on rolling whiteboards or flip charts) can help provide an overview and consensus on what the group should focus on next.

Estimated time: 10 min.

Suggestions for activities that enable collegial development of pedagogical expertise include: (1) Peer observation and coaching to review each other's teaching as a collective; (2) Exploring new teaching activities and assessment methods together during pedagogical seminars discussing research on student learning; (3) Co-create teaching materials and share ideas and insights during the process; (4) Jointly investigate teaching practices to develop evidence-based knowledge about student learning and study behaviours.

What have we achieved by enhancing our pedagogical expertise?

Step 3

In the third step, the previous activities are followed up, and the group decides how to continue working together to develop their pedagogical expertise further.

Step 3 (45 or 90 min.) focuses on evaluating and reflecting on the concrete activities conducted after the previous step(s). Optimally, there should be a break between steps 2 and 3 to allow the group time to engage with the activities intended to improve pedagogical expertise and impact teaching practices. If step 3 is conducted in 45 minutes, there is room to evaluate and reflect on the activities carried out. If Step 3 is conducted over two 45-minute sessions, there is also time for a shared discussion about a vision or plan for the continued development of the teaching team's, programme council's, subject group's or division's pedagogical expertise.

- Begin the third step by presenting the activities that have been carried out. For example, the course coordinator, programme coordinator, subject coordinator, head of division, or another pedagogical leader could prepare a summary based on the activities carried out. This can serve as a starting point for reflection and evaluation.

Estimated time: 10 min.

- Next, let the participants discuss and reflect on the activities' outcomes in smaller discussion groups. To what extent have the activities contributed to the participants' collective pedagogical expertise? How is enhanced pedagogical expertise evident in interactions with students? What impact does it have on teaching and assessment?

If possible, document the group discussions on rolling whiteboards or flip charts to provide a more straightforward overview of the various experiences from the completed activities.

Estimated time: 30 min.

- Conclude the evaluation by having participants share their experiences. The conclusions documented on the rolling whiteboards or flip charts during the group discussions can be beneficial in providing participants with a quick overview of the group's collective experiences.

Estimated time: 5 min.

If Step 3 is conducted as two 45-minute sessions, continue the workshop with the group collectively discussing a vision or a plan for the continued development of the teaching team's, programme council's, subject group's, or division's pedagogical expertise:

- Let participants work together in discussion groups to develop a foundation for a vision or plan for the continued development of the group's pedagogical expertise. It's important to focus on what the group aims to achieve and how the continued work will be organised.

Another option is for the course coordinator, programme coordinator, subject coordinator, or head of division to present a draft vision or plan that the teaching team, programme council, subject group, or division can discuss and provide feedback on.

Estimated time: 30 min.

- Conclude Step 3 by summarising the work on the vision or plan for the continued development of the group's pedagogical expertise, and consider formulating concrete goals and activities that can later be included in the division's operational plan.

Estimated time: 15 min.

In a 2021 study, Rachelle Esterhazy and her research colleagues at the University of Oslo noted that the collegial development of pedagogical expertise depends on contextual, relational, and individual factors. In other words, collegial development is influenced by (1) the organisation's traditions, climate, and leadership; (2) the group's balance, sense of safety, and mutual respect and trust among group members; (3) the group members' individual experience, education, and views on teaching and learning. These factors are worth considering when working on a vision or plan for the continued development of the group's pedagogical expertise.

Recommended reading

Read more about different ways for teachers to develop their pedagogical expertise in Esther E. van Dijk et al., “What Makes An Expert University Teacher? A Systematic Review and Synthesis of Frameworks for Teacher Expertise in Higher Education”, *Educational Research Review* 31 (2020):

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2020.100365>

Read more about different factors that influence the collegial development of pedagogical expertise in Rachelle Esterhazy et al., “Moving Beyond Peer Review of Teaching: A Conceptual Framework for Collegial Faculty Development”, *Review of Educational Research* 91:2 (2021):

<https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654321990721>